

EASTER v PASSOVER

By Jamie McNab

Did you know that Easter falls at the SAME TIME every year?

But surely, you might say, Easter is a “moveable feast” — it can fall sometimes in late March, and at other times in mid-April?

There is a simple RULE used for calculating when Easter falls (at least *most* of the time). Easter falls on “the first Sunday after the first full moon after the 21st of March.”

To find the date of Easter, therefore, you simply check your calendar for the full moon that follows the 21st March; the very next Sunday is Easter. In that sense, Easter is always at the same TIME every year, although the actual date will vary depending on the phase of the moon in March.

But, you might wonder, what is the significance of the FULL MOON? And why the 21st March?

And whilst we are asking these questions, why Easter *eggs* — why Easter bunnies — why Hot Cross Buns? And why the name “Easter” anyway — is it a Biblical name; what does it mean?

Easter is considered by many to be the most holy festival in the church calendar — a time for us to picture the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Let us, however, now look at the origin of Easter, and seek answers to the questions we asked earlier.

The Name “Easter”

Where does the name “Easter” come from?

Alexander Hislop in *The Two Babylons* tells us, “It is NOT a Christian name. It bears its CHALDEAN ORIGIN on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte ... the queen of heaven, whose name, as pronounced by the people of Nineveh, was evidently identical with that now in common use in this country. That name, as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar,” (page 103).

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Bible Words states under “Easter”: “The term Easter is not of Christian origin. It is another form of Astarte, one of the titles of the Chaldean goddess, the queen of heaven.”

Kurtz's Church History confirms that, "the Saxon name Easter is derived from the old German FESTIVAL OF OSTARA, the goddess of spring, which was celebrated at the same season (as Passover)."

So, rather remarkably, one of the main festivals of modern churchianity is named after a PAGAN GODDESS, the queen of heaven!!

This is a rather odd way of following God's commandment in EX 23:13, "Make no mention of the NAME of other gods, nor LET IT BE HEARD FROM YOUR MOUTH."

Easter Eggs and Bunnies

Probably nothing symbolises Easter more than the Easter *egg*. Millions of chocolate Easter eggs are consumed every spring. Do Easter eggs come from the Bible?

Let Hislop answer: "An *egg* of wondrous size is said to have fallen from heaven into the river Euphrates. The fishes rolled it to the bank, where the doves having settled on upon it, and hatched it, out came Venus, who afterwards was called the Syrian Goddess — that is, Astarte. Hence the *egg* became one of the symbols of Astarte or Easter," (page 109).

Encyclopaedia Britannica states, "The customs and symbols associated with the observance of Easter have ANCIENT ORIGINS, not only in the Teutonic rites of spring but also far back in antiquity. The conception of the *egg* as a symbol of fertility and of renewed life goes back to the ANCIENT EGYPTIANS AND PERSIANS, who had also the custom of colouring and eating eggs DURING THEIR SPRING FESTIVALS."

And the Easter bunny? An obvious symbol of fertility, of course, but, in addition, the hare, or rabbit, has been associated in many pagan cultures with the moon and was specially honoured *during the spring equinox*. Britannica continues, "Like the Easter *egg*, the Easter hare, now an accepted part of the Easter story, came to Christianity FROM ANTIQUITY. The hare is associated with the moon in the legends of ancient Egypt and other peoples. It belongs to the night, since it comes out only then to feed. It is born with its eyes open and, like the moon, is the 'open-eyed watcher of the skies.'"

The Catholic Encyclopaedia is quite plain on this subject, "... (eggs) were brought to the table of Easter Day, coloured red to symbolise the Easter joy ... the custom may have its origin in paganism, for a GREAT MANY PAGAN CUSTOMS celebrating the return of spring, gravitated to Easter ... the rabbit is a pagan symbol and has always been an emblem of fertility."

What about hot-cross buns? Surely they are not pagan, too? Yet Hislop states, "The hot-cross buns of Good Friday, and the dyed eggs of Pasch or Easter Sunday, figured in the Chaldean rites just as they do now. The 'buns' KNOWN TOO BY THAT IDENTICAL NAME, were used

in the worship of the queen of heaven, the goddess Easter," (pages 107-108).

Bryant, in Volume 1 of his *Mythology* states, "One species of sacred bread which used to be offered to the gods, was of great antiquity, and called BOUN."

People today often look with fondness on the Easter (and Christmas) customs, commenting on the way that families can "be together" during this time — having a special Easter meal, sharing hot-cross buns and chocolate eggs, perhaps having a few days together during the "Easter holidays."

What does GOD say, however? Are these admittedly PAGAN EMBLEMS acceptable *to Him*?

JER 7:18, 20 warns us, "The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to MAKE CAKES FOR THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN ... that they may provoke Me TO ANGER ... therefore thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place. ..it will burn and not be quenched.'" Here God CONDEMNS family activities involving hot-cross buns. Hislop points out that the very word "bun" appears to be derived from the Hebrew word here translated "cakes."

Some will say that although these customs have their origin in paganism, they are kept now in a "new spirit." It is explained that new CHRISTIAN meanings have been added to the various symbols, which now picture Christ's resurrection. These customs, we are assured, HONOUR God, and we should not dwell on their pagan and occult origins.

These are of course the views of MEN — but are they right or wrong? What does GOD say?

DEUT 12:29-32, "When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, TAKE HEED to yourself ... that you DO NOT INQUIRE after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You SHALL NOT WORSHIP the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates have they done to their gods ... whatever I command you, BE CAREFUL to observe it; you SHALL NOT ADD TO IT NOR TAKE AWAY FROM IT."

God makes it very clear. DO NOT seek to worship Him with the pagan customs which were previously used to honour the heathen gods. Those customs are an ABOMINATION to Him which He hates — man's opinions notwithstanding.

In the New Testament, we are instructed in 2 COR 6:14-17, "For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? And what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has

the temple of God WITH IDOLS? ... Therefore COME OUT from among them, and BE SEPARATE, says the Lord. Do NOT touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

This article has only scratched the surface of the pagan origin of the various Easter customs. Further information can be obtained from *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop, *Babylon Mystery Religion* by Ralph Woodrow, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and other sources.

There you will also read of the surprising origin of Easter bonnets, Easter lilies and Easter sunrise services.

Easter in New Testament Times

Since Easter customs are pagan in origin, and linked to the spring festival in honour of the goddess Ishtar, HOW did they get into the professing Christian church — and WHEN?

Did the Apostles — or early New Testament church — accept these customs as symbolic of Jesus' death and resurrection?

The record of history will give us our answer.

Again we turn to the Encyclopaedia Britannica article on Easter, "There is NO INDICATION of the Easter festival IN THE NEW TESTAMENT or in the writings of the Apostolic fathers ... the first Christians continued to OBSERVE THE JEWISH FESTIVALS (they mean GOD'S festivals!!) though in a new spirit ... thus the PASSOVER, with a new conception to it, of Christ as the true Paschal lamb and first fruits from the dead, CONTINUED TO BE OBSERVED."

Hislop writes, "The festival of which we read in church history, under the name of Easter, in the third and fourth centuries at that time was not known by any such name as Easter. It was called ... Passover ... that festival *agreed originally* with the TIME OF THE JEWISH PASSOVER, when Christ was crucified."

History records that the early New Testament church observed the Biblical festival of PASSOVER, which some hundreds of years later was eventually REPLACED by the pagan festival of Easter.

FEW today have any knowledge of God's festivals or any understanding of God's teaching in this area. Let us see HOW this happened, and how God's truth was suppressed.

The Lord's Passover

The very first Passover took place in Egypt almost 3,500 years ago.

In Exodus 12 we read God's instructions to the Israelites who were at that time in sore bondage to the Egyptians.

Ancient Israel were to take a lamb (representative of Jesus Christ) and splash its blood over the doors of their houses. When the death angel

passed through the land of Egypt that night, it would slay the first born in every house, but would PASS OVER the Israelite homes. They would be SAVED BY THE BLOOD of the lamb; the symbolism for Christians today is plain.

The Passover took place on the 14th Abib, the first month of the sacred year.

It was commanded FOREVER, "Now you shall keep it (the lamb) until the FOURTEENTH DAY of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at TWILIGHT ... It is the LORD'S Passover ... And you shall observe this thing as an ORDINANCE for you and your sons FOREVER," EX 12:6, 11, 24.

Jesus kept the Passover throughout His life, setting His disciples then and us now, an EXAMPLE.

The gospels, in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22 and John 13, show us Jesus keeping His last Passover on earth with His disciples. Jesus was arrested a few hours after the Passover meal, and was later slain on the same day — the 14th Abib. Jesus Christ, who is our Passover Lamb, shed His blood for our deliverance on the SAME DAY the Passover lamb had been slain for over 1400 years, the 14th Abib.

During His final Passover, Jesus changed the emblems from the traditional meal of lamb, to the New Testament symbols of bread and wine. He commanded His disciples — and believers today — to continue to observe the Passover with these new symbols, "DO THIS in remembrance of ME," LUKE 22: 19.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the GENTILE believers in Corinth some 25 years later, gave further instructions as to how the Passover was to be kept. 1 COR 11:23-26, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same NIGHT in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; DO THIS in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This DO, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of ME.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you PROCLAIM THE LORD'S DEATH till He comes."

Jesus died on the afternoon of the 14th day of Abib. His body was broken for our healing, and His blood shed for the remission of our sins, on that day. This was the day of the Passover.

God had established the Passover as an ordinance FOREVER back in Exodus 12. Jesus showed how the Passover emblems were to be changed to represent HIM more meaningfully, and commanded that we CONTINUE TO OBSERVE the Passover in this new light. Paul passed on these instructions to the believers in Corinth, see 1 COR 5 and 11.

History records that the early New Testament church faithfully continued this practice. As we saw earlier from both Britannica and Hislop, the early Christians CONTINUED to observe the Passover *for several hundred years*.

The Controversy Develops

So HOW then did the Lord's Passover — commemorating the DEATH of Jesus — fall into disuse? How and when was it replaced by a festival allegedly in honour of Christ's resurrection, but actually borrowed from paganism, and even named after a heathen goddess?

For the first fifty or sixty years, or so, after the crucifixion of Jesus, the believers continued to keep the Passover annually to show Jesus' death as He Himself had commanded. In accordance with the Scriptures, they observed this event on the 14th of Abib.

Those who have studied the manner in which the seventh-day Sabbath was "changed" to Sunday will be aware of the effect of anti-Jewish feeling around the turn of the first century. The Jews had been involved in a number of well-known insurrections against their Roman rulers, and being Jewish was, at that time, potentially a source of great trouble. Many Gentiles also tended to blame the Jewish people as a whole for putting Jesus to death, and this was another reason for anti-Jewish sentiment.

In addition, being THOUGHT OF as being Jewish was almost as bad as actually BEING Jewish!

Since the Sabbath was seen by most as a JEWISH holyday, many professing Christians considered it only logical to substitute a NEW weekly observance — Sunday — in an attempt to DISTANCE themselves from anything Jewish. In making this change, however, they forgot that no man can alter the COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, no matter how apparently sincere or logical their motives might be.

A similar approach was taken with regard to God's Passover.

To many people the Passover was a wholly Jewish festival; in fact "too Jewish" for comfort. Many people, particularly in the Western part of the Roman Empire, where Roman influence was stronger, felt that a CHANGE in the observance of Passover was called for.

Rather than continuing to observe an evening memorial of Christ's death on the 14th of Abib, a number of people chose to commemorate Christ's supposed resurrection on the SUNDAY nearest Passover. Understandably, this was not acceptable to those who looked to the Scriptures for their instruction.

Britannica advises, "Although the observance of Easter was at a very early period the- practice of the Christian church, a SERIOUS

DIFFERENCE as to the day of its observance soon arose between the Christians of Jewish and those of Gentile descent, which led to a LONG AND BITTER CONTROVERSY. With the Jewish Christians ... the fast ended ... on the 14th DAY OF THE MOON AT EVENING ... without regard to the day of the week. The Gentile Christians on the other hand ... identified the first day of the week with the resurrection, and kept the preceding Friday as the commemoration of the crucifixion, irrespective of the day of the month. Generally speaking, the Western churches kept Easter on the 1st day of the week, while the Eastern churches followed the Jewish rule."

The "Jewish rule" referred to here by Britannica is of course that of Almighty God, whose very clear COMMAND can be found in Exodus 12:6, 24!

As *Britannica* states, the dispute over the correct time of observing Passover continued for several hundred years. It was more or less settled — from a human point of view — in 325 A.D.

Prior to then argument raged, between those who wished to adhere to the Scriptures and those who believed men had the authority to change the dates.

Polycarp and Polycrates

Two individuals who figured very prominently in the Passover controversy in the second century were Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John, and Polycrates.

We read in *Britannica* that, "Polycarp, the disciple of John the Evangelist, and Bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome in 159 to confer with Anicetus, the bishop of that see, on the subject, and urged the tradition WHICH HE HAD RECEIVED FROM THE APOSTLE of observing THE 14TH DAY. Anicetus, however, declined."

Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* tells us, "For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe it, because he had always observed it WITH JOHN the disciple of our Lord, AND THE REST OF THE APOSTLES, with whom he associated; and neither did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, who said he was bound to FOLLOW THE CUSTOMS of the presbyters before him."

Polycarp came from Asia Minor, the area where Paul had established many churches, and where John had been based. Irenaeus wrote of Polycarp that "he was not only instructed by the apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the church in Smyrna"; Smyrna was, of course, one of the seven churches addressed by Christ in the Book of Revelation.

Polycarp was well versed in the teachings of the Apostles, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to convince Anicetus (an early "Pope" in Rome) to abide by the Scriptures and the testimony of the Apostles.

The bishop of Rome, however, preferred to follow the traditions of his predecessors.

Within 35 or 40 years the controversy broke out again, with a great amount of ferocity between East and West. Britannica reveals that at around 197 A.D. "the question was discussed in a very different spirit between Victor, bishop of Rome, and Polycrates, metropolitan of pro-consular Asia. That province was the only portion of Christendom which still adhered to the Jewish usage (by that the writer means, more accurately, the God-commanded usage!). Victor demanded that ALL should adopt the usage prevailing at Rome. This Polycrates firmly refused to agree to, and urged many weighty reasons to the contrary, whereupon Victor proceeded to excommunicate Polycrates and the Christians who continued the Eastern usage..."

Although Victor was finally persuaded not to carry out his threat of wholesale excommunication, passions were running high.

Polycrates' reply to Victor of Rome is preserved in Volume 8 of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, and reads "As for us, then, we scrupulously observe THE EXACT DAY, neither adding nor taking away. For in Asia great luminaries have gone to their rest, who shall rise again in the day of the coming of the Lord ... I speak of Philip, one of the twelve apostles ... John moreover, who reclined on the Lord's bosom ... Then there is Polycarp ... these all KEPT THE PASSOVER ON THE FOURTEENTH DAY OF THE MONTH in accordance with the gospel, without ever deviating from it, but keeping to the rule of faith."

For another hundred years or so the dispute continued to simmer, though slowly the Western or Roman practice grew in popularity. Then the Emperor Constantine took a hand.

The Council of Nicaea

Constantine, as an able politician, was aware of the importance of unity in his empire. The endless argument and debate surrounding the keeping of Passover was a cause of concern to him, and he decided to convoke a special assembly of bishops to look at the matter "officially" and make a final decision.

In 325 A.D. the Council of Nicaea met. It was attended by 318 bishops, with Constantine in overall control.

Constantine ordered the bishops to come to a decision, once and for all. He was not personally interested in WHAT date they finally chose for Passover, as long as they all agreed on ONE DATE. It was unity that Constantine sought — NOT Bible truth!

Britannica advises "At that time the Syrians and Antiochenes were the solitary champions of the observance of the 14th day. The decision of the council was unanimous that Easter was to be kept on Sunday, and on the same Sunday throughout the world, and that 'none hereafter should follow the blindness of the Jews.' ... The FEW who afterwards

separated themselves from the unity of the church (that is, the Roman church) and continued to keep the 14th day, were named 'Quarto-decimani', and the dispute itself is known as the 'Quartodeciman controversy.'"

And so God's instructions for observing the Passover, as followed by Jesus, the Apostles, and the early New Testament church, fell victim to a politically inspired decision.

In fact, the bishops at Nicaea so totally abhorred everything "Jewish" that they "decided that Easter Day should always be on a Sunday, but never AT THE SAME TIME AS THE FEAST OF THE JEWS. If the 14th Nisan fell on a Sunday, Easter Day WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY"! See Burns, *The Council of Nicaea*. Man decided that AT ALL COSTS God's Passover ordinance must NOT BE observed *even accidentally!*

"For how," explained Constantine, "could we who are Christians possibly keep the same day as those wicked Jews?"

So strong was anti-Jewish opinion, that pork or ham was deliberately eaten on Easter to show their utter contempt and disdain for anything "Jewish." As with the Passover itself, this was, in fact, *another* of GOD'S WAYS that man was rejecting.

In Summary

To recap, we have seen how Almighty God gave HIS PASSOVER to ancient Israel, while they were in Egypt, some 3,500 years ago. The Passover was given to Israel FOREVER, months prior to the ceremonial law being established.

JESUS KEPT the Passover with His disciples. On the night before His crucifixion He changed the emblems, commanding His disciples to thereafter keep the Passover in commemoration of His DEATH, rather than primarily a celebration of deliverance some 1500 years before.

Paul faithfully passed on these instructions to the believers in Corinth.

History shows that the early New Testament church continued to keep the Passover annually, on the 14th Abib, in accordance with the Scriptures and following the example of Christ and the Apostles.

Controversy ultimately broke out, particularly between those in the Eastern and those in the Western parts of the Roman Empire. The East chose to follow the Scriptures and Apostolic tradition; the West wished to distance themselves from anything "tainted" by being Jewish. The weekly Sabbath and annual Passover services were among the first of God's truths to be attacked, and replaced by more "acceptable" days to Gentile minds.

The Roman Emperor Constantine brought matters to an "official" conclusion in 325 A.D. with the Council of Nicaea. Man decided he knew better than God, and outlawed the keeping of Passover on the 14th Abib. As Daniel prophesied, "And [the fourth beast] shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to CHANGE TIMES AND LAWS ..." DAN 7:25. God's Holy Day LAW, and the correct TIME of the Passover, has been cast aside as irrelevant, and spurned as "Jewish" by the leaders of the pagan Roman Empire.

Multitudes of pagans "converted" to Christianity over the next few centuries. All too often they brought with them the customs they had previously used during their worship of their pagan gods. In particular, the various customs surrounding the worship of the Queen of Heaven, *Ishtar*, gravitated to "Easter," which the pagans saw as merely a "Christianised" version of their annual spring festival.

Easter eggs, Easter bunnies, hot cross buns, sunrise services, Easter lilies, even the very name "Easter" itself, all have their origin IN PAGANISM.

God Speaks Out

God's view on the matter is plain.

He says in DEUT 12:29-32, "When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, TAKE HEED to yourself ... that you DO NOT INQUIRE after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You SHALL NOT WORSHIP the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates have they done to their gods ... whatever I command you, BE CAREFUL to observe it; you SHALL NOT ADD TO IT NOR TAKE AWAY FROM IT."

Paul makes it VERY CLEAR for those who want to walk after God: 2 COR 6:14-17, "For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? And what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God WITH IDOLS? ...Therefore COME OUT from among them, and BE SEPARATE, says the Lord. Do NOT touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

Compromising with pagan customs and ideas is not an acceptable form of worship to God, no matter how sincere people may be. HOS 4:6 reminds us, "My people are DESTROYED for LACK OF KNOWLEDGE."

As Jesus warned us in MARK 7:6-7, 9-13 "This people honours Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And IN VAIN THEY WORSHIP ME, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men ... all too well you REJECT THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD, that you may keep your TRADITION ... making the word of God of NO EFFECT through your tradition."

What's the Difference?

Does it make any difference, people may ask?

Those who understand the truth about the Sabbath day know that it DOES make a difference which day you keep holy to God. Man may choose a Friday or a Sunday — and may be very sincere. However, God has sanctified only the seventh-day Sabbath, and only that day is holy and acceptable to Him.

God has likewise set apart the 14th of Abib as the day which commemorates both the deliverance of ancient Israel from Egypt, and the death of our Lord and Saviour. NO OTHER DAY has this meaning, and this God-given blessing.

“And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons FOREVER ... It is the Passover sacrifice OF THE LORD,” EX 12:24, 27.

“On the 14th day of the first month at twilight is THE LORD'S PASSOVER,” LEV 23:5.

The choice is plain. Do we follow the Word of God, without compromise — or the traditions of men?

Jesus said, “... the hour is coming, and now is, when the TRUE WORSHIPPERS will worship the Father in spirit and IN TRUTH; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him,” JOHN 4:23.

Let us be found worshipping the Father IN TRUTH — and according to HIS WORD!

