

Why Count Fifty Days?

Redeeming the Time

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 03-Jun-01; Tape #505A

Please turn to Acts 2. That is always a good place to start of the day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

For us too, the day of Pentecost has fully come. We are here this morning. We are enjoying the day, and we are worshipping God in spirit and in truth, on this holy day. As far as the timing goes, for when this happened in Acts 2, we are just about two hours in the day when this occurrence occurred of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

But really I came to this scripture primarily because of the word "Pentecost" itself. It is a Greek word that is almost exactly like what has come down to the English. It has basically been transliterated from the Greek into the English. In Greek, it is "*pentekostos*" and it simply means "fiftieth." It is an ordinal number—like "first," "second," "third," etc.—which shows sequence, through the numbers. This one means "fiftieth."

The word "day" is assumed, basically. Everyone knows (or, should know) that one of the ways to count to Pentecost is by counting fifty days. And so the Jews just shortened this to "fiftieth." This was the "fiftieth." That is the day that you keep *the feast of weeks*. This "fiftieth" implies the process of counting. And, on this day, the counting process was finished. It was concluded. The "fiftieth" had come *fully*. It was the middle of the fiftieth day, and so they kept the day of Pentecost.

Let us go back to Leviticus 23. In the Old Testament, it is called *the feast of weeks*. Also, at other times, it is called *the feast of harvest*.

Leviticus 23:15 And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed.

There is one way of counting—to count seven weeks, or seven Sabbaths. And then you keep it on the next day.

Leviticus 23:16 Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

So, God gives us a second way to count. If we are confused about counting weeks, go ahead and count the days. It will all come out the same way. It will all come out to this particular day, if you start at the right place.

Leviticus 23:17 You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the

firstfruits to the LORD.

This shows us, in one respect. Firstfruits of God, but leavened because we have lived lives of sin. Though we have been forgiven of our sins and allowed to come into God's presence (because of the blood of Jesus Christ), we still are leavened. We have not fully become unleavened, like Jesus Christ.

Leviticus 23:21 And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

Here we have the basic instruction that God gives us concerning this festival, the day of Pentecost. I do not know if you noticed it, but the word "count" appears more than once. "*You shall count for yourselves,*" in verse 15. "*Count fifty days...*" in verse 16. Thus, counting is a very large part of the day of Pentecost. We can count seven Sabbaths, or fifty days; and, either way, we arrive at the same day—a Sunday. So, we have *the feast of weeks* by *counting* seven weeks, or we can call it *Pentecost* because we have *counted* fifty days.

The fact that God wants the day to be counted immediately nullifies the idea that Pentecost can occur on a fixed date. The Jews keep it on Sivan 6 every year. They get Sivan 6 because they count from the first holy day. The day after the first holy day, they begin their count; and it always comes out on Sivan 6. But if God had wanted us to keep it on Sivan 6, why did He ask us to count it every year? He could have just said "on the third month and on the sixth day (i.e., Sivan 6), you shall keep the feast of weeks." Of course, then He would not have called it *the feast of weeks* because we would not have to count seven weeks. He would have called it something else (maybe the feast of harvest), and we would have just kept it on Sivan 6.

But He did not do that. He gave us what seems to be very ambiguous instructions about how to count—where to start from, and where to end. We know specifically that He tells us to count seven weeks, or fifty days. There must be something important about counting, for Him to have instructed us to do it this way every year.

If you use the Hebrew calendar, there are four days on which it can occur. That is, four different *dates* (I should say) on which Pentecost can fall. "The Sabbath" can occur on four different places throughout the week of Unleavened Bread. So there must be something to taking us through the paces of counting that God wants us to draw a lesson from.

We also have to ask ourselves, "What is so important about this seven weeks (or, fifty days)? Whether you count seven weeks or fifty days, you still end up counting fifty days. When you count seven weeks, then you go to the morrow after that seventh Sabbath; and it ends up fifty days. What is so important about the number 50? What is it about that that is so interesting? Why did He not just say, "Count 23 days." or "37" or "43"? Is there something significant about the number 50 (*pentekostos* in the Greek)? Is "50" just a number that God pulled out of the air? "Ah, 50 is a nice number—half a hundred. That'll do. They'll get the point."

Or, could it have a significance to us and His purpose—beyond just 'any old number'? I think it does, and that is what we are going to look into for the rest of the sermon today. Not just specifically the number "50" (but we will go into that), but the fact that He wants us to count.

Also, what this period of the count could mean to us—if we understand it. And then we will try to pull in a spiritual lesson at the end, so that we can come away with more than just head knowledge—but some way to practically apply it.

Counting is a mathematical process. If you want to put it in kind of highfalutin language, it is a mathematical process of calculating sequential items. (One, two, three, four, five, six. You get them all in a group. You count how many they are, and then you know the number of them.) And we can count just about anything.

You all know that I am an auto-racing fan. So, when I first started to think of an illustration for this, I thought of auto racing. Those of you who are from the South have probably seen an auto race, at least once in your life. So you know what I am talking about. Counting is a vital part of auto racing. We count the number of cars on the track. They keep very detailed lists of how many cars are on the track, how many cars are one lap down, two laps down, three laps down, etc. How many cars have done this, and how many cars have done that.

In most races, the cars are numbered. They have numbers on the sides of them. They have numbers on the roof, so you can tell which car that particular is. It helps to identify them. We count the number of laps they run. We even count the time that it takes them to make one circuit of the track. Timing is also *counting*. (It is part of the same process.) We count their finishing positions, and we count their points towards the championship. And I am sure I could get together with Ronny [Graham], and we could come up with half a dozen more things that we count. How many times they have crashed. How you do not want them on your fantasy racing team.

We use counting in just about every aspect of life. The same is true in the Bible. The Bible's approach to counting is exactly the same as we use it in our regular daily lives. It does not just count objects. Sure, it does say, "They had 500 men in this band, and 300 men in that band," and you have "captains of hundreds, and captains of fifties, etc." It is not just counting objects—like animals, or cities, or armed men, or what have you. It also counts time. It counts events. It gives us markers of things, and we are supposed to count the time to when they are going to happen. There is counting all through the Bible. You can go from Genesis to Revelation, and in just about every book there is something having to do with counting.

The count to Pentecost measures time by days, or by weeks. And I just used a word that brings us to an interesting point about counting. The word that I used was *measure*. Counting, in terms of measuring, becomes a metaphor. When it is used in terms of "measuring," counting is a metaphor for evaluation or for judgment. This plays a large part in the reason why God has us count 50 days to Pentecost. That is, this idea of measuring something.

Jesus talks about "counting the cost." What does He actually mean? He means that He wants us to evaluate what this is going to cost us. What are the risks? What things might happen that could cause problems in the future? Counting—in terms of measuring—means evaluation and judgment. We will begin to see a few examples of this, beginning in Isaiah 65. This is in a long section that talks about God's righteous judgment, especially when it comes to people who have forsaken Him. God is perfectly righteous in judging and passing sentence upon such people.

Isaiah 65:11a But you are those who forsake the LORD, who forget My holy mountain,

who prepare a table for Gad. . .

This is not the tribe of Israel that He is talking about. "Gad" is a god. I believe he had something to do with "the god of fortune."

Isaiah 65:11b . . .and who furnish a drink offering for Meni.

"Meni" is interesting. This term means to number. God is talking about people who have forsaken Him for these gods that are talking about fortune and numbering (which has to do with some sort of superstitious way of trying to guess your fate, from the numbers. It may have had something to do with rolling the dice, or what have you.) But it was some sort of thing by which you could try to find your fortune. Fortune-telling, that sort of thing; but this god's particular name was "number." So God makes a play on words. He says,"Because you've forsaken Me for this god named 'Number'...

Isaiah 65:12a Therefore I will number you for the sword. . .

God uses the term "to number" in the sense of *passing judgment*—meaning, "You, you, you, you, you, and you. All of you, whom I've just picked out, are numbered because you drew the wrong straw, or you drew the wrong roll of the dice. And you guys are going to go to the sword." Meaning, you are going to be slaughtered (as it says in the next part):

Isaiah 65:12b . . .and you shall all bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not hear, but did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight.

We just need to pick up the idea here that the fact that God numbered them for a certain fate—in this case, death—was a means of letting them know that He had judged them.

Let us go to Job 14. This comes in the middle of a very well known section, in which Job was (in a sense) making a prayer to God. He was talking to God; but he was also answering his fellows, who were giving him very discouraging advice.

Job 14:13-14 "Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! [He is talking about a resurrection here.] If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes."

If you ask the Bible scholars, they will say that Job is asking a question here and he does not know the answer. But, the way I read it, it sounds very much like he is asking a rhetorical question—because his answer is, "When God calls me, I'm going to rise from my grave."

Job 14:15-17 "You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands. [Verse 16 is the one I specifically want us to be looking at.] For now You number my steps, but do not watch over my sin. My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and You cover my iniquity.

I am not exactly sure that I agree totally with the way that these last two verses are translated, but we will deal with them 'as is' here. However, in other Bibles the last half of verse 16 is a question: "Do You not watch over my sin?" Anyway, the main thing that we are looking at here is the fact that Job is accusing God of numbering his steps. What he is doing is showing a

comparison. He says, "Oh, that I would die, and just go into the grave. Then, when You call me, I would rise again; and my life would be changed. I would be changed. But now, while I'm in this precarious position, You are over me like a Judge. And every time I take a step, You are evaluating it."

That is what he felt God was doing—looking over him in everything he did. He was saying, "God, you are watching me like a hawk. I can't do anything, without You collecting all my sins in a bag. Then, when You think the time is right, You just dump all the punishments on my head. And look at what's happening to me now! I've lost my children. I've lost my fortune. I've lost everything that was ever dear to me—except my wife, and she's telling me to curse You. God, you just dumped the whole bag on my head."

That interpretation of this section is not as important as the fact that Job felt that God was number numbering his every step. Watching him like a hawk. Judging him for every thing he did. But God wanted Job to look at it from another direction, which was "Job, why don't you number your own steps?" For the most part, I think that Job did. But, in this particular circumstance, he was feeling pretty sorry for himself. He was feeling that the whole weight of the world was on his shoulders, and he just turned it right back around on God. It was all God's fault.

If we watch our own steps, we are far less likely to fall into sin—and more likely to live according to God's will. We know from the story of Job that he was a righteous man. He just did not have the right perspective on God. This was why he would accuse God of doing such a thing. He did not look at God the way he should have.

This idea of numbering, or measuring, goes right through into the New Testament. We find it in Matthew 7, which is a part of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says:

Matthew 7:1-2 "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

Here we get to the term *measure*. Jesus is using the term *measure* and the term *judge* in a synonymous fashion. "If this is the way you judge [others], then you [yourself] will be judged in that way. If this is the way you measure up people, then this is the way you'll be measured up." So it is the same idea. Measuring is just another form of *numbering* or *counting*.

When you ladies make a cake, you get so many cups of flour (let us say); and that is a measure. You have to count them—so that you do not end up with something that is real dry or just basically inedible.

Now, let us go to Revelation 11. This idea carries right through to the end of the Book.

Revelation 11:1-2 Then I [John] was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

We have understood the spiritual principle that is in these verses for quite a long time. John was not given this measuring rod to find the physical measurements of the temple. God could

have done that. He could have sent an angel out there. Actually, He did not even need to do that. He was the One who had given the instructions as to how many cubits it was to be, in every direction. He did not need the temple to be measured *physically*. He wanted the temple to be measured *spiritually*!

Now what is the measurement then that is being done? Well, the people are being evaluated. It is not only the people. "The temple, the altar, and those who worship therein." That is the whole schmeer—everything having to do with the church. The people, the ministry—everyone! The whole temple! There is a *process of judgment* going on, which is preparing the people and the ministry for the end time.

What is the conclusion of these two verses? The time of the Gentiles is coming, let us say, and they are going to tread the holy city under for forty-two months. The church needs to be ready for this time. Of course, not only for this time of tribulation that is coming; but also for the time of Christ's return, which happens immediately thereafter.

The whole idea of *measurement* and *counting*—as a form of *judgment* or *evaluation*—comes right through into our very time right now. We are under a period of judgment! We are being measured right now to see how fit we are to be stones in the temple. I think that is plain.

Let us stick all of this (that we have just talked about) into the corner of our minds, and now let's go on to the number "50." What is the significance of the number "50"? Let us turn back to Exodus 26. These are the instructions about the tabernacle. I do not want to make too much of this, because there are other measurements that do come up; but fifty happens to be a number that arises quite frequently in the measurements of the tabernacle—which is kind of intriguing. The tabernacle in the wilderness has a lot of "50" measurements, or multiples of "50."

Exodus 26:5-6 Fifty loops you shall make in the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is on the end of the second set, that the loops may be clasped to one another. And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains together with the clasps, so that it may be one tabernacle.

I do not know what, symbolically, the loops and the clasps have in the overall scheme of things. (That is, what God was trying to teach by "loops" and "clasps.") But it is interesting that there are 50 of them.

Exodus 26:10-11 You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain of the second set. And you shall make fifty bronze clasps, put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one.

Now, that is kind of interesting—that the number 50 has something to do with uniting. "*So that they may be one.*" I do not know what that means, but it is interesting. Anyway, you can go through the other measurements given here for the tabernacle; and you can come up with several other 50s, which seem to have some connection with the tabernacle.

And what is the tabernacle representative of? The church in the wilderness! I am not going to go into that. You can draw whatever conclusions you may. I just want to give you the understanding that the number "50" is associated with the tabernacle, because I think there is

something there.

If you go through the sections (later on, in the books of the Kings and Chronicles) on the temple, it is very interesting. The temple that Solomon built does not have a lot of 50s with it. That sets up an interesting line of study or thought. What does that mean?

In addition to that, it is very interesting that, if you go to Ezekiel 40 and check the millennial temple, you will find 50s popping up again. I do not know what it means. At least, I have not totally figured it out yet. But it is interesting that the tabernacle has 50s in it, the temple does not, but the millennial temple does.

Let us go to Leviticus 25, because there is another event that has 50 associated with it as well. This is the Jubilee. What is really interesting about the Jubilee is what we find here. (But just think of Leviticus 23: 15.)

Leviticus 25:8-12 And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family. That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine. For it is the Jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat its produce from the field.

Did you notice that the Jubilee is counted just like the day of Pentecost? You count seven Sabbaths of years, and then on the fiftieth year you keep an entire year holy to God. It is an all-together different type of year, where you do not sow. There is no labor being done in the fiftieth year—at least in terms of agriculture. It says here that you let things grow up by themselves.

What did they do all year? I do not know. Play softball, I guess. The Jubilee would be something that, if we had them today, I think we would all just yearn for the Jubilee year. It was a year when labor was not a first priority. It was one of those things where the whole nation got a rest, and the land got another rest. It had just come through the seventh land Sabbath, and then this next year it got another one. The whole nation got another rest for a whole year.

God calls it a year of release, in which all debts were cancelled. All the ownership of the land went back to its original possessors. Thus, a small group of people did not end up owning all of the land. Everything went back to the people it originally belonged to—to the original families. It was a way of bringing everything back to the way it was in the beginning. It was leveling out the playing field again.

There were other things about slaves that come in from other chapters and other places in the Bible. As a matter of fact, later on in this chapter, there is a law regarding slavery and the poor which affects all of this. But it was a year in which people's burdens were taken off their shoulders, and they were given a new start.

It was also a year of rest. Or, perhaps we should say, rather than 'rest', that it was a year of cessation of labor. They did not have to go out and plow their fields and sow their seed. This has quite a significant tie to the Sabbath itself and to the Millennium—when some of the same sorts of ideas will apply. So, just keep all of this in the back of your mind, as we go through the rest of the sermon—especially that link with the day of Pentecost. That is, that the Jubilee is counted the same way.

Remember that the day of Pentecost is called *the feast of harvest*. And when will that harvest actually occur in the scheme of God's plan? It occurs when Christ returns and then the Millennium begins. This year of Jubilee was counted very much like Pentecost, which is the feast of harvest, which symbolizes the end of the time of trial, testing, and evaluation.

Now, let us go to Numbers 1. [The book of] Numbers is called "Numbers" because the word "number" comes up quite frequently. God is telling Moses, right here in the first chapter, to number Israel. The words "number," and "count," and "measure" and those sorts of things occur frequently in the book of NUMBERS.

Numbers 1:1-3 Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

I just wanted to pull one thing from there. I was most interested in the first part of verse 3, "From twenty years old and above." File that. The average Israelite was considered an adult at 20 years. Some of you people who are rather particular will say, "Ah, but the Levites were counted differently." Well, we are just talking about "the average Joe" in Israel, at this point. We are talking averages here—normal. What is the norm?

Let us go to Psalms 90. This is a psalm of Moses. It was written just about the same time, generally, that the book of Numbers was written. So, we are talking about the same person, the same ideas, the same way of thinking, occurring in both of these places.

Psalms 90:10 The days of our lives are seventy years. And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow. For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Moses says here that an average person lives 70 years. If he lives any longer than that, it is probably just good genes or a good constitution. Somehow there is strength there that allows you to live beyond 70 years. Then he goes on to say that, even then, it is nothing. It is a drop in the bucket. Do you know that still holds out for today? There are some countries (like Japan, I believe, and some of the Scandinavian countries) where the people, especially the women, seem to live to be about 76 years. That is quite a long lifespan.

But the average lifespan of a normal person, no matter where they live, is about 70 years. You can check the figures out. Some are lower. Some are higher. But, if you average them all together, you get about 70 years. God's Word comes through again! Let us do the math from

these last two scriptures. The normal, average lifespan is about 70 years. A man is accounted an adult—able to go to war—at age 20 years. So he has 20 years of youth, let us say, in which he is not quite as accountable as a normal adult is. Seventy minus twenty is fifty. Now that makes for a very interesting situation.

Seventy minus twenty equals fifty years of adulthood. A normal person has 50 years of *adult accountability*. Things are beginning to fall into place here. It is the norm—it is the average—that we have 50 years in order to do all the things that we need to do, to live our lives as a mature individual.

Let us transfer that to a New Testament spiritual context. What does *50 years* represent? Fifty years represents the time of our conversion. Like I said, this is the norm. This is especially true, I hope, of second-generation Christians. They have lived "in the church" all of their lives as youth. They come into the church and become adults, become baptized, right around 20 something, some lower, some higher. I am talking norms here. And then (if there are no accidents or whatever, that would cut short that life) they would have about 50 years of conversion, if they lived a normal span of years, in order to prove to God that they are fit members of His Family.

Fifty years of life to live as God lives—or, to try to live as God lives. To learn the lessons, to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, to do the things that need to be done to develop the character of God. Remember that we said earlier that *numbering* and *counting* are talking about *judgment* and *evaluation*? Well, the other side of this is that God has 50 years to number your steps. God has 50 years to evaluate your progress. God has 50 years to judge how worthy we are. So, we have 50 years—during which God calls, converts, and prepares us for inclusion into His Family.

Fifty years of life lies between our calling and our ultimate salvation. No matter when we die, that is it. Our period of judgment is done at that point. We have had 50 years. Could that have something to do with the day of Pentecost and counting 50 days? Think about it.

Let us plug this into the holy days and the festival periods. Passover represents our redemption from the world, and the forgiveness of our sins. Unleavened Bread symbolizes our lifelong task of coming out of the world, and putting on the new man. It takes 'forever,' it seems, to do this. (We heard a great deal about that yesterday.) *Wavesheaf* day, which occurs within the period of the Days of Unleavened Bread, begins the 50-day count to Pentecost. But it, itself, represents the acceptance of *the first of the firstfruits*, Jesus Christ. And because He went through what He did—as our Passover, and then He was buried and laid in the grave for three days and three nights. He rose from the grave, by the power of God. And He was then, afterwards, accepted by Him as High Priest and as the first of the firstfruits—our Elder Brother and soon-coming King. Then that makes possible for the rest of us to be able to do the same, to go along the same route.

Then we have Pentecost, which (like some of the others) looks back, and it looks forward. It memorializes two things: First, the giving of the law, and then the giving of the Spirit. And remember that, when we went through the instructions on Pentecost, there were two loaves there. I have to wonder, and I think it is pretty well established that those two loaves represent

the Old Testament church and the New Testament church. God gave to the Old Testament church the law. Then, to the New Testament church—we not only have the law; but now we have the Spirit. Two broad time periods in which God was working with us [His covenant people], but we are both leavened—both the Old and the New.

By giving us the law and the Spirit, God has given us the tools that we need to ripen. Remember that this is the *feast of harvest*. We have been given the tools—*the law* and *the Spirit*, and then *the gifts* that come by the Spirit—to mature, to be prepared to be God's children.

Now, how long do we have to use those tools? Fifty years! And then what happens at the end of that time? We are *reaped*. Did I not say that the feast of harvest is another name of the day of Pentecost? So, between the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread—because that is a continual process that occurs there—and Pentecost we have 50 days before the harvest occurs. And the 50 days there represents the time of our conversion—the time when we begin coming out of the world until the time when we are harvested. So, the 50 days tells us something quite sobering.

That may seem like a long time—50 years of conversion; but it is really not. It is a blink of the eye to God. Fifty years tells us that our day of salvation is a rather finite period. That means there is a limit. Remember that I also said that 50 years is the norm. It is an average. How soon will it end for us? Do you know when your 50 years began? Maybe. But do we know when our time of salvation is actually going to be up? God does not give everybody 50 years. It is just a general time period, to represent something.

This is what Moses was getting at, here in Psalms 90. He was not necessarily thinking of the day of Pentecost and the 50 days. But he was thinking about this idea that there is a finite period of time in our lives. And there are things that need to get done within that time.

Psalms 90:10-12 The days of our lives are seventy years. And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow. For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

What was it that Job said? "God, You're numbering my steps." Now what does Moses say? "God, teach us to number our days." There is a slightly different attitude there. Job's comes across as an accusation. Moses comes across as a request, a plea (if you will), for help in numbering our days. Moses is coming across as asking for help, because he does not have the abilities (on his own) to do it properly. He wants, from God, the aid that only God's Spirit can give to properly evaluate his life. That is, the time that he has remaining. The things that he still needs to accomplish. Why? To gain a heart of wisdom.

It is very interesting that he asks God for this help, for this reason. He did not want just help in evaluating his days. He wanted help in evaluating his days *because* he wanted to gain wisdom. He wanted to have it in his heart.

What is wisdom? I call it the third tier of spiritual growth. The first tier is *knowledge*, which is, basically, just intellectually 'knowing information.' It is having it there, at your fingertips, knowing what God says. Knowing God's revelation, let us say. The second tier is *understanding*.

That is where the knowledge bumps up a notch. Then you know what it means and how it works. But the third tier is *wisdom*, which goes up even further. Wisdom is the application of knowledge and understanding, in the right way.

God's goal for us is that we live as He lives. And godly living is *wisdom*. If we live as God lives, then we are wise. And why are we wise? Because we are conforming to God's will, we are doing what He wants, and we are making progress towards the goal. What Moses wants here is to be able to evaluate where he is, evaluate where he needs to go, evaluate how he wants to prioritize, evaluate everything so that he can properly *apply himself to the task*.

And not only just "do it," but gain the character (that heart of wisdom) so that he will always continue to do those things. That is, so that he has the very character of God written on his heart, so that no matter what comes up, he is going to act in a godly and wise manner. That is why he wants to be able to number his days, as God does. In a way, it all comes down to *prioritizing time properly*. That is, evaluating the time and making sure that we understand the best use of our time.

David makes a very similar request. He uses a slightly different word, and he gives a different reason; but it is nonetheless, very interesting the way that David approaches this compared to the way that Moses did.

Psalms 39:4 "LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days; that I may know how frail I am."

That is an interesting spin, is it not? He does not necessarily ask God for wisdom. He wants to know how weak he is. It seems strange that he would ask for something like that. "God, help me to know how long I'm going to live. Help me to know what kind of time I have left—because I want to know how weak I am." That is the right approach. It is the humble approach.

The rest of the psalm explains that David understood that the things that occurred to him were the result of what God had done. That is, that God was working in his life. And what God was showing him was how insignificant he was, compared to God. He mentions, in verse 5, that certainly every man at his best is but a vapor. And then he goes on to say, in verse 6, "Every man walks about like a shadow." How insignificant is a vapor, or a shadow? They do not even really have any consistency. They are nothing.

So, what does David want to know? He wants to know how little he is, compared to God—which is the proper attitude. He wants to know just how dependent he is, on God—which is very interesting. In our day, we all want to be independent because we think that there is some virtue in standing alone, with only our own strength. But David says here, "That's dumb!" We are so frail and weak. Our understanding and our wisdom are so lacking. We need to be totally dependent upon God, and to stand with those who are also standing with God. We ourselves are like a shadow and a vapor; and we are gone, like that. Who are we to stand up against the onslaught of the world? It is best to do it together—with God and with others of like minds. "Two are warm in a bed, and a two-fold cord is not quickly broken," said Solomon.

If you understand how frail you are, it gives you the right perspective on life and how you need to *get on the move* to get God's help in allowing you, and helping you, to grow and overcome

and gain strength—via His Spirit. We are not going to stand on our own. We need God's help. God is everything to us.

David says, "God, if You'll help me to understand how to evaluate my place now versus where I need to be in the future, and how long a time I have to reach that—then I'll be wise. Then I'll know how frail I am, and how much work I need to do. And that will give me motivation to do what needs to get done. It'll give me the right understanding of my relative place next to You."

If we think we are something, God is going to show us that we are nothing. So it is better to think that we are nothing, and try to climb out of "nothingness" *into* something. Let God lift us up, as He says that He will do.

If we come to realize our frailty—by evaluating our lives and just where we are—that is good. Recognizing our dependence on God makes us so much more willing to submit to Him, and that is wisdom. That gets right back to what Moses asked for. When that happens—when we are humble, and ready and willing at all times to submit to God—then growth will happen. It will occur. And we might be surprised at the rate of growth at that point.

This goes into the New Testament as well. We will start in verse 8 of Ephesians 5, because I want to get a running start in the context here and at where Paul's argument comes in, that he is making here.

Ephesians 5:8-17 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out [proving] what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Paul here exhorts the Ephesians to *redeem the time* because the days are evil. He puts an even different spin on this than either Moses or David did. He says that we need to evaluate our place—evaluate the time we have remaining—because the days are evil, because it is a bad, wicked world out there. The world is getting no better. In fact, it seems to be running hell-bent in the other direction. And "the world is too much with us," said a famous English poet; and it stays with us, and it stays with us, and it stays with us—like Saran Wrap. It is hard to get out of it. Once you get one arm out, you try to get another piece out and you are stuck again. It is like cobwebs. The world is with us so much, and it is getting worse. So we have to evaluate where we are in our conversion, and say "enough is enough."

Let us expose the evil by the light of the truth, and get rid of it. You will remember that yesterday my dad talked about Hebrews 12:1-2, where it talks about *stripping away* the sins that so easily ensnare us. That is what Paul is talking about here. He says, "redeem the time," number your days, because the time is so short and the days are evil. And it is not going to get any better. There is no time like the present.

If you let it go on—if you procrastinate getting rid of sin—it is going to be just that much harder when you do try to do it. This is the best time—right now, in the present—to put those things off. That is wise. It says, "Do not be unwise, but know what the will of the Lord is." So, redeem the time. The days are evil. Walk circumspectly, not as fools. Awake out of sleep. Arise. Get going. That is Paul's message here, because it is only going to get harder if we let it go on. So act now!

Let us go back to Romans. Here we will see that Paul puts an even different spin on this same sort of thing. He does not use the term "number your days" or "redeem the time," but the idea is the same.

Romans 13:11-14 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust [licentiousness and lewdness], not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Here is a fourth reason to get on the stick, to act immediately, to figure out what kind of time we have and move. This one is, maybe, the most obvious to us—because the time is short. I do not necessarily (or, completely) mean that Christ is coming in the next six months. That is not what I mean. What I am getting at is, "How do you know that you are going to live until Christ comes?"

Every second that goes by, our salvation is nearer, and nearer, and nearer. And do you know the terminus point of your life? You may have five years? Ten years? Twenty years? Twenty five? Thirty? One? Six months? A week? A day? Any one of us, if God so chose, could walk out that door at lunch time, get in our cars, and have a traffic accident up at the corner—and our salvation would be here, would it not?

Does that not give you a little bit of a prod to redeem the time, to awake out of sleep, to get a move on, to put on Christ? It should, because that is what Paul meant for it to do. We have to live each day as if it were our last. I know that is a cliché anymore; but it is a true one, in terms of the firstfruits. We do not know our time. How best are you making of it now? Paul says, "Don't waste a second, because the day of Christ's return for YOU may be quite near." So do not delay in putting Christ on.

So, why does God have us count fifty days? We do it every year, do we not? Why does He have us clean our homes of leaven? Why did God tell the Israelites to take a lamb on the tenth day of the first month, and keep it until the fourteenth day at even; and then slay it and put the blood between the doorposts? Is there not something interesting about each one of those things that adds to our understanding of the day, and of our salvation?

That lamb that is taken on the tenth represents Jesus Christ. And it stays in the family for four days. And all of the kids hug it, and nuzzle it; and it becomes just like the family pet—or, even better, it becomes a part of the family. Then it is killed; and each one of the family members eats it. Does that not teach you something about the awesome cost that Jesus Christ paid for

our salvation?

And then God tells us to take leavening out of our houses. And we clean, and we go over everything. We get it all out, and we put it in the trash. Then the garbage man takes it away. But we are halfway through the Days of Unleavened Bread, and we find cereal with yeast in it in our cupboard (or, something like that). For me, it was cookies in a tin that we had forgotten to look in. Does that not teach us something?

Well, God did the same thing for the day of Pentecost. He has us count fifty days every year, so that we can understand how important it is to *number our days* because our salvation (our time of conversion, let us say) is only so long. We only have a very short amount of time to do all the things that we need to do. And how important it is for us to get on the stick and start really displaying the character of God in our every action. For putting on a heart of wisdom, for understanding how frail we are, for knowing that the world is evil and getting more evil as time progresses. Now is the best time to make the changes that are necessary. And we may die tomorrow. Are those not good reasons?

There is no time to waste. There never has been any time to waste. We must get serious about our calling and begin truly to make steady progress in coming to "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

I I Corinthians 6:1a We then, as workers together with Him. . .

Notice how he starts. We are co-workers with Christ. This is a combined effort. We do some. Christ does some. We have been finding out that Christ does an awful lot, and we do what seems to us to be a lot; but, in the grand scheme of things, it is all by grace. But still, the works are necessary to show just how far we have come. And it helps us to learn, and to grow. And that is good. But let us notice this.

I I Corinthians 6:1a We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you. . .

In that first part of the verse, he was talking specifically about himself—not about the whole church. But it does apply to the whole church. "We plead with you. . ."

I I Corinthians 6:1b We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

Do not throw it away! God does not do things in vain. He has a purpose for each one of us. He wants each one of us in His Family. And He is going to do everything in His power to bring it about. But there is a part that we must do too. So Paul gives them this reminder.

I I Corinthians 6:2, 17a For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. [And that is for each one of us.]. . . .Therefore [Concluding statement on this chapter.] "Come out from among them and be separate," says the Lord.

We just heard about that yesterday. When we follow the truth, we will be separate. It is automatic.

I I Corinthians 6:17b-7:1 "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

[Become pure.] "And I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters," says the LORD Almighty. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.