

How Was Passover Replaced by Easter...

And Who Did It?



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Unquestionably, Jesus Christ was Jewish and observed Passover. Jesus never kept an Easter in His life! So how was this holy day changed? And who changed the day He observed, chose, and instituted as the holy day for taking His sacrificial emblems, representing His body and blood? Where is the Biblical record confirming the authority for this replacement?

Church history is a fascinating study. There are many angles and approaches one can take when exploring the nuances of the ecclesiastical record. However, the means by which Passover was abandoned and replaced with Easter is fairly straightforward and clearly documented as to “who” and “how” it was done. The real question underscoring this issue is: did they have the right to do it, and more importantly, is that what Jesus wanted?

Before we go ahead and answer those questions, let’s review the historical facts of “how” and “who” made this change so we can put this event into its proper context. Otherwise, we might marginalize the significance of the result and overlook the real tragedy of this unauthorized change.

HOW PASSOVER WAS ABANDONED AND REPLACED

When reviewing the historical record of the Passover/Easter controversy, it is undeniable that the early New Testament Church did not observe Easter. They continued observing Passover, but with a new significance and understanding.

Notice: “There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. The first Christians continued the observance of the Jewish [God’s] festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, p. 828). In addition, we are informed, “Neither the apostles, therefore, nor the Gospels, have any- where imposed... Easter... The Savior and His apostles have enjoined us by no law to keep this feast [Easter]... And that the observance originated not by legislation [of the apostles], but as a custom the facts themselves indicate” (fourth century scholar, Socrates Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History, Book V, chapter 22). The Apostle Paul confirms he maintained the customary observance of Passover, as was given to him by Christ Himself, when he said, “For I received of the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed [not Easter Sunday!] took bread” (1 Corinthians 11:23). Keep in mind Jesus Christ was betrayed during the night of Nisan 14 (Luke 22:15-22), which was considered the evening portion of the day of Passover (Exodus 12:6-13). Remember, God begins a new day at evening,

commencing at sunset (Genesis 1:5). With this established fact and connection in mind, how then was it changed from the 14th of Nisan (Passover) to the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox, and then assigned the pagan name Easter (Ishtarte)? Unquestionably, this is no minor change from the original observance that Jesus Christ exemplified (especially since people died refusing to obey this change). And furthermore, to supersede the authority of Jesus' own example is obviously presumptuous at best; and at worst, it is outright heretical! How could such a blatant act of contradiction and disregard for our Lord's example and commands be allowed to take place? This is a question all of us should seriously ask ourselves!

Assuredly, we must first understand the contention between the Western congregations led by Rome and the Eastern Asiatic congregations. This debate intensified during the second century, and is historically known as the Quartodeciman controversy.

“Quartodeciman” is simply a Latin term indicating fourteenth. What the ecclesiastical record of the second century reveals is that there was a controversy over the fourteenth—specifically, it concerned the change from the fourteenth of Nisan (Passover) to Easter, with all of its pagan connections, associations, and typologies of fertility and fecundity. This was unequivocally contested and rejected by the congregations of the Asiatic East. It came to a head when Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna (who was personally taught by John the apostle), faced off with Anicetus, the preeminent bishop of Rome, in about 95 A.D.

Notice what history tells us from the Catholic Church itself, concerning this second century controversy: “The dioceses of all Asia, as from the older tradition [Passover], held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should always be observed as the feast of the life-giving Pasch Passover]... However, it was not the custom of the churches in the rest of the world [primarily the West, represented by Rome] to end it at this point [allegedly a non-biblical based fast ending on Easter Sunday], as they observed the practice, which from apostolic tradition has prevailed to the present time... Synods and assemblies of bishops [not Jesus Christ's example or the Gospel records!] were held on this account and all with one consent through mutual correspondence drew up an ecclesiastical decree [superseding Christ's personal example as recorded in the Gospels] that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be celebrated on no other day but, the Sunday [Easter] and that we should observe the close of the paschal fast on that day only. A letter of Saint Irenaeus is among the extracts just referred to, and this shows that the diversity of practice regarding Easter had existed at least from the time of Pope Sixtus. Further, Irenaeus states that St. Polycarp [bishop of Smyrna], who like the other Asiatics, kept Easter on the fourteenth day of the moon [which is really the Passover], whatever day of the week that might be, following therein the tradition which he [Polycarp] claimed to have derived from St. John the Apostle, but could not be persuaded by Pope Anicetus to relinquish his Quartodecimen observance. The question thus debated was therefore primarily whether Easter was to be kept on a Sunday, or whether Christians should observe the holyday of the Jews... Those who kept Easter [Passover] with the Jews were called Quartodecimans” (Catholic Encyclopedia, emphasis added).

Clearly, the historical record from the Catholic Church proves that they themselves (not Jesus Christ) chose to exercise authority to change and sever the connection of Passover. Undoubtedly, there was a long-term agenda to shift and undermine any and all associations connecting Jewish Israeli underpinnings that were foundational to the early Christian Church. Remember, Paul said, the household of God (the Church) is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets [not Synods, Councils, and bishops], Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20). There was absolutely no authorization to change the framework of this major point of doctrine, disconnecting from Jesus Christ’s own appearance of worship exemplified by His life, habits, and customs (1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6). It is important we remember: Jesus Christ never kept an Easter in His life! Unequivocally, it is undeniable that Easter has no Biblical connection, foundation, or authority on the name of Jesus Christ that requires observance and/or recognition by any who claim Christ as their Savior.

Yet, regardless of these verifiable facts; this trend finally became law in the year A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicaea. Again notice, from the Catholic Encyclopedia: “The emperor himself [Constantine] writing to the churches after the council of Nicaea, exhorts, ‘At this meeting the question concerning the most holy day of Easter was discussed, and it was resolved by the united judgment of all present [regardless of the example/commands of Jesus Christ and the original apostolic fathers, Matthew 26:17-30] that this feast ought to be kept by all and in every place on one and the same day [Easter Sunday]...And first of all it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hand with enormous sin... for we have received from our Savior a different way [Where, then, is the Biblical proof or Christological authorization?] ...and I myself [Constantine] have undertaken that this decision should meet with the approval of your sagacity in the hope that your wisdoms will gladly admit that practice which is observed [Easter Sunday] at once in the city of Rome and in Africa, throughout Italy and Egypt... with entire unity of judgement.”

And finally, under the article “Councils” in the Catholic Encyclopedia again, we read about the purpose of the Council of Nicaea. “The first ecumenical, or council, of Nicaea (325 A.D.) lasted two months and twelve days. Three hundred and eighteen bishops were present. Hosius, bishop of Cordova, assisted as legate of Pope Sylvester. The Emperor, Constantine, was also present. To this council we owe the Creed of Nicaea, defining against Arius the true divinity of the Son of God [Arius challenged the divinity of Jesus Christ], and the fixing of the date for keeping Easter [which opposed the Quartodecimans who observed Passover]

It was now made “official”: Easter Sunday, the day after the first full moon, after the spring equinox, became the day to celebrate Jesus Christ’s resurrection. This was a serious and critical shift of theology. Critical, because it not only changed the day of the observance, but changed the focus, the meaning of the observance. It now became an observance and celebration of His resurrection, contrary to the Biblical admonition of remembering His death!

Notice what Paul says, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do

shew the Lord's death [not His resurrection] till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). There is a purposeful point of significance our Lord placed exclusively on Passover concerning His death. It's very fundamental, but crucial to understand; Passover was intended to distinctly address the impeccable fact that it was by Jesus Christ's sacrificed life and shed blood that we have access to eternal life. Unfortunately, merging His death and resurrection into one holy day, as Easter describes, blurs the deep profound meaning of both these events by taking away the emphasis that each so richly deserves.

Sadly, on a broader scale, the abandonment of the observance of God's holy days has contributed to this greatly. Understanding the additional holy days throughout the year, their enriched meanings and sequence they portray, would clarify how each step in the salvation/atonement process is remarkably explained for our understanding and spiritual appreciation.

SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFYING WHO MADE THE CHANGE

After the Council of Nicaea, the Roman government became more entangled with the ecclesiastical matters of the Church, derailing it further from the original intent by multiple means. "Emperor Theodosius (A.D. 378-395) made Christianity the State Religion of the Roman Empire, and made church membership compulsory. This was the worst calamity that has ever befallen the Church. The forced conversion filled the churches with unregenerate people.. Christ had designed to conquer by purely spiritual and moral means. Up to this time conversion was voluntary, a genuine change in heart and life. But now the military spirit of Imperial Rome had entered the Church. The Church had conquered the Roman Empire. But in reality the Roman Empire had conquered the Church, by making the Church over into the image of the Roman Empire. The Church had changed its nature, had entered its great Apostasy (2 Thessalonians 2: 1-12), had become a political organization in the Spirit and pattern of Imperial Rome, and took its nose-dive into the millennium of Papal abominations. The Imperial Church of the 4th and 5th centuries had become an entirely different institution from the persecuted Church of the first three centuries. In its ambition to rule it lost and forgot the Spirit of Christ" (Halley's Bible Handbook, "Paganization of the Church," p. 760).

Regrettably, the combination of Rome's secular power and the integration of fertility symbols and observances, adopted from many of the existing pagan religions that saturated Rome, took its toll; and by means of forced compliance and/or persecution, marginalized the true Church, reducing its influence. Notice again, "Conversion of the Barbarians, the Goths, Vandals, and Huns who overthrew the Roman Empire accepted Christianity; but to a large extent their conversion was nominal and this further filled the Church with pagan practices.

"...Even as every generation seeks to interpret Christ in terms of its own thinking, so, no sooner had Christianity made its appearance than it began its process of amalgamation with Greek and Oriental philosophies; and there arose many Sects..." (Halley's Bible Handbook, "Paganization of the Church," p. 761).

Throughout history, the Christians remaining faithful to the commandments and testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:17) have been comparably small when measured against the traditional Christian community that has emerged and been so heavily influenced by the Hellenistic teachings of Greco-Roman culture. The liberties taken by the Catholic Church and many of the popes, bishops, councils, synods, and emperors to rearrange the theology of Christ's original teachings is unconscionable. Unfortunately, the hard reality is, much of traditional Christianity, Protestant and/or Catholic, is not theologically correct.

Notice what Jesus says: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye who work iniquity [lawlessness]" (Matthew 7:22-23).

Seriously, it would do all of us some good to consider this possibility. It is very plausible one can think he is pleasing God when in fact he is not. It's important to our Lord we worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Love of the truth is living the truth. It's easy to say we love and believe the truth, but we must love by "doing" (1 John 3:17-18). The hearers are not justified. Acting on what we know, or living our faith, is key to justification and pleasing the true God (James 2:15-26). Notice: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like:" Read the remaining verses located in Luke 6:46-49. They are revealing in light of the historical record you just read. We are expected to believe and obey. God expects those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them (Romans 8:9) to be an example to others by living the Faith.

It is the height of arrogance, vanity, and ego to circumvent God in areas He reserves exclusive prerogative to define "what is to be." The historical record of the Passover/Easter controversy is a prime illustration of how man endeavors to evade God, avoiding His authority. History reveals the combination of the Greco-Roman government, implemented by the ecclesiastical authority of the Popes and Catholic Councils over the centuries, replaced Passover with Easter. There is absolutely no Biblical directive or Christ-like example throughout the whole Bible authorizing the institution of Easter as a Christian holy day! It's simply a man-made tradition, adopted, concocted, and assimilated with ancient pagan fertility rites and symbols that are well connected to the "sun-worshipping" religions of Babylon that came down to us through the Greco-Macedonian/Roman cultures. Lamentably, over the years, it has simply contributed to misdirecting much of the vast Christian community, causing it to render the laws of God to no effect because of the traditions of men. Even Jesus Christ had to personally deal with this same principle during His ministry and cautioned against it. Notice what He said. "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:6-9).

Without a doubt, this being the case, why not consider following the example Jesus Christ left us and begin keeping the Passover instead of Easter, as was originally intended? Because, as was mentioned at the outset, what underscores this issue is not that Passover was replaced; that is an obvious historical fact. Instead, what is really at the heart of this

issue is, which laws will you obey: Jesus the Christ's, or the decrees (traditions) of men?

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