

Why Do We Keep the Passover?

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It's widely acknowledged among Biblical scholars and historians that Jesus and the early Apostles kept the Passover -- as the historical and Biblical evidence clearly shows. Is there any reason for Christians to keep the Passover today? YES! Find out why!

The Church of the New Testament, the Church Jesus Christ founded, the Church of Paul the Apostle, and the original twelve Apostles, kept the Passover. Is it not logical that those who want to practice the true Christianity of the Bible will want to be keeping the same tradition, based not on the commandments of men, but on the commandments of God (Mark 7: 6-7, 9; 1 Corinthians 11:1-2; Revelation 12:17; 14:12)?

Yet, most Churches that claim to be Christian keep as holy days festivals that neither Jesus nor his apostles ever kept. At the same time, most such Churches don't keep the holy days Jesus and the apostles did keep. One of those festivals kept by Jesus that ceased long ago to be observed within popular Christianity is the Passover.

Have you ever asked yourself why your Church keeps Easter, but not the same Passover Jesus and the apostles of the New Testament kept, if that is the case? Why should Christians keep Passover and not Easter?

In this article I will discuss **three basic reasons** in answer to this question.

Jesus Christ's Command and Example

The first reason is that in keeping Passover we are following the example, teaching and command of Jesus Christ.

The most common term used in the New Testament for a follower of Jesus is disciple (Greek: *mathetes*, a learner; from a root *math*, indicating *thought accompanied by endeavor*; see *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p. 171). "A 'disciple' was not only a pupil, but an adherent; hence they are spoken of as imitators of their teacher..." (*Vine's*, p. 171). So Christians are to be students — but more than students. They are to be adherents — imitators — of their teacher, Jesus Christ. Their commitment to him is to be absolute, and they are to not just hear, but to follow his example and **abide** in his word (Luke 14:26-27; John 8:31).

Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples on the very same night that he was arrested, according to Scripture. The following morning he was crucified (Mark 14:26-27, 46, 50; 15:25; third hour Jewish time, 9 a.m., see Robertson's *Word Pictures In the New Testament*). As Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples, he sanctified the Passover unleavened bread and wine as symbols of the sacrifice of his body and blood, and commanded this to be done in remembrance of him (Luke 22:7-20).

As the last Passover Jesus would celebrate with his disciples prior to his death approached, Jesus love for them was a foremost thought in his mind (John 13:1). On the night of the Passover, as they were partaking of the sacrificial meal, He got up **during** supper (John 13:2, 4, as in ASV, Darby's, and a number of other translations). "The original means *while they were at supper*; and that this is the meaning is clear from the fact that we find them still eating after this" (Albert Barnes, *New Testament Notes*; cf. John 13:26).

The context shows that the supper referred to in John 13 was the Passover, a festival of God (Leviticus 23:4-5). The Passover is specifically mentioned in the context of the supper (John 13:1). After receiving the “sop” (John 13:26; cf. Matthew 26:17-25), Judas left the assembly. Later, after Jesus had spoken the words recorded in John 13-17, Jesus and his disciples went into a garden on the Mount of Olives just east of Jerusalem (John 18:1; Matthew 26:30, 36).

Some while later, on the same night, the night of the Passover, the fourteenth of the first month of the sacred calendar (see our book *When Is the Biblical Passover?*), Judas appeared with a band of armed men, Roman soldiers and representatives of the Jewish leaders. Jesus was arrested and led away to be condemned (Matthew 26:47, 57; John 18:3, 12-13).

Paul's Instructions

In a letter to the church in Corinth, Paul gives the Corinthians instructions on how to properly observe the “Lord’s supper,” the Passover, not as a riotous banquet but as a solemn remembrance of his suffering and death. This was a predominantly Gentile church (1 Corinthians 11:20-28).

In the same letter, Paul tells the Church, “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). The lambs slain for the Old Covenant Passover were emblematic of Jesus Christ, who is referred to as the lamb numerous times in the New Testament, hearkening to the significance of the Passover sacrifice of Jesus Christ for Christians (cf. Revelation 13:8).

Evidently the letter was written at about the time of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, for he urges the Corinthians to, “...purge out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened.... Therefore let us keep *the* feast; not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8, Green’s Modern King James Version).

It is through the blood of Jesus Christ that we have been purchased, redeemed from the death penalty, that we might be saved and receive the gift of eternal life (1 Peter 1:18-20). The New Testament symbols of unleavened bread and wine symbolize the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ associated with the death that he suffered in payment for our sins (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 1 Peter 2:24; Revelation 1:5).

So following the example of Jesus Christ our savior and in obedience to his command, we keep the Passover, understanding its significance as a memorial of the willing sacrifice of his life to save our lives.

Example of the New Testament Church

A second reason we keep the Passover is because in doing so we are following the example of the New Testament Church of God.

The Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22). Part of our mission as a Church is to restore the true Christianity of the New Testament Church — the Church founded by Jesus Christ and

the apostles. All of the original New Testament apostles followed the teachings and example of Jesus Christ in keeping the Passover. Contrary to what is sometimes alleged, none of them kept Easter, nor would they have countenanced the idea for even an instant.

The historical record is clear on this point. The apostolic New Testament Church continued to keep the Passover annually after Jesus' death and resurrection. And it was not only Jewish Christians, but Gentiles also, who kept the Passover. Note the following remarks from the Protestant church historian J. K. L. Gieseler: "In the Christian assemblies the Jewish passover was at first kept up, but observed with reference to Christ, the true passover, (1 Cor. v. 7, 8). Thus John, too, found it in Ephesus and allowed it to remain unaltered" (*A Text-Book of Church History*, Dr. John C. L. Gieseler, Trans. Samuel Davidson, Harper and Brothers, 1857, vol. 1, pp. 166-167n.).

Note that when John the Apostle took up residence in Ephesus, a Greek city in Asia Minor, a church had already been established there by the Apostle Paul (Acts 19). Paul had remained in Ephesus and ministered to that predominately Gentile Church for more than two years (Acts 19:10, 21-22), and had taught the Christians there to keep the Passover in accordance with Scripture. It was not the "Jewish passover" they were keeping, but the "Lord's Passover" (Exodus 12:11; Leviticus 23:5; Numbers 9:10; etc.).

Gieseler goes on to comment that John in his gospel account made, "...it apparent that Christ was crucified on the 14th Nisan." And he further states, "... if the 14th Nisan was the true Christian passover day, the fulfillment of the typical pasch [Passover] took place on the same day with it" (*ibid.*, p. 167n.; cf. Leviticus 23:5-6; Numbers 9:2-5; Ezra 6:19; etc.).

Gieseler comments that churches in Asia Minor (where Peter, Paul, John and some of the other apostles had personally ministered) were continuing to keep the Passover in the second century. Gieseler further states, "In it they ate unleavened bread, probably like the Jews, eight days through; they said...." Gieseler goes on to quote Chrysostom writing in Greek what the Christians in Asia Minor said about why they ate unleavened bread eight days (*ibid.*, p. 166n.). Translated, "Because the Feast of Unleavened Bread is with [or accompanies] the Passover" (cf. Leviticus 23:5-6; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8). On the Passover unleavened bread was to be eaten (Exodus 12:8; 1 Corinthians 11:23-24). And for seven days during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (fifteenth through the twenty-first) unleavened bread was to be eaten (Leviticus 23:4-6). So unleavened bread is eaten a total of eight days during the festival period.

In confirmation of the fact that unleavened bread was to be eaten a total of eight days during the festival season note the following: "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread" (Exodus 12:18-20). Unleavened bread was to be eaten beginning with the fourteenth at evening (Hebrew *ereb*, meaning "dusk," evening, properly understood as the period in the evening following sunset to dark (cf. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*; *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*; *WordNet English dictionary*; and other dictionaries). Following the giving of the Law after the Exodus, it was not unlawful to eat unleavened bread on the fourteenth, but it was required that unleavened bread be included in the sacrificial Passover meal (Exodus 12:8). During the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, no leavened bread was permitted to be eaten, but it was required to eat unleavened bread during that seven day period, thus a total of eight days (fourteenth through the twenty-first) unleavened bread

was eaten.

More information regarding the Passover in the early Church is provided in some detail in chapters 9 and 10 of our book *When Is the Biblical Passover?* You can download it free of charge at cogmessenger.org.

Pagan Traditions Behind Easter

A third reason that we keep Passover and not Easter is that Easter is a blend of corrupted Biblical and pagan traditions.

“Easter is a convergence of three traditions. (1) *Pagan*. According to the Venerable Bede, English historian of the early 8th century, the word is derived from the Norse *Ostara* or *Eostre*, meaning the festival of spring at the vernal equinox, March 21, when nature is in resurrection after winter. Hence, the rabbits, notable for their fecundity, and the eggs, colored like rays of the returning sun and the northern lights or aurora borealis. The Greek myth, Demeter and Persephone, with its Latin counterpart, Ceres and Persephone, conveys the idea of a goddess returning seasonally from the nether regions to the light of day” (*Encyclopedia Americana*, 1949 edition, “Easter,” vol. 9, p. 506). It also mentions Jewish and Christian elements that are part of the Easter tradition.

But the real root of the Easter celebration is pagan, not Christian. Jesus Christ never commanded the Church to have a festival observing his resurrection, but the Bible explicitly commands us to observe the Passover as a memorial of Christ's death. It took the apostate Church several centuries to settle on a consistent date for the celebration of Easter, further evidence that it was not of apostolic origin.

There's no doubt that the name Easter is ultimately derived from the Babylonian name (Ishtar) for the great mother goddess — the queen of heaven. This goddess was worshiped the world over under a variety of names.

In the Babylonian myths Tammuz and his consort Ishtar (Easter) were resurrected together each year “that with their return all nature might revive” (James G. Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, p. 285). The name Tammuz is said to be a Sumerian term meaning “true son.” He was also known as Adon, or Lord, among the Babylonians, and the same deity came to be worshiped by the Greeks as Adonis (*ibid.*, p. 286). In various cultures at certain times of the year there were lamentations and weeping associated with the death of the god. In the Phoenician sanctuary of Astarte (the Greek name for Ishtar) at Byblus the death of Adonis (or Tammuz) was mourned every spring with weeping, wailing and beating of the breast. But it was believed he rose from the dead the next day. Women celebrating this spring festival of death and resurrection were obliged to either shave their heads or serve a day as temple prostitutes (*ibid.*, p. 289). Temple prostitution was widely practiced in association with the worship of the mother goddess (*ibid.*, 298 ff.). And the worship of these gods was associated with the sun (cf. Ezekiel 8:14-16).

Israel, contrary to God's explicit instructions, repeatedly forsook faithfulness toward God to worship Baal and Ishtar (referred to in the Old Testament by the names Ashtoreth and Asherah; cf. Judges 2:13; 3:7; 1 Kings 11:5; 15:13). Ezekiel describes how Israel and Judah blended the worship of such gods — including Tammuz — and goddesses with the worship of Yahweh. And God refers to such worship as an abomination (Ezekiel 8:1-17).

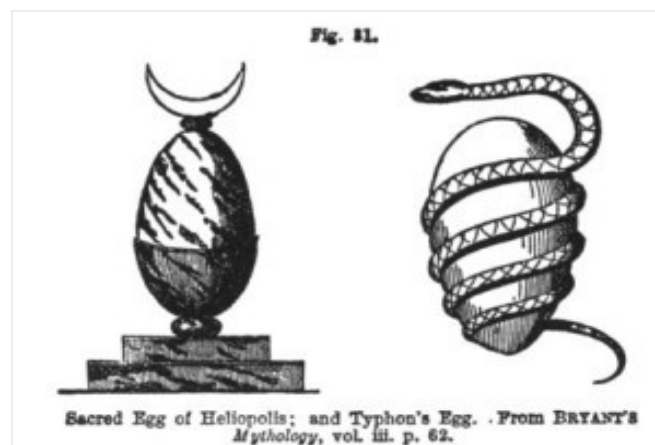
Along with Baal and other false gods and goddesses, the “queen of heaven,” was explicitly

worshiped among the people of Judah at the time of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7:9, 18; 44:17-19). “The Phoenicians called the moon *Ashtoreth* or *Astarte*: the wife of Baal or Moloch, the *king of heaven*” (*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*; Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, on Jeremiah 7:18). This worship was a major reason both the northern tribes of Israel and later the nation of Judah were sent into captivity (2 Kings 17:7-19; Jeremiah 7:1-15; 44:19-23).

The same corrupt blending of pagan customs with Biblical themes is at the heart of the supposedly “Christian” Easter and many other practices of popular Christianity. “At the approach of Easter, Sicilian women sow wheat, lentils, and canary-seed in plates, which they keep in the dark and water every two days. The plants soon shoot up; the stalks are tied together with red ribbons, and the plates containing them are placed on the sepulchres which, with the effigies of the dead Christ, are made up in Catholic and Greek churches on Good Friday, just as the gardens of Adonis were placed on the grave of the dead Adonis. The practice is not confined to Sicily.... The whole custom — sepulchres as well as plates of sprouting grain — may be nothing but a continuation, under a different name, of the worship of Adonis.

“Nor are these the only Easter ceremonies which resemble the rites of Adonis” (*The New Golden Bough*, p. 296-297).

The author goes on to describe various rituals practiced particularly in Catholic churches involving effigies of the dead Christ that parallel rites associated with the idol god Adonis and similar deities. “When we reflect how often the Church has skilfully [sic] contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith on the old stock of paganism, we may surmise that the Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis, which ... was celebrated in Syria at the same season” (*ibid.*, p. 298).



“Sacred Eggs” as pictured in *The Two Babylons*

Alexander Hislop, an evangelical minister of the Free Church of Scotland, courageously exposed the pagan, anti-biblical origins of many popular beliefs and practices of what had become “orthodox” Christianity, among both Catholics and Protestants. While some of his assertions may need further examination and elucidation, the thrust of his argument that what had become accepted as “orthodox” Christianity was in reality a continuation of pagan mystery religion with a Christian veneer is sound. He describes the use of eggs, buns, etc., in ancient pagan myth and worship, adapted eventually into supposedly “Christian” worship (*The Two Babylons*, 3.2).

Hislop comments on the use of “sacred eggs” in various pagan religions, including the worship of Astarte (Ishtar, or “Easter”) in ancient Babylon (*ibid.*). Ralph Woodrow, in his book *Babylon Mystery Religion* also comments on the use of “sacred eggs” in ancient Babylonian religion as one of a number of symbols of fertility associated with “Easter” (pp. 143-145). Even the *Catholic Encyclopedia* admits the following concerning “Easter eggs,” “The custom may have its origin in paganism, for a great many pagan customs, celebrating the return of spring, gravitated to Easter. The egg is the emblem of the germinating life of early spring...” (“Easter”).

The custom of Lent, and eating fish on Friday, are also rooted in the worship of idols, not in Biblical teaching (cf. *Babylon Mystery Religion*, pp. 142-143; *The Two Babylons*, 3.2). Fish (as eggs and rabbits, or hares) were another symbol of fertility in ancient pagan religion, and were associated with a number of pagan gods and goddesses, including Freyja (or Frigg), a Scandinavian or Germanic fertility goddess associated with Venus, and the source of the English word “Friday” (en.wikipedia.org).

The Bible encourages fasting in the right spirit and attitude (Isaiah 58:3-12). But only one fast day is a **required** annual fast, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27). Eating fish, or eating anything, is not really “fasting,” anyway, in the Biblical sense. Real fasting, from the Biblical standpoint, is eating and drinking nothing (Exodus 34:28).

Where in the Bible do you read of rabbits, colored eggs, carrying idol images about in fake coffins, ham dinners, hot cross buns and the other traditions of Easter? The Bible sanctions no such practices. What we do find, on the testimony of many sources, is that very clearly most of the customs associated with Easter are a continuation of idolatrous practices associated with the worship of various false gods. God condemns the blending of his worship with the idolatrous practices of the nations (Deuteronomy 12:29-32; 2 Kings 22:14-17; Jeremiah 7:22-34; 44:19-22).

We reject the false Easter tradition as heresy and apostasy. We keep the Passover because it is part of the true apostolic faith of the New Testament Church, the faith that Jesus Christ established through his example and command.

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