



"The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it; but in the end, there it is."  
—Winston S. Churchill

15-Apr-11

## *Why Passover and Not Easter?*

While most professing Christians consider the Passover to be a Jewish festival, it should also be a sacred observance for all Christians. The apostle Paul writes to the predominantly Gentile church in Corinth:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same manner, He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." ([I Corinthians 11:23-25](#))

This is not, as is commonly believed, the command to take communion as often as one likes. In reality, this is Jesus' own command, communicated through the apostle Paul, for the church to celebrate the Passover "on the night in which He was betrayed," which was the evening of the Passover, Nisan 14 on the Hebrew calendar (see [Leviticus 23:5](#)). This was the practice of the New Testament church—in fact, it kept all of the holy days of Leviticus 23—as long as the original apostles lived.

However, like all men, the apostles died one by one until only the apostle John was left,

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an old man living in or near the city of Ephesus. Around the turn of the second century, John died at an advanced age. For a few generations under the leadership of John's disciple, Polycarp (AD 69-155), and a successor, Polycrates (c. 130-196), the Ephesian church remained faithful to the teachings and traditions of the early church, including the keeping of the Passover on Nisan 14.

Those few who stubbornly resisted the change to the celebration of [Easter](#), which had supplanted Passover throughout most of Christendom, were called Quartodecimans ("fourteenthers") and Judaizers. By Origin's day (c. 185- 254), they were, he wrote, "a mere handful" among the millions living in the Empire. Even so, the Roman Church did not effectively ban the practice of keeping the Passover on Nisan 14 until AAD 325 at the Council of Nicea, when rules were set down to calculate the date of Easter for the entire Church. Canon 29 of the Council of Laodicea (held in 363-364) later anathematized those Judaizers who kept the seventh-day [Sabbath](#), many of whom were also Quartodecimans.

The controversy over Passover or Easter boils down to following Scripture versus following Roman Catholic tradition. Frankly, the reason that the Roman Church chose to keep Easter rests on two faulty pillars: 1) an intense prejudice against "the perfidy of the Jews" in [the crucifixion](#) of Christ (which has come to be known as the "blood libel") and 2) the widespread celebration of Easter among pagan cultures throughout the Empire. The convoluted theological arguments that have come down from the so-called apostolic fathers, repeated endlessly by their successors, are window dressing to obscure these unpleasant factors.

Even during the first-century, an anti-Jewish element had begun to creep into the church of [God](#). In his epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, the apostle Paul had attempted to explain the place of God's law under the New Covenant, but as Peter later testified, in Paul's epistles "are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction" ([II Peter 3:16](#)). And twist them they did, moving the church away from the truths written in the Old Testament and expounded by Christ and His apostles. Soon, many Greek-speaking Christians, not wanting to be constrained by the "Hebrew" law, entertained Gnostic ideas that encouraged spiritual license. Finally, the destruction of Jerusalem in AAD 70 ratcheted up anti-Jewish fervor to a fever pitch, and across the Empire, association with Jews and things Jewish was generally avoided.

In this way, the church that appears in second-century history is quite different from its first-century counterpart. It is largely Gentile, keeping Sunday (which it calls "the Lord's Day") rather than the Sabbath, and growing in power and political influence. It is also

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attracting new converts, not only out of Greco-Roman paganism, but also from the gods and goddesses of the frontier areas like Britain, Germany, and Dacia. This church found it easier to assimilate these new converts by syncretizing the "Christian" Easter celebration with their pagan spring festivals, often called after the name of the widely worshipped fertility goddess, Ishtar (or some close variation: Astarte, Eoster, Ostara, Isis, Aphrodite, etc.). It is from these heathen influences that the Easter Bunny, dyeing eggs, giving candy, and other non-biblical Easter traditions have sprung.

Conversely, the Christian Passover is not a celebration but a solemn observance that commemorates the agonizing blood-sacrifice of [Jesus Christ](#) to pay for our sins ([Matthew 26:28](#); [Romans 4:25](#); [I Corinthians 15:3](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [Titus 2:14](#); [I John 1:7](#)), to redeem us from spiritual bondage ([Matthew 20:28](#); [Galatians 1:4](#); [Ephesians 2:1-3](#); [Hebrews 2:14-15](#); [I Peter 1:18-19](#); [Revelation 5:9](#)), and to open the way to fellowship with the Father ([Romans 8:34](#); [Ephesians 2:18](#); [Hebrews 7:25](#); [10:19-22](#)). Each year in the Passover ceremony, baptized Christians wash one another's feet to follow Christ's example of selfless service ([John 13:1-17](#)), as well as partake of the bread and the wine, recommitting themselves to the everlasting covenant that they have made with God. As Paul writes in [I Corinthians 11:26](#), "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

Easter, however, celebrates, not the Savior's death, but His resurrection, which most professing Christians believe occurred at sunrise on the Sunday morning after His death (please see "[After Three Days](#)" which explains from the Bible that this is not the case). Neither Jesus nor His apostles mention anything about observing or memorializing His resurrection. In fact, His death is the *only* event of His life that the Bible consistently commands us to remember ([Luke 22:19](#); [I Corinthians 11:24-25](#); see the principle in [Psalm 116:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:1](#)).

And, yes, this excludes His birth too, making [Christmas](#) another non-biblical addition to the liturgical calendar. Despite the human desire to mark such times, Christians must be careful to do only what God's Word commands lest they be guilty of adding to or taking away from it ([Deuteronomy 4:2](#); [12:32](#); [Joshua 1:7](#); [Proverbs 30:5-6](#); [Revelation 22:18-19](#)). When we add to or take from what God has said, we alter His revelation to us and are sure to veer from His way.

If you are interested in further information regarding God's Sabbath and holy days, please visit our website on this subject, [www.Sabbath.org](http://www.Sabbath.org).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Passover \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

In this foundational message on the Passover, John Ritenbaugh insists that the annual reaffirmation of the covenant—through the Passover—is at the heart and core of an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ and God the Father, a life-and-death choice beginning the process to perfection. The Passover, specifically commanded on the fourteenth at twilight(dusk), is a memorial of God's passing over the firstborn covered by the blood, distinctly different from the memorial of "going out from Egypt (Unleavened Bread).

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## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [Was Jesus Resurrected on Easter Sunday?](#)

by Staff

When did Jesus rise from the rich man's tomb? The world says Sunday, but the Bible says otherwise!

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