

## EASTER OR PASSOVER?

Should Christians celebrate Easter or Passover? Does it even matter? In this article, I'm going to let history and the Bible answer both of those questions. Once you have all the information, you can decide for yourself. If you're a follower of the Way and a student of the Book, you should want to know and you should care. After all, it's not about how *we* feel or what *we* want but how the *Creator* feels and what *He* desires. And that's what we're after: following after His heart on the matter.



*We're not the first ones to ask this question.* Not by a long shot. It's one that's been debated for almost 2000 years. The first time it was recorded as not only being asked but being voted on, was back in 325 A.D. at the Council of Nicea when the Roman Emperor Constantine addressed it. We'll get to that eventually.

First of all, it's important to understand that Passover and Easter are diametrically opposed to one another. Passover was instituted by the God of Israel for all those who would be called His children while Easter was invented by man out of convenience, as we soon shall see. I doubt

there's anyone who would challenge the fact that the God of the Bible is a very detailed-oriented, extremely picky Being. Every jot and tittle of His Word was important and He made a big deal of His people doing things His way and not their own. The Torah was very clear that they were not to add or subtract from His holy Word (Deut. 12) and that compromising will cause one to be vomited out of His mouth (Rev. 3:16). He simply cannot tolerate disobedience or compromise. Unfortunately, we humans all have doctorates in both. Ancient Israel was famous for going into captivity because of forsaking and compromising His holy Law, and today's believers are not much better. So before we jump into where everything went wrong, let's go all the way back to the beginning and see just how important Passover really was to both Yahweh and to the disciples themselves.

## THE ORIGINAL PLAN

**Genesis 1:14** *Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years;"*

This is a critical verse and one that is very telling if you know where to look. The word translated *seasons* here is actually not the seasons of spring, summer, fall, and winter. The word in Hebrew is *moedim* which is the word for "*appointed feast days, set apart or fixed times*" and can even be translated as "congregation or convocation" since that's what's commanded on His holy feast days. To the biblical writer, a season revolved around the appointed feast days of the LORD. Like we would say it's basketball season or hunting season, that's exactly what it means to the Hebrew. It's Passover season, the season of Sukkot, etc.

The reason why this is important is that it shows that the feast days and appointed times of Yahweh were given in the Garden long before man ever thought about taking fruit from the forbidden tree. It was His original intent that His people have preordained, set-apart times.

## PASSOVER IS NOT JEWISH

**Exodus 12:11** *And thus you shall eat it; with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover.*

Many people believe that Passover is Jewish and Easter is Christian. Unfortunately, that's not what the Bible says. God made it very clear that no one is allowed to take ownership of **HIS** Feast days. These are His celebrations; we're just invited to them. That's why He says that "it is the LORD's Passover." The only reason so many people believe that it's a Jewish holiday is that, by and large, the Jewish people are the main ones celebrating it. If the Chinese were celebrating it, the world would say that it's a Chinese holiday.

## WHAT DID THE DISCIPLES DO?

**Luke 22:19** *And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."*

The Israelites have been celebrating Passover in remembrance of leaving Egypt for 1200 years. The *haggadah* (the story) was the same every year. But when Rabbi Yeshua stood up and made that statement, every head turned in bewilderment as He'd just changed the entire meaning of the feast day. He told them to not just keep it in remembrance of their forefathers leaving Egypt, but for them to remember Him in the feast. They would not fully understand the gravity of this instruction until well after He died and they could see that **He** was actually the Passover Lamb that gave His life to pay for the sin of the firstborn Adam, which, in turn, reversed the curse. But the point remains the same. Yeshua said, "Do THIS." And what was "this"? **Passover.**

**1 Corinthians 5:8** *Therefore let us keep the feast (of Passover), not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*  
(parenthetical insertion mine)

You can't get much clearer than this. The apostle Paul is telling his new converts, formerly Gentiles, and in Corinth I might add, to keep the feast of Passover. Except that instead of everyone using it as an excuse to get drunk like many of the other Jews did, the Messianic community should keep it in sincerity and truth.

**Acts 18:20-21** *When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, <sup>21</sup> but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.*

**Acts 20:16** *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he could not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.*

Again, these passages show Paul's zeal and intent with regard to the feast days. They were commanded by Yahweh, kept and commanded by Yeshua, and his disciples continued to not only keep them themselves but taught both the Gentile and Jewish communities to keep them properly.

## **FOR 166 YEARS STRAIGHT**

We have records for over 150 years after the death of Messiah that tell us that all of Christendom celebrated the feast days just like the original disciples did with Yeshua Himself. Take a look at this quote from Polycrates of Ephesus, the 9th Bishop of the Messianic Church since James in the book of Acts:

*"We observe the genuine day, neither adding thereto or taking there from...All of these (the disciples) observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith."*

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a monumental quote. It tells us that there was some sort of schism happening were some of the early believers were starting to stray from the pattern of scripture and the early disciples. The "fourteenth day of the Passover" he refers to is the fourteenth day of the first month on the biblical calendar, called Nisan. According to the Torah (in Leviticus 23), God commanded that the Passover lamb be killed on the evening of the 14th of Nisan. Polycrates

was clearly making a definitive, authoritative ruling for the entire early church that they were to continue to follow in the footsteps of Rabbi Yeshua and the early disciples by following the scriptural commands in regard to celebrating the Passover.

## WHEN PASSOVER WAS VOTED OFF THE ISLAND

As more and more Gentiles started to come into the church, groups began to be segregated, with virtually all the churches in the East following the path the disciples did and the Christians in the West in Rome, made up of mostly Gentiles, starting to pull away from their Hebraic root. These Roman Christians were coming out of paganism and didn't know the difference between "come here" and "sic 'em!" They had no clue how important the rules were or how to follow this new God they'd just adopted. On top of that, many were converting to Christianity because the Emperor said they had to or else. This natural separation between the way the former Gentiles did things and the way the believers in the East practiced was bound to come to a head – and it did.

Along with voting out the Sabbath and switching it to Sunday, in 325 A.D., at the Council of Nicea, the Roman Emperor settled this question of Passover or Easter once and for all when he declared the following:

*"When the question relative to the sacred festival of Easter arose, it was universally thought that it would be convenient that all should keep the feast on one day...It was declared to be particularly unworthy for this, the holiest of all festivals, to follow the custom [the calculation] of the Jews, who had soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded...In rejecting their custom (which was coming from Yeshua Himself), we may transmit to our descendants the legitimate mode of celebrating Easter....We ought not therefore to have anything in common with the Jews, for the Savior has shown us another way...All the brethren in the East who formerly celebrated Passover with the Jews, will henceforth keep it at the same time as the Romans." (parenthetical insertion mine)*

Wow! If there was ever a time to pick your jaw off the floor, this would be it. *The anti-Semitic Emperor Constantine just gave us a mouthful.* In one stroke of a pen, he gave us the following historical statements:

1. There was a dispute about which day to celebrate the feast.
2. His decision was based on convenience. Sounds like something a politician would say...
3. They didn't want to keep it on the same day as the Jews because in Constantine's mind, the Jews killed Yeshua. I suppose he kind of forgot that it was his sin that sent Him to the cross, too.
4. He decided to reject "their custom," having no clue that the "custom" was a commandment right out of not just the Bible but straight from the mouth of the Messiah Himself: "Do this..."
5. He says they should not have anything in common with the Jews. This statement alone shows his anti-Semitic mindset and how bent he was toward creating a completely different religion that looked nothing like that of the disciples or the early church.

6. His last statement tells us that all the brethren in the East were, just as Polycrates said, keeping it according to the Bible.
7. And last but not least, a pagan Roman Emperor who pretended to convert to Christianity was now behind the wheel of the well-established Messianic Church. No longer would there be a central leader in Jerusalem like there had been in the time of James or Polycrates. From now on, Rome was in charge and it would soon be big business.

## ISHTAR

As if all of the above wasn't bad enough, there are some sources that say that Easter was actually the fertility goddess of the East and the actual Ishtar of the Bible that the Israelites were constantly falling into idolatry over. It's speculated that the Roman pagans were already celebrating Ishtar's Sunday on the first Sunday after the vernal equinox in the Spring. This is easily believable for multiple reasons. First, because we know they had many other gods they celebrated throughout the year. Second, they were already celebrating the sun god's birthday on December 25<sup>th</sup> as witnessed on their own calendar as early as 354 A.D. Third, the second most popular deity in virtually all pagan cultures, and sometimes the most important, is the female goddess of fertility. She also represented the sunrise and was said to be the wife of the sun god. There can be no doubt that if Rome was celebrating the sun god they were most certainly celebrating the fertility goddess of the East, as well. Lastly, as we have just demonstrated, Rome was a place of compromise. "**Convenience**" and Pax Romana (the peace of Rome) were the most important will of the day. If most of Rome was used to celebrating the goddess of Easter on the first Sunday after the Spring Equinox, and the Emperor already said that he wanted the entire Roman Empire to be Christian, it's simple logic to deduce that making Easter "Christian" not only made sense and was convenient but would also – in his mind, anyway – redeem a pagan holiday. This, of course, is forbidden in the scriptures as Yahweh never redeems things that were pagan. *He redeems people.*

Whatever the reason, the evidence is clear. There is simply no contest...*Passover wins in the historical record hands down.* And although it can't be kept according to the letter of the law since there's no temple and because Christ became its fulfillment, the commandment to honor it just as Yeshua told us to do still stands. We are to celebrate His death and resurrection by doing "**this,**" Passover, in remembrance of Him.

When all is said and done, we each have to make a decision when it comes to following the Creator of the Universe. Do we follow Him the way **WE** want to, in the ways and decrees of a Catholic Emperor, or do we follow Him the way His Son said to, the way all the early disciples did for hundreds of years? It's a tough switch. I've been there. Everyone thinks you've lost your mind. That's okay. Just turn around and tell them, "*No, we lost our minds back in 325 A.D. and I just found it.*"

Shalom!  
Jim Staley  
3 April 2017

If you would like to learn more about Passover, the rest of the feast days, and how they relate to the first and second comings of Christ, I encourage you to visit YouTube Channel [Passion For Truth Ministries](#) where you will find many videos.