

THE BIBLICAL HOLY WEEK : PASSOVER, THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD AND FIRST FRUITS

WARNING: There are many links in this paper that lead to articles which containing historical documentation on the subject matter. The links contained herein should in no way suggest endorsement or recommendation of the sites they lead to or their theology. **Proceed with caution.**

WHY OBSERVE THE BIBLICAL FEASTS OF PASSOVER AND UNLEAVENED BREAD INSTEAD OF EASTER

The Acceptable Worship of God is Instituted by Himself

- Scripture alone is our instruction manual as to the proper worship of YHWH. (2 Timothy 3:16) Chapter XXI paragraph 1 of Westminster Confession of Faith is a good summary of the biblical doctrine of worship:

The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and does good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might.[1] But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.

- The word of the LORD lasts forever (1 Peter 1:25, Psalm 119:160). Therefore, since there is no clear command from YHWH to discontinue His Feasts which are an everlasting ordinance, we continue to worship Him according to the dictates of His Holy and inerrant word understanding that no one can observe the feasts exactly as YHWH instructed in the Pentateuch because the historical, geographical and spiritual setting (i.e. Christ the Passover Lamb has come) has changed.

YHWH Instituted His Feasts and Instructed His Children to Keep Them

- YHWH instructed His Children (aka the Children of Yisra'el - Yisra'el means the God Who Prevails) to observe Passover/Unleavened Bread/First Fruits as a lasting ordinance (Exodus 12:14). Believers in Jesus Christ are grafted in to Israel and are no longer viewed as gentiles but rather are true Jews, Israel and children of Abraham (Romans 1:16, Romans 2:28-29, Romans 9:6)
- The Biblical feasts belong to YHWH – They are His appointed times set apart to meet with His people. YHWH refers to them as “My Feasts”. (Leviticus 23:2)
- The “Children of Yisra'el” was a mixed multitude of people, a congregation which included/welcomed all circumcised foreigners and aliens who desired to worship YHWH along with the children of Yisra'el. (Exodus 12:48-49) For more in-depth study on the words congregation/assembly/church translated from the Hebrew to the Greek to the English here are 2 helpful articles: [Hebrew Word Study: Church?](#) And [Qahal and Edah: Ekklesia and Synagoge: Church and Synagogue](#)

The Apostles and Their Disciples Observed the Biblical Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread

- The apostle Paul instructed believers to continue observing Passover/Unleavened bread, with the new understanding of the symbols of the Passover/unleavened bread Feast. (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)
- Church history records that the Apostles Paul, Peter and John all taught their disciples to observe Passover on the biblically mandated day of Abib (aka Nisan) the 14th day.
<http://www.prca.org/books/portraits/polycarp.htm>
<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/polycrates.html>
- [Appolinarius](#) a possible disciple of Peter also observed Passover on the biblically mandated day of Nisan 14.
- Though in 325 AD at the council of Nicea it was ruled under the Emperor Constantine that the resurrection of Christ (referred to as “Easter” from a pagan spring festival) would be observed on the [first Sunday following the full moon after the vernal/paschal equinox](#) with a deliberate attempt to divorce the resurrection of Christ from the Biblical Feasts that the Jews as well as many Christians especially in Asia Minor continued to observe. [Read Eusebius Account in his Life of Constantine Book III, Chapter 18.](#) However the word of YHWH instructs us to obey YHWH rather than men (Acts 5:29) and “Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.” (Deuteronomy 4:2)
- For more Apostolic evidence that the Apostles of Christ Himself were convinced that followers of Christ should continue to observe the Biblical feasts read what Eusebius of Caesarea, a Roman historian (AD 263 – 339), wrote in his [Ecclesiastical History chapter XXIV](#) about the observation of the Biblical feast of unleavened bread which included the feast of Passover:
 1. But the bishops of Asia, led by Polycrates, decided to hold to the old custom handed down to them. He himself, in a letter which he addressed to Victor and the church of Rome, set forth in the following words the tradition which had come down to him:
 2. We observe the exact day; neither adding, nor taking away. For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming, when he shall come with glory from heaven, and shall seek out all the saints. Among these are Philip, one of the twelve apostles, who fell asleep in Hierapolis; and his two aged virgin daughters, and another daughter, who lived in the Holy Spirit and now rests at Ephesus; and, moreover, John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and, being a priest, wore the sacerdotal plate.
 3. He fell asleep at Ephesus.
 4. And Polycarp in Smyrna, who was a bishop and martyr; and Thraseas, bishop and martyr from Eumonia, who fell asleep in Smyrna.

5. Why need I mention the bishop and martyr Sagaris who fell asleep in Laodicea, or the blessed Papirius, or Melito, the Eunuch who lived altogether in the Holy Spirit, and who lies in Sardis, awaiting the episcopate from heaven, when he shall rise from the dead?

6. All these observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith. And I also, Polycrates, the least of you all, do according to the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have closely followed. For seven of my relatives were bishops; and I am the eighth. And my relatives always observed the day when the people put away the leaven.

7. I, therefore, brethren, who have lived sixty-five years in the Lord, and have met with the brethren throughout the world, and have gone through every Holy Scripture, am not affrighted by terrifying words. For those greater than I have said 'We ought to obey God rather than man.' Acts 5:29

New Testament Scripture Supports Rather Than Negates the Observance of the Feasts

YHWH, our heavenly Father has clearly instructed us in the Torah/Pentateuch how He would have us worship Him on certain holy days and seasons set apart by His divine decree. Ecclesiastical history as we have seen as well as the New Testament points us to a continuation of the Biblical Feasts:

- Matthew 5:17-19 - Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach [them], the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
- 1 Corinthians 5:8 - Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened [bread] of sincerity and truth.
- Colossians 2:16-17 - Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.
- Acts 18:21 - But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

The Feasts Exalt the One They Foreshadow

Since the Feasts are shadows of what is to come and have their substance in Christ (Colossians 2), there is a sweeter fragrance for the New Covenant Believer to enjoy when they enter in to YHWH's holy convocations that is impossible for the Torah believing Jew to enjoy. That sweet fragrance is emitted through the flower of personal knowledge and understanding of the person and work of Jesus the Christ by way of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. What a great privilege, honor and lavish blessing to enjoy the Feasts in the knowledge of Christ – For those who enter in it is truly special joy granted to the redeemed by their heavenly Father.

The Feasts are Not Jewish They Are Biblical

It is sad to hear so many Christians, authors and even historians connect the Biblical Feasts to Judaism. Surely, it is true that many Jews observe(d) the Feasts days because they believe(d) in the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. However, as was pointed out above, the Feasts were appointed by YHWH to be a holy convocation of His people, the Children of Yisra'el, to come together and corporately meet with their God.

That said, the Feasts are not Jewish, Hebrew or Israeli – they are biblical. Of course cultural tradition has grown up around each feast, depending on the religious sect and ethnic group. (More on that topic – Who is Isra'el, Who are the Jews in a future article.)

Christian what is Your Biggest Reason for Not Observing the LORD's Feasts?

Christian, why would you want to dismiss an invitation from YHWH to meet with you and celebrate His Son and His redemptive work? What better way to corporately exalt Jesus the Son of YHWH than by observing the days He appointed as holy rather than the days appointed by man as holy.

Christian can you reason from the scriptures why God would have you not observe His feasts?

HOW TO OBSERVE YHWH'S INSTRUCTION FOR THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD, PASSOVER AND FIRST FRUITS?

As said above the feasts cannot be observed in the old tradition To discover for yourself what the word says about how to worship the LORD during this holy week prayerfully consider the following passages Exodus 12, Leviticus 23, Deuteronomy 16 and Numbers 9. Below are a few of the elements YHWH decreed:

- For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. (Exodus 12:15)
- In the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight they shall keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. (Numbers 9:2)
- On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. (Exodus 12:15)
- On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat; that is all you may do. (Exodus 12:16)
- Because the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the LORD for the generations to come. (Exodus 12:42)
- Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread. (Exodus 12:20)

- Leaven represents sin and wickedness (2 Corinthians 5, Matthew 16:6, Galatians 5:9)
- Observe First Fruits , “On the day after the Sabbath” (Lev 23) which foreshadowed Christ’s resurrection from the dead and in some people’s opinion coincides with the traditional day of Easter in the Western churches. (1 Corinthians 15:20)

GET ACQUAINTED WITH YHWH’S CALENDAR

- Many Christians are not aware that the calendar used in the West and most of the world is not YHWH’s calendar. It is called the Gregorian calendar and you can [read all about the various man centered calendars and their history here](#).
- YHWH instituted a calendar that has been in effect for over 4,000 years. The account is recorded in Exodus 12. YHWH’s calendar uses the signs (the celestial bodies) He set in the heavens to keep track of time and His appointed Feast days (Genesis 1). Biblical Calendars can be purchased at HolyLandMarketPlace.com .

BUT AREN’T CHRISTIANS SUPPOSED TO CELEBRATE EASTER?

Have you ever wondered where the word Easter comes from? There is **NO** word in the Holy Scriptures that translates into Easter. Despite the fact that the King James Version wrongly translates the word “pascha” in [Acts 12:4](#) for “Easter” it is not a proper translation nor is it a transliteration of the word “pascha”. Every other place in the KJV the word “pascha” is translated properly as Passover. There are no other Bible translations that the author is aware of today that translate “pascha” as Easter as most bible editors recognized this as a translation error in the KJV.

According to the English Church historian Bede, Easter derives from a pagan spring festival in honor of Eastr or Ostara a Teutonic goddess. It has absolutely no associations whatsoever with Christ, His death and Resurrection, or indeed anything Christian. ([Orthodox Research Institute](#)).

Because YHWH’s appointed Feasts are foreshadowing of Christ and His work, Jesus the Passover Lamb rose from the dead on the Feast of First Fruits in 30 AD according to many scholars and this is verified by the [Talmud](#). The “church” history pertaining to all of this is long and complicated, but well documented and worth searching out if you desire to know more. However, for the sake of the One Who is The Way, the Truth and the Life and Who came to this earth to testify to the Truth do not think that this is a minor matter – the TRUTH matters and how we worship God matters. You can read more here on the origin of the word [Easter](#).

THE HISTORY OF EASTER AND HOW IT GOT INTO OUR BIBLE AND CHRISTIAN CULTURE

The History of the Word Easter

- According to Jacob Grimm, a German philologist (One who studies language) Easter is the name of a pagan spring ritual that Christians took on and applied to their celebration of the resurrection. He writes:

We Germans to this day call April ostermonat, and ôstarmânoth is found as early as Eginhart (temp. Car. Mag.). The great christian festival, which usually falls in April or the end of March, bears in the oldest of OHG remains the name ôstarâ ... it is mostly found in the plural, because two days ... were kept at Easter. This Ostarâ, like the [Anglo-Saxon] Eástre, must in heathen religion have denoted a higher being, whose worship was so firmly rooted, that the christian teachers tolerated the name, and applied it to one of their own grandest anniversaries.[7]

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eostre>

- According to the [Trinitarian Bible Society Quarterly Record](#) the word for the Passover had not been used in a Bible translation until reformist William Tyndale in 1534 when he translated the New Testament from Greek into English. [According to TBS](#) Tyndale did not want to use a foreign word, so he used the word “Easter,” a word the English people associated with the Passover season. The word had been around for several centuries prior to Tyndale. Even though it was the name for the Anglo-Saxon goddess of dawn and a springtime festival for the goddess, the Christians took the name for their own celebration of the resurrection of Christ.

Prior to Tyndale, the first translators of the Bible into Latin used the Greek word pascha. Reformist John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English from Latin and also kept the word (pask). However, when Tyndale translated the Pentateuch, he coined a new word, “Passover.” That word appeared in a number of passages. He did not get to revise the New Testament at the same time he worked on the Old Testament, and the word “Easter” (“Ester”) remained for a time in the latter. Matthew’s Bible (1537) later incorporated Tyndale’s work on the Pentateuch, which used “Passover,” but there were still some references to “Ester.” The Great Bible of 1539 also retained “Ester,” or “Easter,” in places. However, the Geneva Bible (1560), the Bishops’ Bible (1568), and the Authorized Version (King James) (1611) continued the elimination of “Easter,” replacing the word with “Passover” until the Authorized had the one remaining use of the word—in the Acts passage. This vestige likely was a translation oversight rather than an intentional inclusion. <http://www.blessedquietness.com/journal/resource/easter2.htm>

YHWH Instituted His Own Calendar Which is Written in the Heavens

- The Biblical Calendar has long been forgotten by most of Christendom as a guide to which days and when we should keep Holy sometimes citing Galatians 4:9-10. However, in Galatians 4 Paul makes no specific reference to God’s commands or His Feasts, Sabbaths, or New Moons as He does in Colossians 2. Our best guess here would suggest that he is speaking of tradition and not

what is expressly commanded or decreed in YHWH's word. The scripture here speaks generically of keeping special days and months and years as a form of justification.

The Council of Nicea Ruled Christians Were No Longer to Observe Passover/Unleavened Bread

- The council of Nicea in 325 AD ruled that ...

We further proclaim to you the good news of the agreement concerning the holy Easter, that this particular also has through your prayers been rightly settled; so that all our brethren in the East who formerly followed the custom of the Jews are henceforth to celebrate the said most sacred feast of Easter at the same time with the Romans and yourselves and all those who have observed Easter from the beginning.

- The author has not been able to confirm whether the word "Easter" was actually used in the Greek in the Nicean rulings. But, without a doubt the issue was when the resurrection of Christ would be celebrated in the "church". The council changed the date from the 14th of Nisan, which was the apostolic tradition and the biblically mandated day to the first "sun god day" after the vernal new moon. Those who refused to comply were called Quatrodecimans or 14th Day Christians and were [ostracized by the ruling hierarchies](#).

In other words those believers living in Asia Minor continued to follow the biblical calendar until, under threat of persecution, were forced to yield their religious freedom to Roman authority. Constantine and others wrongly referred to Biblical feasts as the "custom of the Jews" or "Judaism". The custom of the Jews is just that, a custom or tradition. We must not confuse what YHWH commanded and Jesus practiced with Judaism. Jesus followed Torah – the Word of God, which by the way He, Jesus, is the Torah made flesh. (John 1:7-14)

So over time, in attempts to distance Christianity from Judaism, the resurrection of Christ came to be known as Easter, a pagan spring fertility festival, rather than Feast of First Fruits which is actually the day Christ rose from the dead.

It is biblical to recognize the resurrection of the LORD Jesus as the First Fruits from the Dead as He is the fulfillment of what this biblical Feast foreshadowed. YHWH set the appointment for First Fruits to be the day after the weekly Sabbath immediately after the Passover. The year that Jesus was crucified He rose from the dead after three days and nights in the grave on the Feast of First Fruits.

There is actually an entire Biblical week of Feasts and special day observances on YHWH's calendar which came to be known as The Feast of Passover or alternatively The Feast of Unleavened Bread. On man's calendar is called Passion Week as the Roman Catholics and many Protestants refer to it. The week of Christ's passion was named Unleavened Bread by the one Who is not only The Unleavened Bread but also The Passover Lamb.

Though many wrongly argue (Colossians 2) that we have the freedom to come up with new "religious" holidays and mix worldly traditions with the holy, I ask since when can man improve on YHWH's self ordained ways of worshipping Him? How much more does the follower of Christ have to gain in

knowing, loving and serving Him by doing life, service and worship His way? For Paul wrote, “it is the love of Christ that compels us.” And Proverbs instructs us, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One that give us understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10) “Keep my commandments and live, My Law as the apple of thine eye.” (Proverbs 7:2) It does not get much plainer than that.

PERSECUTION COMES FOR WORSHIPPING YHWH HIS WAY

Jesus said, “In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.” There was a time in history, during the first few centuries, when Christ followers who observed the biblical Sabbath (Sabbatarians) and the traditional day for Passover (Quartodecimanism) were persecuted and even killed by the church for doing so. They were seen as Judaizers: people who wanted to continue worshiping the way their spiritual forefathers did. The problem with this is that the leaders in the church at Rome did not make the distinction between what was Biblical and what was the religious tradition of the Jews. Whereas, the use of the term Judaizer in the bible is referring to those Jews who believed that salvation was not just through faith but works as well. They insisted that for gentiles to become part of the congregation they must follow torah commands as well as their customs.

Under the Roman Emperor Constantine the Nicean Council in 325 AD deliberately severed the celebration of Christ’s death and resurrection from the Biblical Feasts calendar appointed by YHWH. This site has a nice chart to show the history of the Passover celebration from the first through the sixth century. <http://home.comcast.net/~jovial/learn/mc/spfeasts.htm>

John wrote in 1 John 2:6 that those who say they are in Christ must walk as He walked. Jesus also for warned His followers that there would be persecution for following Him. The persecution came immediately and in many different forms for the first few hundred years after Christ’s ascension. One of the forms of persecution was when Theodosius a Roman Emperor decreed to put the [Quatrodecimans to death for celebrating Passover.](#)

Edicts of Theodosius against the heretics, A.D. 380-394...Theodosius...decreed that...by the death of the offender; and the same capital punishment was inflicted on the Audians, or Quartodecimans, who should dare to perpetrate the atrocious crime of celebrating on an improper day the festival (Gibbon E. Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Volume III, Chapter XXVII. ca. 1776-1788).

Theodosius the Great (379-395 AD) the last Roman Emperor who ruled over both the east and western halves of the Roman Empire decreed the death penalty for believers who continued to observe Passover on the biblically mandated date of Nisan 14. Theodosius is considered a Saint in both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodosius_I
<http://www.cogwriter.com/news/church-history/apollinaris-of-hierapolis/>

All this and we have not even begun to discuss Good Friday and the fact that, no matter how you slice the pie, Jesus could not have died at 3PM on a Friday and rose before sunrise on Sunday making His time in the grave – a matter of approximately 2 nights and 1.5 days or roughly 39 hours not the 72 hours

or 3 days and 3 nights that is needed to fulfill the sign of Jonah. (Matthew 12:40) But we will save that for another blog post.

A QUESTION FOR THOSE WHO CRITICIZE THE ROMAN CATHOLICS

You who judge the Roman Catholics for their rejection of sola fide, how can you so easily reject the very instruction of YHWH and His Son Jesus who said, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition." Mark 7:9.

The LORD Jesus said, "My commands are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3) He gave us His Holy Spirit to free us from bondage to His law and move us to love and obey His law. (Ezekiel 36)

Is it burdensome to meet with the God head on His appointed days?

FINAL THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER

YHWH says, "Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you." (Exodus 23:33)

For some this article has stirred up some thoughts and feelings that you have never been confronted with before. Please pray about your traditions and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you whether any of your personal, church, or family traditions:

- Are based on lies
- Have been a snare to you and your family
- Have distracted you and your family from truly worshipping the LORD and giving Him all the glory.

In closing may I encourage you to not take my word for anything you have read here, but to prayerfully "test everything; hold fast what is good." (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and be like the Bereans who, "received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." (Acts 17)

You'll find YHWH's mandate and instructions on Passover, Unleavened Bread and First Fruits in the following scriptures:

Exodus 12, Leviticus 23, Numbers 9, Deuteronomy 16, Ezekiel 45, 1 Corinthians 5