

Should Adventists Celebrate Passover Or Easter?

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

At this time of the year some Adventists ask the question: "Should Adventists join the Christian world in celebrating Christ's resurrection with a special church service on Easter Sunday morning?" I did address this question at this time last year in ENDTIME ISSUES No. 43. But I thought it would be a good idea to discuss the subject more fully at this time, especially since during the last few days I received numerous inquiries about the Easter Sunday morning services that will be conducted in an increasing number of SDA churches on Sunday, April 15, 2001.

It might be of interest to some readers to note that this year both Passover and Easter occur on a Sunday, though they are a week apart from each other. Passover falls on Sunday, April 8, and Easter on Sunday April 15. This poses the question: Should Adventists celebrate Passover or Easter? Or, should they ignore both of them?

Why do Christians celebrate this year Easter a week after Passover, when both of them occurs also on a Sunday? Wouldn't this be a golden opportunity for Christians to join the Jews in celebrating the Feast of Redemption on the same Sunday? Why are the two festivals celebrated a week apart when they both fall on Sunday?

The answer, as we shall see shortly, is to be found in the historic theology of contempt for the Jews, which led the Papacy to the change, not only the Sabbath to Sunday, but also Passover to Easter Sunday. To ensure that Easter would not be celebrated at the same time of the Jewish Passover, the council of Nicea (A. D. 325) decreed that if the Jewish Passover fell on a Sunday, then Easter was to be celebrated the following Sunday in order to have "nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd." Sad to say, most Christians ignore that this is what has happened this year. Since the Jewish Passover fell on Sunday, April 8, the date of Easter has been set for the following Sunday, April 15. In my view, this historical practice represents a most tangible proof of the "Christian" hate for the Jews—a hate which is a disgrace to the Christian faith which summons us to love and accept every person, whether Jew or Gentile (Gal 3:28).

As Adventists, it would be advisable for us to distance ourselves from a festival, whose dating reflects more hate for the Jews than love for Jesus Christ. Instead of celebrating Easter, I am proposing in this newsletter to remember the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's atoning death and resurrection, on what we might call a special "Passover-Sabbath." Before expanding on this proposal, let me mention a few items.

SURPRISING RESPONSES TO LAST NEWSLETTER

The last newsletter (No. 66) on "Living the Advent Hope," generated a surprising number of favorable responses. Several pastors asked me permission to preach the same sermon, after making personal modification. Others have asked me permission to post the Bible study in their own newsletter, which they email to their subscribers.

Faith Crumbly, the editor of SABBATH SCHOOL LEADERSHIP (8,000 subscribers), published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, asked permission to use the study in a condensed version for her subscribers. For me it is a gratifying experience to see how the Lord can use these newsletters in the most unexpected ways. May I take this opportunity to inform all my readers, that you have full permission to use any of my published material, whether it be books, articles, or newsletters, as long as you acknowledge the source.

A THANK YOU NOTE:

Thank you for taking time in your busy schedule to read these lengthy newsletters. If these Bible studies enrich your understanding and experience of Biblical truths, be sure to invite your friends to subscribe. All what they need to do is to email me a request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 13,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

SPECIAL OFFER ON *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*

Several Adventist churches have contacted me during the past few weeks to find out if the special offer on ***THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*** still stands. The answer is "Yes." Your church can still order this timely book by the case of 32 copies for only \$190.00, postage paid. This means that the price for **a single copy is only \$5.90**, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. Feel free to contact us at (616) 471-2915 for a supply.

We are offering this book by the case at such a low price, to facilitate its distribution to clergy, libraries, and community thought-leaders. As a result of these endeavors numerous church leaders and religious organizations have accepted the Sabbath during the past two years. The reason ***THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*** has proven to be more effective than my other three Sabbath books, is most likely because it refutes in a systematic way the most common arguments used to negate the continuity and validity of the Sabbath. I plan to write a report on the results of the distribution of this book in a future newsletter. Some churches that have distributed the book to the local clergy, are now inviting me to conduct a weekend Sabbath seminar in their district. A personal invitation to attend the seminar is extended to those who have received the gift copy of the book.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the seminars for the months of April and May 2001. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area during the latter part of this year. I still have few open weekends.

APRIL 20-21: SANDPOINT SDA CHURCH

Location: 2255 Pine Street, Sandpoint, Idaho 83864

For information call Pastor Ron Reed at (208) 265-0519 or (208) 263-3648

APRIL 27-28: HERMISTON SDA CHURCH

Location: 855 W. Highland, Hermiston, OR 97838

For information call Pastor Kevin Wilfley at (541) 567-7989 or (541) 567-8241

MAY 4-5: PATTERSON AVENUE SDA CHURCH IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Location: 3901 Patterson Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23221

For information call Pastor Robert Banks at (804) 270-1456

MAY 11-12: SPRING BRANCH SDA CHURCH IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

Location: 1614 Bingle Road, Houston, Texas 77055

For information call Dr. Cesar Puesan at (281) 405-8833

MAY 27 TO JUNE 2: CAROLINE CONFERENCE CAMPMEETING

Location: Lake Junaluska in North Carolina

For information call Carolina Conference office at (704)596-3200

SPECIAL OFFER ON GOD'S FESTIVALS IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

The Bible study presented in this newsletter is largely drawn from **GOD'S FESTIVALS IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY: Volume 1: THE SPRING FESTIVALS**. The two volumes on **GOD'S FESTIVALS**, are designed to help Christians understand how the ancient Feasts of Israel reveal the unfolding of the Plan of Salvation. The information on how to order these timely books is given at the end of this newsletter.

Adventist theology has focused primarily on the Day of Atonement, especially the eschatological significance of the cleansing of the sanctuary performed on that Day. In this ritual, Adventist Pioneer saw a typological representation of the investigative judgment. We wish that our Pioneers would have examined also the contribution of the other Annual Feasts to a fuller understanding of the unfolding of the Plan of Salvation.

The two volumes on **GOD'S FESTIVALS** attempt to fill this gap, by investigating how the redemptive acts of God are revealed in the Bible weekly through the Sabbath and annually through the Spring and Fall Festivals. The Spring Festivals of Passover and Pentecost help us understand the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's first Advent, namely, Christ's atoning death, His resurrection, ascension, inauguration of His heavenly ministry, and sending of the Holy Spirit. The Fall Festivals of Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles point to the consummation of redemption, namely, the judgment, the final disposition of sin, the second Advent, and the restoration of this world.

GOD'S FESTIVALS challenges Christian churches to bring about worship renewal by developing a church calendar patterned after the religious calendar God gave to Israel. Such a calendar would focus during the course of the year on the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's first and second Advents. We cannot preach the whole Bible in one sermon. We cannot celebrate the whole story of redemption in one Sabbath. A calendar patterned after the calendar of Israel can help to do justice to all the great saving acts of God.

SHOULD ADVENTISTS CELEBRATE PASSOVER OR EASTER-SUNDAY? **Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D., Prof. of Theology, Andrews University**

The question many have posed to me is: "Should Seventh-day Adventist Churches join the rest of the Christian world in celebrating Christ's resurrection with a special church service on Easter Sunday morning?" In answering this question a distinction must be made between conducting a church service on Easter Sunday morning for an evangelistic purpose and holding a service to celebrate Christ's resurrection. Evangelistic meetings are conducted on every day of the week.

Scheduling an evangelistic meeting for Easter Sunday morning can be a unique opportunity to help people understand the real meaning of Christ's resurrection as an existential reality, rather than a liturgical festival. We can capitalize on this occasion by reflecting on the personal, existential meaning of the resurrection. This is indeed what I did when I was invited to speak at an Easter Sunday service in an Adventist Church. I entitled my meditation, "What the Resurrection Means to me!" Here is a summary of the seven points of my meditation.

What Christ's Resurrection Means to Me!

(1) *Christ's resurrection tells me that truth is stronger than falsehood.* "You seek to kill me," Jesus said, "a man who told you the truth" (John 8:40). Jesus was put to death because He spoke and revealed the truth about God and His plan for our salvation. If Christ's enemies had succeeded in silencing Christ for ever, then falsehood would have been stronger than truth. For me the resurrection is the final guarantee of the indestructibility of truth.

(2) *Christ's resurrection tells me that good is stronger than evil.* The forces that crucified Christ were the forces of evil. Jesus said: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth" (John 8:44). If Christ had not risen there would be no hope that goodness will ultimately triumph over evil.

(3) *Christ's resurrection tells me that love is stronger than hate.* It was virulent hatred that procured Christ's crucifixion. It was hatred that ascribed Christ's healing to the power of the devil. If there was no resurrection it would mean that human hatred had conquered God's love. The resurrection is the triumph of God's love over all what human hatred could do.

(4) *Christ's resurrection tells me that life is stronger than death.* If Jesus had not risen again, it would have meant that death had power even over the loveliest and best life that ever lived. Between the cracks of the ruins of a church in London bombed during the World War II, some corn plants came out. As the bombs could not destroy the life of the corn-seeds so death could not destroy Christ's life. The resurrection is the final proof that death cannot destroy God's gift of life.

(5) *Christ's resurrection tells me, not only that Christ died to pay the penalty of my sins, but also that He lives to empower me to live victoriously.* Some Christians focus on Christ's crib and other on His Cross, but ultimately it is His resurrection that gives us the reassurance that "He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25). The resurrection tells me that Christ is not on vacation recovering from the exhaustion of His earthly mission, but He is actively working at the right hand of God (Eph 1:20) to bring to consummation the redemption he accomplished on this earth.

(6) Christ's resurrection assures me that God preserves the identity and individuality of those who have fallen asleep until the Day of the resurrection. The resurrected Christ was recognized by His followers, because He was the same Christ they had known before His death. In the same way the resurrected saints will be recognized by their loved ones because God preserves and will restore the identity of each person.

(7) Christ's resurrection gives me reason to believe in my own resurrection on the glorious day of His coming. Being "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20), Christ's resurrection has a profound eschatological meaning. The early Christians grasped this meaning when they greeting one another saying, "Marantha-the Lord is Coming." The Lord is coming because He is risen. His resurrection is the prefiguration of our resurrection.

A careful study of all the references to the Resurrection reveals the incomparable importance of the event, but it does not provide any indication regarding a special day to commemorate it. In fact, the first day of the week, in the writings of the New Testament, is never called "Day of the Resurrection." This is a term which made its appearance later in the fourth century.

The New Testament attributes no liturgical significance to the day of Christ's Resurrection simply because the Resurrection was seen as an existential reality experienced by living victoriously by the power of the Risen Savior, and not a liturgical practice associated with Sunday worship. If Jesus wanted the day of His resurrection to become a memorial day of rest and worship, He would have capitalized on the day of His resurrection to establish such a memorial. It is important to note that divine institutions like the Sabbath, baptism, Lord's Supper, all trace their origin to a divine act that established them. But on the day of His resurrection Christ performed no act to institute a memorial of His resurrection.

If Jesus wanted to memorialize the day of His Resurrection, most likely He would have told the women and the disciples when He arose: "Come apart and celebrate My Resurrection!" Instead He told the women "Go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee" (Matt 28:10) and to the disciples "Go . . . make disciples . . . baptizing them" (Matt 28:19). None of the utterances of the risen Savior reveal an intent to memorialize His Resurrection by making Sunday the new day of rest and worship.

The reason is that our Savior wanted His followers to view His Resurrection as an existential reality to be experienced daily by living victoriously by the power of His Resurrection, rather than a liturgical/religious event to be celebrated on Sunday. Paul expressed the hope to "know him and the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:10), but he never mentions his desire to celebrate Christ's Resurrection on Sunday or Easter-Sunday.

My Reasons for Objecting to a Regular Easter Sunday Service

Planning for a special Easter Sunday service in Adventist churches to celebrate the event of Christ's resurrection, poses two serious problems. First, it assumes that Christ's resurrection is an event to be celebrated liturgically on Sunday by a special church service. This assumption is devoid of biblical and apostolic support. Second, Easter Sunday services indirectly supports Sunday observance, since it is a known fact that both the weekly Sunday and the annual Easter Sunday, are viewed by many Christians as memorial days of Christ's resurrection. For Adventists to reject the weekly Sunday's celebration of the resurrection, while participating in the annual Easter Sunday celebration of the resurrection, is a contradiction that indirectly supports Sunday observance.

The position I have taken is largely derived from my extensive investigation into the origin of Easter Sunday and its relationship to the origin of weekly Sunday observance. For the purpose of this newsletter, I am summarizing some of the findings of my study. Interested readers are encouraged to read the full treatment of this subject in **FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY** and **GOD'S FESTIVALS**, volume 1.

THE ORIGIN OF EASTER SUNDAY

The introduction of Easter-Sunday appears to have occurred after Emperor Hadrian ruthlessly crushed the Barkokeba revolt (A. D. 132-135) and rebuilt on the ruins of Jerusalem a new Roman city, *Aelia Capitolina*. At this time, Hadrian promulgated the most repressive legislation, prohibiting the practice of Judaism, in general, and Jewish festivals, in particular. Jews and Jewish-Christians were expelled from the city and categorically forbidden to reenter it.

The Church historian Eusebius (About A. D. 260-340) informs us that as a result of Hadrian's edict, the Jewish-Christian members and bishops of Jerusalem were replaced with Gentile Christian members and leaders: "The Church there was now composed of Gentiles, the first one to assume the government of it after the bishops of the circumcision was Marcus." This replacement suggests that a clear distinction was made at that time between Jewish-Christians and Gentile-Christians. Presumably, this distinction was not limited to the racial factor alone, but included also a new theological orientation, especially toward characteristic Jewish festivals such as Passover.

This hypothesis is supported by the Palestinian historian Epiphanius (ca A. D. 315-403), who in his lengthy report over the Passover controversy states: "The controversy arose after the exodus of the bishops of the circumcision [A. D. 135] and it has continued until our time." Epiphanius clearly says that the fifteen Jewish-Christian bishops who administered the Jerusalem Church until A. D. 135 had observed Passover on Nisan 14 in accordance with the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions*, where the following rule is given: "You shall not change the calculation of the time, but you shall celebrate it at the same time as your brethren who came out from the circumcision. With them observe the Passover."

The fact that the Passover controversy arose when Emperor Hadrian adopted new repressive measures against Jewish religious practices suggests that such measures influenced the new Gentile hierarchy to change the date of Passover from Nisan 14 to the following Sunday (Easter-Sunday) in order to show separation and differentiation from the Jews and Jewish-Christians. Elsewhere, I have argued that the same factors contributed to the abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of Sunday.

Easter Sunday and Anti-Judaism. As long as Jewish Christians had influence in the church, the Biblical typology and experience of Passover were maintained by the church. But as Gentile Christians gained control of the church, the Biblical Passover themes began to wane, being replaced by pagan symbols and myths that, as we shall see, became part of the Easter celebration.

In their book, *Passover: Before Messiah and After*, Donna and Mal Broadhurst rightly observe that "Gentile Christians usually came from a background devoid of Scriptural knowledge. They did not have a natural appreciation for, allegiance to, or comprehension of the Scriptures, especially the Law and Prophets which they misunderstood, overlooked, or actually discarded in the early church struggle to break free from erroneous legalizers. They found it easy to disregard Passover and other major institutions of the Mosaic Covenant."

The problem with Gentile Christians was not only their lack of familiarity with Scripture, but also their excessive fascination with their Greek philosophical speculations, which conditioned their understanding of Biblical truths. While Jewish Christians often

erred in the direction of legalism, Gentile Christians often erred in the direction of philosophical speculations which sundered Christianity from its historical roots.

The detachment of Gentile Christians from their Jewish roots was influenced by the repressive policies adopted by Roman emperors against the Jewish people and religion as well as by the defamatory campaign waged by Jews against the Christians. These factors encouraged Gentile Christians to develop a "Christian" theology of contempt toward the Jews as a people and toward Judaism as a religion. A whole body of *Against the Jews* literature was produced by leading Fathers who defamed the Jews as a people and emptied their religious beliefs and practices of any historical value. Two major casualties of the anti-Jews campaign were Sabbath and Passover. The Sabbath was changed to Sunday and Passover was transferred to Easter-Sunday.

Scholars usually recognize the anti-Judaic motivation for the repudiation of the Jewish reckoning of Passover and adoption of Easter-Sunday instead. Joachim Jeremias attributes such a development to "the inclination to break away from Judaism."³⁴ In a similar vein, J. B. Lightfoot explains that Rome and Alexandria adopted Easter-Sunday to avoid "even the semblance of Judaism."

Nothing in Common with the Jews. Perhaps the most explicit and forceful expression of anti-Judaism for the repudiation of the traditional Passover dating is found in the letter that Emperor Constantine formulated at the Council of Nicea in A. D. 325. In desiring to establish a religion completely free from any Jewish influence, the emperor wrote regarding Passover: "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 hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. . . . *Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd:* for we have received from our Savior a different way. . . . Strive and pray continually that the purity of your soul may not seem in anything to be sullied by fellowship with the custom of these most wicked men. . . . All should unite in desiring that which sound reason appears to demand, *avoiding all participation in the perjured conduct of the Jews.*"

The Council of Nicea (A. D. 325) put an end to the controversy over the date of Passover by decreeing that it should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon of Spring. To ensure that Easter-Sunday would never be celebrated at the same time as the Jewish Passover, the council decreed that if the 14th of Nisan fell on a Sunday, then Easter was to be celebrated on the following Sunday.

Nicea represents the culmination of the Passover controversy initiated two centuries earlier and motivated by strong anti-Judaic feelings. Unfortunately, the controversy was "settled" at Nicea, not Biblically but politically. It was settled by suppressing the traditional observance of Passover and by adopting instead Easter Sunday as championed by the church of Rome.

"As far as Christian Passover is concerned," write Donna and Mal Broadhurst, "the beginning of the Dark Ages can be set at 325 A. D. with the Council of Nicea. Along with turning their back on Jews, the Gentiles turned their back on the Jewish Scripture. They disallowed Jewish input to their faith, life-style, and worship. They became persecutors of the Jews. In place of the Exodus Passover story to inspire a sense of justice and freedom for all men, the Gentile church had the words and example of power-hungry leaders who taught oppression. It took a major reformation centuries later to begin to undo the horror and destruction the church brought on the world when the Gentiles at Nicea formally adopted the policy of having 'nothing in common with the Jews.'"

Easter Sunday and Pagan Symbolism. The change from the primitive observance of Passover to that of Easter-Sunday was not only a change of dates from Nisan 14 to the following Sunday, but also a change of meaning and experience. The primitive Christian Passover followed in many ways the Jewish Passover. Both celebrated the drama of redemption, though the focus of the Christian Passover was not the deliverance of God's people from Egyptian bondage, but their deliverance from the bondage of sin through the sacrifice of the true Paschal Lamb.

The waning influence of Jewish Christians and the growing influence of Gentile Christians led not only to the adoption of a new date, Easter-Sunday, in order to have "nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd," but also to the acceptance of pagan speculations and fertility myths, which are foreign to the Biblical meaning of Passover.

In his scholarly book *The Bible and Liturgy*, the renowned Jesuit scholar Jean Daniélou examines in chapter 17 the meaning of "Easter" in the thought of the Fathers (a term used to refer to church leaders of the first five centuries). What is conspicuous in his survey is the attempt of Gentile church leaders to explain the meaning of Easter on the basis of philosophical speculations about cosmic mythologies, rather than on the basis of the Biblical Passover story.

One could wish that the Fathers would have used their rational skills to help Christians understand and accept more fully the drama of redemption typified by the substitutionary sacrifice of the paschal lamb. Unfortunately, they failed to do so because their understanding of redemption was conditioned by their philosophical (gnostic) thinking, which viewed salvation more as metaphysical deification through special knowledge than a moral transformation through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

In the mysterious cosmic speculations of the Fathers, we find, as Jean Daniélou himself acknowledges, "the incorporation into the Christian mystery of a whole solar mythology. The conflict of light with darkness is expressed by the myth of Ormuzd and Ahriman, of Apollo and Poseidon. But Christ is the sun of the new creation. He rose at the time of the Incarnation: His name is Orient, the Dawn in the East, He attacked the power of darkness, and, on the day of His Resurrection, He completely scattered the darkness of death and of sin. So Christianity disengages the cosmic symbols from the pagan myths . . . and incorporates them as figures of the mysteries of truth. This line of thought shows that we are in the fourth century, at the time of the decline of paganism, *when Christianity began to cloth itself in its garments.*"

Eastre: Anglo-Saxon Spring Goddess. The process which led Christianity to clothe itself in the garments of paganism began when Gentile Christians gained control of the Church, and it continued during the Middle Ages when hordes of Barbarians entered the Church with their superstitious beliefs.

Passover was renamed "Easter," which derives from *Eostre, Eastur, Ostara, Ostar*, terms used by the Norsemen (ancient Scandinavians) to refer to the season of the rising sun. According to Bede (ca. A. D. 673-735), the "Father of English History," the word "Easter" is derived from *Eastre*, an Anglo-Saxon spring goddess to whom sacrifices were offered at the vernal equinox (March 21). "This pagan festival probably gave way to the Christian celebration of the resurrection."

Donna and Mal Broadhurst point out, "It is probable that Eostra/Ostara is the Anglo-Saxon version of Ishtar, the Sumerian goddess of love and war who in Canaan evolved into a moon goddess and wife of Baal. According to Sumerian lore, Ishtar was the wife of the Summerian god, Tammuz. Both are spoken of in the Bible—Tammuz in Ezekiel 8:14 and Ishtar, called Ashtoreth and Queen of Heaven, in Judges 2:13, Judges 10:6, Jeremiah 44:17, and elsewhere.

"When Tammuz died, Ishtar followed him to the underworld, leaving the earth deprived of its fertility. She and Tammuz were rescued from death when the Queen of the

Dead allowed a heavenly messenger to sprinkle them with the water of life. This allowed them to return to the light of the sun for six months of each year. For the other six they had to return to the land of death.

“The worship of Ishtar as a nature goddess had spread throughout the ancient world. In Phoenicia and Syria her name had become Astarte. Her husband earlier called Baal, and known as Tammuz farther east, became Adon and Adonai in Phoenicia and Syria. In Greece, Ishtar and Tammuz became Aphrodite and Adonis; in Asia Minor they became Cybele and Attis. Diana of the Ephesians (Acts 19:27) probably traces to Ishtar.”

What makes these cults the forerunners of Easter is the fact that most of them had their annual festival at the vernal equinox, the Easter season, during which they celebrated the cycle of death and resurrection. In his book ***Easter: Its Story and Meaning***, Alan W. Watts discusses the relationship of these pagan cults to Easter and notes that “their universal theme—the drama of death and resurrection—makes them the forerunners of the Christian Easter and thus the first ‘Easter services.’ As we go on to describe the Christian observance of Easter we shall see how many of its customs and ceremonies resemble these former rites.”

Lent from Pagan Cults. One example of the former rites is the fast of Lent, which begins forty days before Easter. This practice most likely derives from the fast practiced among various ancient cults. A Lent of forty days was observed by the worshippers of the Babylonian Ishtar and by the worshippers of the great Egyptian mediatorial god Adonis or Osiris. The rape of the goddess Proserpine also was commemorated among the Romans by forty nights of wailing. Among the pagans, this Lent period seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual (usually spring) festivals commemorating the death and resurrection of their gods.

Lent, with the preceding revelries of carnival, was entirely unknown in the earliest Christian Passover celebration. Christians fasted, as we have noted, the night of Passover until dawn, when they broke their fast with the Lord’s Supper, which commemorated Jesus’ expiatory suffering and death. The extension of the fast to forty days was apparently borrowed from pagan spring festivals.

Easter Bunny and Eggs. Pagan influence can also be seen in the replacement of the Passover symbolism of the lamb with that of the Easter hare. The Easter hare was once a bird which the goddess Eostre changed into a four-footed creature. The hare, or rabbit, became a symbol of fertility, presumably because rabbits are notably prolific. The hare laid eggs which became the symbol of the abundant new life of spring. Thus, the Easter egg is the production not of some mystical bird but of a rabbit or hare.

The origin of the Easter egg is traced back to the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Babylon, Phoenicia, and Greece, where the universe is said to have been born from a mighty world egg. “The ancient peoples of Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, and China exchanged eggs at their spring fertility festivals. In Babylonia, eggs were presented to the goddess of fertility, Astarte (Eostre).”

Hyginus, the Egyptian historian who was the curator of the Palatine library in Rome at the time of Augustus, wrote: “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 upon it, and hatched it, out came Venus, who afterwards was called the Syrian Goddess [that is, Astarte].” The egg became one of the chief symbols of Venus or Astarte. In Cyprus, one of the chief centers of the worship of Venus, an egg of a wondrous size was represented on a grand scale before her Temple.

Christians adopted eggs for their Easter celebration because the egg was a popular pagan symbol of death and life. It was a symbol of death because the shell is like a tomb that imprisons the life-germ inside. It was a symbol of life insofar as it contains the source of a new creature.

Innumerable European folk customs are found in connection with Easter eggs. Eggs were elaborately painted with symbols, often Roman crosses and swastikas. Egg hunting in gardens was a favorite Easter game for children. In my country, Italy, eggs are blessed by the priest on Easter-Sunday with holy water when he goes from home to home. The "blessed" Easter eggs are then sold on the market with the promise of miraculous power, very much as sacrificial meat was sold on the market of ancient Rome (1 Cor 8:1-6). With the advent of the industrial era, Easter eggs were transformed into chocolate and sugar, wrapped in tin foil, or even trimmed with real gold and jewels, as was the custom among the wealthy in czarist Russia.

"Eggs laid on Good Friday are credited with miraculous powers. There is the belief that if such an egg is kept for a hundred years its yolk will turn into a diamond, or that if it is cooked on Easter Sunday it will work as a powerful amulet against sudden death or as a charm for fruitful trees and crops."

Reformers and Easter. The above survey of some of the pagan practices and superstitions associated with Easter helps us understand why the Reformers were generally opposed to the observance of Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. "Calvin considered the annual church feast of Easter so paganized that at one point he did not observe it." Though Calvin tolerated the observance of Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas, he viewed their institution as a superstition, because God alone can institute a festival. Luther shared the same view. In his *Treatise on Good Works*, he wrote: "And would to God that in Christendom there were no holy days except Sunday." Martin Bucer also opposed the many holy days because they often had pagan origin and appeared to be consecrated to the devil rather than to the Lord.

The Reformers viewed the multitude of saints' days and Marian feasts instituted by the Catholic Church as indicative of the apostasy into which the church had fallen. To rid the church of all the pagan superstitions which had become part of the popular piety, the Reformers did away with most of the annual holy days, retaining only Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. Even these were tolerated rather than promoted.

The position of Luther was based not only on his reaction against the superstitious observance of the host of holy days established by the Catholic Church, but also on his radical distinction between the Old and New Testaments. In the *Large Catechism* (1529), Luther explains that the holy days are "altogether an external matter, like other ordinances of the Old Testament, which were attached to particular customs, persons, and places, and now have been made free through Christ."

Luther chose to retain Sunday, not as a Biblical institution but as a convenient day "ordained by the church for the sake of the imperfect laity and the working class," who need "at least one day in the week . . . to rest and . . . to attend divine service." It is regrettable that in his efforts to cleanse the church from pagan superstitions and legalistic tendencies, Luther rejected even those Old Testament institutions which can help believers understand and experience the very "righteousness by faith" which he passionately taught.

Calvin rejected Luther's radical distinction between the Old and New Testaments, emphasizing instead the basic unity between the two. For Calvin, as Winton Solberg explains, "the scheme of redemption unfolds in one unbroken sequence throughout the two Testaments. One covenant unites the people of God; it varies only in the mode of administration, not in substance. The Christian Church rather than the Jewish Nation is the society adopted by the Lord, and both were federally connected with him by the same law and doctrine. Using the same exegetical method as that of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Calvin Christianized the Old and Judaized the New Testament in order to make them appear as one unified covenant."

Calvin attached great spiritual importance to Passover, which he saw as a monument of the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt as well as a symbol of the Christian

deliverance from sin. He believed that though Passover was abolished as a ceremony, it should still be observed spiritually in order to be reminded constantly of the incomparable power and mercy of God.

The Puritans and Easter. The moderate attitude of the Reformers became radicalized by the Puritans, who swept away all religious holy days except Sunday. In England, the Puritan Parliament struck Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost from their calendar. In America also, the Puritans did not celebrate these feasts, which they regarded as part of the apostate church they had left behind in the old world. J. P. Walsh notes: "The Puritans rested on the Sabbath in order to keep it holy; they worked on December 25 in order to strip it of its sanctity."

The Puritans were familiar with the Exodus story, which they often quoted and applied to their own political situation. Like the Israelites, they believed they had been delivered by God's hand from the oppression of the established church. They found the meaning of Passover in their sufferings and deliverance. They rejected the paganized Easter but made no effort to restore the Biblical observance of Passover. Their influence was so strong that hardly anyone in colonial America celebrated Easter or Christmas. The exceptions were places such as Louisiana and Maryland which had been settled by Catholics.

The situation changed as new waves of Catholic immigrants brought to America their Easter customs, which were soon adopted by the American people. Mardi Gras, a carnival period climaxing on Shrove Tuesday before Lent, became popular in certain cities. The Easter parade, Easter bonnets, chocolate eggs, Easter baskets, and cute Easter bunnies, have all become part of the American Easter tradition. Still, some American churches with a strong Biblical commitment do not participate in the Easter customs with origins from pagan fertility cults.

Conclusion. The earliest Passover documents clearly show that Christians observed Passover as their annual commemoration of the suffering and death of Christ. They engaged in prayer, singing, reading of Scripture, and exhortations until dawn, when they broke their fast by partaking of the Lord's Supper and an *agape* meal.

As Gentile Christians gained control of the church, they adopted and promoted Easter Sunday instead of the traditional Passover date. The change was influenced by the repressive policies adopted by Roman emperors against the Jewish people and religion, as well as by the defamatory campaign waged by Jews against Christians. As a result, the Biblical Passover themes were gradually replaced by pagan symbols and myths, which became part of the Easter celebration. In time, Easter became associated with numerous pagan practices and superstitions which are foreign to the redemptive meaning and experience of the Biblical Passover.

DO ADVENTIST HAVE A PROBLEM WITH PASSOVER?

The Passover season provides an annual opportunity for Adventist pastors to lead their congregations to a renewed appreciation of the drama of redemption: Christ's suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and inauguration of His heavenly ministry. Most likely, few pastors will preach on the significance of the suffering and sacrifice of Christ, our Paschal Lamb, who was sacrificed for our redemption on Passover day almost twenty centuries ago.

This is surprising because Christmas, which is a pagan festival, is celebrated every year with more fanfare in most Adventist churches, than Passover, which is a Biblical festival. Those few Adventist churches that take notice of the Passover season, prefer to focus on the Easter Sunday resurrection rather than on the Holy Saturday atoning death of Christ. How can we account for this strange situation?

The answer is not clear to me. Rather than speculating on the factors which may have contributed to this puzzling situation, I wish to submit some closing reflections, first on the nature of the Last Supper, and then on the meaning of Christian Passover.

Was the Last Supper a Special Passover?

In the first volume of *God's Festivals*, I argue at length that the Last Supper was a special Passover meal not only because it was partaken of a day earlier, but also because the item which gave the most significance to the meal, the paschal lamb, was lacking. Prior to the destruction of the Temple in A. D. 70, it was unthinkable for a Jew to celebrate Passover without the lamb, because it was the blood of the lamb, the symbol of divine deliverance from Egyptian bondage, that gave meaning to the feast. For Christians, however, the paschal lamb is not needed to celebrate Passover, because Jesus Himself is the true Paschal Lamb whose blood delivers us from the bondage of sin.

Possibly Jesus wanted His last Passover Supper with His disciples to be eaten without the lamb to impress upon them the fact that He was their Paschal Lamb. Therefore, He could have planned that they celebrate Passover not by eating the flesh of a lamb and pouring out its blood at the Temple's altar, but by partaking symbolically of His own flesh and blood, their true Paschal Lamb.

Support for this view stems from the fact that no mention is made of the paschal lamb in either the Gospels or the Pauline accounts of the Last Supper, possibly because the paschal lamb was missing. Maybe Jesus instructed His disciples to prepare the Passover meal without the lamb because He wanted to impress upon them that He Himself was their Paschal Lamb that would be sacrificed the next day. He wanted to institute a new Passover to commemorate deliverance from the bondage of sin through the sacrifice of Himself, the true Paschal Lamb. As such, there was no need of a roasted lamb for the new Passover meal. The bread and wine, symbols of His body and blood, were sufficient.

The Emblems of the Christian Passover. The symbolic partaking of the body and blood of Jesus through the elements of the bread and wine (Mark 14:22-24) can be understood best as the replacement of the paschal lamb. Until that moment, Passover had been celebrated by eating a lamb and pouring out his blood at the foot of the altar. Now the new Passover was to be celebrated symbolically by partaking of the very body and blood of the Messiah, the true Paschal Lamb.

The paschal lamb was intentionally missing because Jesus wanted to institute a new Passover in which His followers would celebrate redemption from sin, not through the flesh and blood of a lamb, but by partaking, through the symbolic elements of the bread and wine, of His own body and blood, the true Paschal Lamb (Mark 14:22-25; Matt 26:26-29; 1 Pet 1:19).

In the light of the preceding discussion, we can conclude that the Last Supper was indeed a Passover Supper, though unique in two major ways. First, it was celebrated a day earlier because Jesus knew that He Himself would be sacrificed as the true Paschal Lamb on Passover day. Second, most likely it was celebrated without the paschal lamb, because Jesus wanted to institute a new Passover meal to commemorate His redemption from sin, not through the flesh and blood of a lamb, but through bread and wine, the new symbols of His own body and blood, soon to be offered "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28). There was no need of a lamb because the Lamb of God was there in Person, giving Himself as food and offering for the sins of the world.

Why did Jesus choose the bread and wine instead of the flesh and blood of a lamb as the emblems of the new Passover? Presumably, He wanted to impress His disciples with the truth that He was the Lamb "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). His followers no longer needed to sacrifice a lamb at Passover; their Passover Lamb "had been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7). The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross brought to an end the sacrifice of all animals, including that of the Passover lamb.

Had Christ chosen flesh and blood from a lamb to represent His atoning sacrifice, He would have perpetuated the sacrificial system which was designed to come to an end with His death on the Cross (Matt 27:51). By choosing instead the bread and wine (nonsacrificial elements of the Passover meal) as the emblems of His atoning death, Jesus detached the new Passover from the sacrificial system and transformed it into a fitting memorial of His redemption. This radical transformation can be seen also, for example, in the *cup of blessing* of the paschal meal which becomes the *cup of salvation*: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). By these few words, Paul shows that though some of the elements of the Jewish Passover survive, their meanings have changed. The sacrifice of Jesus is the new reality commemorated by the remaining ancient signs.

The Meaning of the Christian Passover. At His Last Supper, Jesus instituted a simple but profoundly meaningful ceremony to celebrate His atoning sacrifice for sin. He instructed His disciples to celebrate Passover henceforth by partaking of unleavened bread and wine in remembrance of His body and blood. The four texts that give us the account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper (Mark 14:22-25; Matt 26:26-29; Luke 22:15-20, 27-30; 1 Cor 11:23-26) suggest **three theological meanings**.

The Christian Passover **looks back** at what has already happened. It is a **proclamation of the death of Jesus** (1 Cor 11:26), a death which took place for all participants. The fruit of salvation wrought by Christ’s death is granted to all who symbolically partake of His broken body and shed blood. Through the emblems of the bread and wine, we appropriate the benefits of Christ’s death as a death suffered for us. It is a memorial feast of the Person and substitutionary work of the Messiah.

The *remembrance* goes beyond historical events and becomes a proclamation and appropriation by the believer of the benefits of Christ’s death. In many ways this was true also of the Israelite Passover. Through the feast, the people reenacted and reexperienced the events on which their existence as an independent nation was based. Year-by-year, Israel called out of the past into the present the experience of the Exodus deliverance and reentered into the covenant with its blessings and obligations. Parents were to take time during the Passover meal to recount to their children the events of the Exodus deliverance, so that the original meaning and potency of the event would remain continually active (Ex 12:24-27).

In the same way the Christian Passover is an act of remembrance: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; cf. 1 Cor 11:24). We remember Jesus as the Paschal Lamb who was sacrificed for us by partaking of the emblems of His broken body and shed blood. This simple and yet dramatic ritual enables the believer not only to conceptualize but also to internalize and appropriate the reality of Christ’s vicarious death.

This truth can be understood best through the typology of the substitutionary sacrifice of the paschal lamb, in particular, and of the sin-offerings, in general. Through the vicarious death of sacrificial animals, the Israelite accepted the provision of forgiveness and salvation. Similarly, through the vicarious death of Christ, the Christian accepts the provision of His redemption. As the blood of the Passover lamb kept God from killing the firstborn of the Hebrews, so the blood of Jesus shed on the Cross keeps God from punishing with death the penitent sinner.

The Christian Passover points to the **present**. Each celebration is a **new confirmation of God’s covenant with His church**. “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24). The covenant is God’s commitment to love and save His people: “The Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands” (Deut 7:7-9). The covenant is at the core of the Passover account. On the eve of the Exodus, God revealed Himself as the God who remembered His Covenant to the Fathers (Ex 2:24; 3:15). The Passover lamb whose blood was struck with a bunch of

hyssop over the lintel and doorposts of the houses (Ex 12:7, 22) represented the outworking of God's covenant to protect and deliver the Israelites.

Similarly, on the eve of His Crucifixion, Christ reaffirmed His covenant by His willingness to shed His blood. At the Lord's Table, believers enter into fellowship with the exalted Lord. Paul describes this fellowship as "a participation in the blood . . . [and] body of Christ" (1 Cor 10:16). The benefits of Christ's atoning death are mediated to believers in the *present* when they partake of the emblems of His blood and body. Thus the Christian Passover reaffirms the eternal Covenant that God promised to the fathers (Jer 32:40; 50:5; cf. Is 55:3; Ez 16:60) and seals it in the blood of the Messiah (Heb 13:20).

The Christian Passover looks toward the *future*. It is an ***anticipation of the future messianic banquet***. This eschatological expectation is expressed in the Gospels by Christ's words: "I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine *until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God*" (Mark 14:25; cf. Matt 26:29; Luke 22:16, 18). In Paul's letter to the Corinthians the eschatological expectation is expressed by the phrase "you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*" (1 Cor 11:26). This expectation gives a sense of joy and jubilation to the Christian Passover and is reflected even in the daily breaking of the bread in the homes of the early Christians, who "partook of food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46).

As Christians we joyfully partake of the Lord's Supper, because for us it represents the redemption that Christ has already provided. While for Jews the deliverance from Egypt foreshadows the final Messianic redemption, for Christians Messianic redemption is already an accomplished fact. Furthermore, while the historic Exodus was limited to the experiences of one people; the Christian Exodus is open to all the peoples of the world. The Christian Passover is the beginning of a joyful journey leading to a happy reunion with the Savior at the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

A SUGGESTED PASSOVER ORDER OF SERVICE

A rather detailed ***Passover Order of Service*** is provided on pages 155 to 161 of volume 1 of ***God's Festivals in Scripture and History***. If you do not have a copy of the book, you can access the chapter 4 at my website: www.biblicalperspectives.com Many pastors have informed me that they have found this suggested Passover Order of Service very helpful. Feel free to use it in any modified form you choose in your home or church.

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