



The Zion Letter

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Jesus Rose From the Dead On Passover

I was on a prayer walk one night when I heard the Lord say, “**Joe, tell them that I rose from the dead on Passover.**” Passover is a week long holiday that begins on the 14th day of the first month of the Biblical calendar known as Nisan, also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread (See Leviticus 23:4-8). It was on the first day of the week (Sunday, MT 28:1-6) that Yeshua (Jesus) rose from the dead, right smack in the middle of Passover! In fact, the actual day of His resurrection is called The Feast of First Fruits (Lev 23:9-11). The Apostle Paul confirmed this to us in 1 Corinthians 15:20-21, “But now Messiah has been raised from the dead, the **First Fruits** of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.” **So how did Passover and the Feast of First Fruits get changed to Easter?** Read on and find out.

Luke 22:7-8 says, “Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. And Yeshua sent Peter and John saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it.” Twenty-four hours later the Lord would be crucified and buried. The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover) lasts for seven days, and Yeshua was crucified, buried and he rose from the dead during the seven days of Passover. In Leviticus 23:6 it says, “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord's Passover.” (See a Biblical calendar for this year's dates.) Yeshua celebrated Passover every year while He dwelt among us, as did His disciples and his family members. His first followers from among the Gentiles also celebrated Passover, and this Biblical tradition continued among the believers for the first three centuries. That's right, for three hundred years thousands of believers celebrated Jesus' resurrection as Passover! So what happened to change that?

How the Passover was stopped:

There was a huge controversy in the Church of the early fourth century concerning **the date** on which the resurrection was to be remembered. It also involved a political maneuver to change **the name** of the holiday. This controversy is often referred to as *The Passover Controversy*.

According to authors Reuven Schmalz and Raymond Fischer, “Eusebius the Gentile bishop of Caesarea in his early church



history tells us much about the second century schism directed against the Judeo Christians on the subject of Easter. The Nazarenes had always celebrated the Lord's Supper on the 14th of Nisan, or the Passover eve. Even many of the original eastern Gentile churches followed this custom. Pope Victor (189-199) instructed that church synods should meet on this subject in Caesarea, the Church See of Palestine. Only Gentile bishops attended, although there were many Judeo Christian groups in the Land.” Bellarmino Bagatti, the Franciscan archeologist and historian of Jerusalem, in his book “The Church from the Circumcision” suggests that the Jewish bishops of the Land were intentionally boycotted from the meeting by the Gentile bishops, so that the latter could decide for themselves on the Easter usage without opposition. As he writes: “The fixing of Easter on a Sunday resulted in a certain manner in taking from the hands of the Judeo-Christians a predominance” ¹

Eusebius, a bishop during the 4th century wrote that the churches in Asia celebrated Passover according to the teachings of the Apostles. He said, “The Churches of all Asia, guided by a remoter tradition, supposed that they ought to keep the fourteenth day of the moon for the festival of the Savior's Passover, in which day the Jews were commanded to kill the Paschal lamb.” ² Eusebius

further reports that councils of bishops convened to decide the issue of when to observe the resurrection. The debate was essentially between the bishops of Asia in the east and the bishops of Rome in the west. “The bishops, however, of Asia, persevering in observing the custom handed down to them from their fathers, were headed by Polycrates. He, indeed, had also set forth the tradition handed down to them, in a letter, which he addressed to Victor and the Church of Rome.” “We”, said he, “therefore, observe the genuine day (Passover); neither adding thereto nor taking therefrom. For in Asia great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again in the day of the Lord's appearing, in which he will come with glory from heaven, and will raise up all the saints; Philip, one of the twelve apostles, who sleeps in Hierapolis, and his two aged virgin daughters. His other daughter, also, who having lived under the influence of the Holy Ghost, now likewise rests in Ephesus. Moreover, John, who rested upon the bosom of our Lord; who also was a priest, and bore the sacerdotal plate, both a martyr and teacher. He is buried in Ephesus; also Polycarp of Smyrna, both bishop and martyr.” All these observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to

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the gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith.” “Upon this, Victor, the bishop of the Church of Rome, forthwith endeavored to cut off the churches of all Asia, together with the neighboring churches, as heterodox, from the common unity. And he publishes abroad by letters, and proclaims, that all the brethren there are wholly excommunicated.” So the Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua (Jesus) of Israel and all Asia were excommunicated by the Catholic (Byzantine) Church, because they celebrated Passover and not Easter, which was a pagan fertility holiday named after the Babylonian fertility goddess Ishtar and equally related to other pagan fertility goddesses such as Isis, Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians (Lebanese), Astarte, etc. (You can google these ladies to find out more.)

“There were others, like Irenaeus, who ‘with much severity’” exhorted Victor to withdraw his decree. Irenaeus reminded Victor of what had happened about fifty years earlier. Anicetus, the bishop of Rome at that time, had tried to persuade Polycarp. “For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe it (Passover), because he had always observed it with John the disciple of our Lord, and the rest of the Apostles, with whom he associated.” Eusebius says this about Polycarp: “He always taught what he had learned from the Apostles, what the church had handed down, and what is the only true doctrine.”³

Thus the early Church writings bear witness to the fact that the Apostles, including John and Phillip as well as their esteemed disciples such as Polycarp continued in their observance of Passover long after the resurrection of the Lord. According to Dan Gruber, “The church at Rome continued to press for its own supremacy. Jerusalem had already been physically destroyed, but it still had to be destroyed as a spiritual competitor. The issue, in a slightly altered form, was finally settled by the Council of Nicea in 325 AD.”⁴ It was there that Emperor Constantine replaced Passover observance on the 14th of Nisan, the Biblical date, with Easter, an ancient pagan holiday which was observed on the first Sunday after the Vernal Equinox. **It was at Nicea that the teachings of the Apostles and their disciples were formally abolished or changed. The effect of this action broke the fellowship between the Church of Rome and the Messianic Jewish congregations throughout Israel and Asia.**

This schism or division between Jewish and Gentile believers is in the process of being healed by the Lord, but its effect changed the course of Church history and sent the Church spiraling into more than a thousand years of darkness. The Church began to come out of that darkness when salvation by grace through faith was rediscovered at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. I am not going to address the origins of Easter, Lent, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Fat Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, etc. in this article. Suffice to say that they are not Biblical nor would Jesus or His disciples ever consider connecting them with the God of Israel. Basically my view is, if Jesus didn’t do it or teach it and His Disciples didn’t do it or teach it, then I’m not going to do it either. Yeshua said to His Jewish Disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the Gentiles (Goyim is the word for Gentiles and Nations in Hebrew), baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.” MT 28:19-20. Mark 7:7-8 says, “But in vain do

they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of Men. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” The only mention of Easter in the Bible is in Acts 12:4 in the KJV. But if you look up the actual Greek word the King James translators used for Easter, you will find that the word is “Pascha” or Passover. **So the translators of the King James version changed Passover to Easter** in Acts 12:4. My purpose in writing this is not to be critical or condemning but to shed light on the truth so that healing may ensue.

Why was the Passover stopped?

Passover is about the altar of the Lord. It was at the Last Supper, the Lord’s Passover Table, that the Lord said, “*This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me,*” Luke 22:19. Do what? Do Passover. Each year Americans celebrate Thanksgiving Day, but believers don’t just give thanks to God on that day. They thank Him constantly! Yeshua was telling us to remember Passover and His sacrifice for us. He wasn’t creating a new ceremony. In our congregation we celebrate the actual feast of Passover each year on the actual date, but we also drink the cup and eat the bread every week in our services as a remembrance of the “Lord’s Passover.”

In Judaism, the dinner table is considered an altar. The Lord’s Passover table was also an altar. The bread and the wine symbolized the body and blood of the Lord Himself. Through the Passover meal, the Lord was able to explain what He was about to do for His disciples and for us on the Cross. Paul said, “*For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the Feast...with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*” 1Cor 5:7-8. Passover is about the altar of the Lord, but a long time ago men changed the Biblical way and added their own traditions. By doing away with Passover and changing its name and date, the Church of Rome was attempting to revise history and to hide the truth. **Rome tore down the Passover altar and replaced it with a different altar.**

To understand why Rome forced the churches in Asia and the Jewish Christians to stop observing Passover I think it would be good for you to read the words of the man responsible for this change, the emperor Constantine.

Constantine, August, to the Churches.

“*Having experienced, in the flourishing state of public affairs, the greatness of the divine goodness I thought it especially incumbent on me to endeavor that the happy multitudes of the Catholic (i.e. universal) Church should preserve one faith, be united in unfeigned love, and harmoniously join in their devotions to Almighty God. But this could not otherwise be effected in a firm and solid manner, than by an examination, for this purpose, of whatever pertains to our most holy religion, by all the bishops, or the greater part of them at least, assembled together. Having therefore convened as many as possible, I myself being present, and, as it were, one of you, (nor do I deny that I exceedingly rejoice in being your fellow-servant,) every thing was examined, until a unanimous sentiment, pleasing to God, who sees all things, was brought to light; so that no pretence was left for dissension or controversy respecting the faith.*”

“*When the question arose concerning the most holy day of Easter, it was decreed by common consent to be expedient, that*

this festival should be celebrated on the same day by all, in every place. For what can be more beautiful, what more venerable and becoming, than that this festival, from which we receive the hope of immortality, should be suitably observed by all in one and the same order, and by a certain rule. And truly, in the first place, it seemed to every one a most unworthy thing that we should follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this most holy solemnity, who, polluted wretches! Having stained their hands with a nefarious crime, are justly blinded in their minds."

*"It is fit, therefore, that, rejecting the practice of this people, we should perpetuate to all future ages the celebration of this rite, in a more legitimate order, which we have kept from the first day of our Lord's passion even to the present times. Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews. We have received another method from the Savior. A more lawful and proper course is open to our most holy religion. In pursuing this course with a unanimous consent, let us withdraw ourselves, my much honored brethren, from that most odious fellowship."*⁵

Feel the love for the Jewish people by this guy ☺. The letter continues, but I will stop at this point. It is clear from Constantine's opening paragraph that his agenda was to unite the churches under the Roman Empire. So there was clearly a political motivation for his actions. But when you read the second and third paragraph you begin to see another motivation based on his hatred for the Jews. I'll leave it to you to decide which of the two motivations drove Constantine to change the customs and teachings of the Lord, His Apostles and their disciples.

Constantine was not alone in his hatred of the Jews. Many bishops shared his sentiments. In the 14th chapter of his letter to the Philipians, bishop Ignatius wrote, "If anyone celebrates the Passover along with the Jews, or receives the emblems of their feast, he is a partaker with those that killed the Lord and His Apostles."

The Effect of the Nicene Decree:

The effect of the Nicene Decree was to break fellowship between Jewish believers (Messianic Jews) and the Roman Church. Constantine tore down the altar of the Lord and replaced it with a different one. It is that sweet, intimate family relationship that we share with other believers and that only God can give to his people. Fellowship transforms strangers into the family of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our intimacy with the Lord and with each other is symbolized in the Passover by the sharing of bread and wine or grape juice at the Passover table. **The Roman Church tore down the altar that the Lord and the Apostles had built. That altar represented the unity of Jew and Gentile in Messiah that we read of throughout the book of Acts. It represented our fellowship, our unity. Constantine turned the hearts of the children (the Church) against their fathers (The Apostles, the Patriarchs, The Messianic Jews and the teachings of the Lord Himself).** To my Catholic friends, I understand that you did not do these things. They were done over a thousand years ago; so please know that we don't blame you.

Elijah came from God and preached repentance. As a result he was able to turn the hearts of the children of Israel back to the hearts of the Fathers of Israel, which is what is referred to in Malachi, "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will re-

store the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse." Mal 4:5-6. It is clear from the writings of the early Church, some of which I have shared with you in this article, that the customs and teachings of the Lord and His Apostles were changed by Constantine and replaced with the customs and teachings of men.

About sixty years ago, after the Holocaust, Hebrew Christians (Jewish believers) began teaching New Covenant Passovers in churches. Miraculously after seventeen hundred years without Passover, thousands of churches around the world are once again celebrating Passover! This year thousands of Christian pilgrims from all over the world will journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The very fact that there are any Jewish believers alive today after so many persecutions of the Jews throughout Church history is an amazing testimony to the power of the truth. Yeshua said, "An hour is coming, and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His Worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth," John 4:23-24. Beloved, I write this letter to you for the sake of truth. Jesus also said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," John 8:32. I also write this letter to you that you should be free. **Jesus wants you to know the truth that He rose from the dead on Passover, and that He's coming back to fulfill it in the Kingdom of God** (Luke 22:15-16).

Lastly and most importantly, the key to repairing the altar of the broken fellowship between Messianic Jews and Christians is that they come together and celebrate The Feasts of the Lord with each other. That is the key to unity and love that will repair the torn down altar. I invite you to come to the Messiah in the Passover celebration we are holding on Saturday, March 30th, 2013. This is a wonderful way to demonstrate your love and solidarity with the Jewish people. As for Easter, I am not telling you to stop celebrating it. That is between you and God. I am merely explaining how the Lord's Passover was stopped and that Yeshua rose from the dead on Passover.

In Messiah's love,
Rabbi Joe Bell

1 Reuven Schmalz and Raymond Fischer, *The Messianic Seal of the Jerusalem Church*, Olim Publications, Tiberias, Israel, 1999, p.37-38

2 Dan Gruber, *The Church and the Jews: The Biblical Relationship*, Serenity Books, Hagerstown, MD, 1997, P.32

3 Ibid., P.32

4 Ibid., P.33

5 Ibid., P.33-34

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Maurice Sklar is known for his pioneering work in returning classical music to the church by sharing his unique vision for God to restore classical music and the arts to the church for God's glory. He plays with a prophetic anointing and has been featured on Sid Roth's "It's Supernatural" TV show, on Day Star TV, the 700 club and with other recording artists such as such as Paul Wilbur.