

Easter, Passover and the Crucifixion

By Dianne D. McDonnell

The Good Friday and Easter Sunday tradition has spread around the world and few people question the historical validity of that tradition. Yet the Bible record **does not back up a Friday crucifixion!** Nor does it back up an Easter Sunday celebration as we know it! How could the religious world as a whole misunderstand something as critical to Christianity as the crucifixion of Jesus?

The confusion starts in the book of John, where John tells us that Jesus died on the Preparation day. Jesus stands before Pilate, who is sitting at the Judge's seat, and John tells us, what day it was.

It was **the day of Preparation of Passover week** about the sixth hour.... John 19:14, NIV

John is speaking of Roman hours so it was about 6 a.m. in the morning when Jesus stood before Pilate. Later in that same chapter, we find that Jesus died on this very same day, the same day he was captured and brought to trial. John records the dying words of Jesus' and then again tells us the day:

Now, it was **the day of Preparation**, and the next day was to be a **special Sabbath**.... John 19:31, NIV

Some translations refer to next day as a "**High Day**". This special Sabbath or "High Day" that John was talking about is a **yearly Sabbath**—a day that comes just once a year in the same way that the Fourth of July comes only once a year. In Leviticus 23:4-7 we are told about this once a year Sabbath.

These are the appointed times of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. In the first month, on the **fourteenth day** of the month at twilight [sunset] is the LORD'S **Passover**. Then on the **fifteenth day** of the same month there is the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. Leviticus 23:4-6, NASU

This *yearly* Sabbath of rest and religious observance did not have to fall on a certain day of the week. Just like the 4th of July can come on Wednesday, Thursday or any other day of the week-- so can this "High Day". Since it is on the **15th day of the first month of the Jewish**

calendar the actual day of the week will vary from year to year. In 2009, this holy day set for the 15th of the first month of the Jewish calendar, falls on Thursday, April 9, of the Roman calendar we are familiar with. Since there is to be no work done on this yearly Sabbath or "High Day", one must **prepare** for the day by doing the necessary work the day before. In 2009 the day to prepare for this "High day" would be the day before, which is a Wednesday.

So we realize that **the Preparation Day** mentioned in the Bible **was not a Friday**. It was on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar and it was during Passover week. This "Preparation Day" was the very day that the temple priests were killing the Passover lambs in the afternoon! They were getting ready for the 15th which started as soon as it was sunset. Romans days commenced at midnight, but Jews calculated time according to an older tradition with sunset beginning a new day.

Jesus' "Sign" of Three Days and Three nights

Jesus himself made a prediction before his crucifixion, and his words are critical in understanding that the Easter time sequence is in error.

... "the Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of man. They will kill him, and **after three days** he will rise." Mark 9: 31

Matthew gives us even more details and tells us that this is three **full days three days and three full nights**, not just parts of three days.

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous **sign** from you." He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But **none** will be given it **except the sign of** the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be **three days and three nights** in the heart of the earth." Matthew 12:38-40, NIV

It is **impossible to get three days and three nights** from the tradition of a crucifixion on **Friday afternoon** and a resurrection on **Sunday morning**. Friday night would be one night and Saturday night would be the second night, which would account for only two nights in the tomb, and parts of two days. If our Savior did not rightly predict how many days he would be in the tomb— how can he be our Savior? He cannot prove wrong on such a major statement since that was the only SIGN we are given. **Jesus' Sign must be totally accurate!**

The Passover Lamb

Did God plan ahead of time that Jesus would die on the same day that the Passover lambs were being killed? Remember that John the Baptist saw Jesus coming and twice he cried out "Look, **the Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world!" Refer to John 1:29 and 36.

The Passover lamb was already a symbol of salvation. Moses had commanded each Israelite family to kill a lamb and paint the lamb's blood on the sides of each doorway. The night of the 14th of Abib, the first Passover, a death angel "passed over" the blood-marked houses and did not strike the firstborns inside. The Egyptian houses were not marked with lamb's blood, and their firstborns died. Exodus 12:21-29.

Even then the lamb's blood symbolized a Savior that was yet to come. It is Jesus' sacrifice, his blood, which allows us to escape the death penalty due to us for sins. Once we truly are repentant and resolve to follow God's ways, our sins are "passed over" and forgiven!

So overflowing is his kindness toward us that he **took away all our sins through the blood of his Son**, by whom we are saved;
Ephesians 1:7, TLB

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the **precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish** or defect. 1 Peter 1:18-20, NIV

Easter's Tainted History

Easter is linked with the pagan celebration dedicated to Ishtar/Astarte goddess of fertility. Painted eggs symbolizing fertility and new clothes were part of celebrating her day, and there was also a Friday-Sunday link to the resurrection of Tammuz, the lover of Ishtar. The earliest Christians totally rejected this pagan worship of gods and goddesses.

First Century Christians keeping Passover

We even have biblical **evidence** that **early Christians kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread** NOT Easter, and considered Christ their "Passover Lamb". We find this in 1Corinthians 5:6-8. Most Christians don't realize what Paul is saying in these verses because they don't understand the way the holy days are kept or what the symbols mean.

The 15th day of the first month marked the beginning of a seven day period when everyone avoided leavening. The word "leavening" means food items which will make bread rise such as baking soda,

baking powder and yeast and all foods that contained these things. During this time of year, they mixed dough without yeast and made unleavened bread to eat with their meal. For early Christians, yeast and other leavening **symbolized sin** during this seven day period. Understand these key ideas, and Paul's words finally make sense!

As we break into this part of Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, he is reprimanding the congregation because a man in their fellowship is involved in sexual immorality, and Paul berates the congregation for not having put this man out of their fellowship. He uses the symbols of the Days of Unleavened Bread with yeast symbolizing sin to illustrate his points. Since this is still difficult for most modern Christians to understand, there is an explanation added inside brackets to explain each of Paul's statements:

"Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? *[Paul means that just as a little yeast works to raise dough, so sin works in a group to make the entire group sinful.]* Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast -- as you really are. *[Get rid of the one that represents old yeast, or sin, so you can be a new batch without sin.]* For **Christ, our Passover lamb**, has been sacrificed. *[Paul refers to Christ dying for us as our Passover lamb!]* **Therefore let us keep the Festival**, *[Paul is telling Christians to keep and observe the Festival of the Days of Unleavened Bread]* not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. *[Observe the Festival without sin just as we observe it with bread made without yeast.]*" 1 Cor 5:6-8

The first Century Christians of Corinth did not need anyone to explain Paul's words to them, for they were already observing the Days of Unleavened Bread and fully understood the symbolism of leavening standing for sin. Paul linked those symbols to the situation in Corinth. He stated plainly, "For **Christ, our Passover lamb** has been sacrificed. Therefore **let us keep the Festival.**"

Other Historical Proof

Polycrates, an early Christian bishop, wrote an amazing letter to Victor in Rome arguing against keeping Easter and FOR keeping the Passover. He listed **two of the twelve apostles, John and Philip**, Polycarp, Thraseas, and other martyrs, "**All these observed** the fourteenth day of **the passover** (sic) according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith."¹

Should Christians Still Observe the Passover And the Days of Unleavened Bread Today?

Jesus spent his last few hours of freedom observing the Passover! He infused it with new symbolism of his body and his blood, and even washed his disciples' feet to show us his example of serving others. How then can any Christian think that Passover with its Christ-given symbols can be disregarded and ignored by today's Christians? What a travesty it is to **ignore** the very night Jesus set up to honor his sacrifice in the taking of unleavened bread and wine symbolizing his body and his blood! Many churches have made up their own schedules and called this night "the Lord's supper" but to do so they must turn their back on the fact that this was **already a commanded evening**, the evening that began **Passover** day the 14th of Abib in the first month of Spring. The day time portion of the 14th is used to "prepare" for the yearly Sabbath which is the very next day and begins seven days of eating unleavened bread and avoiding all leavened products.

For us as Christians, as we take the wine and unleavened bread we are acting out that **we accept the sacrifice of** the body and blood of **Jesus shed on the day of Passover!** As we continue to avoid leavening and instead eat unleavened bread for a week, we demonstrate that after conversion we will go on to **avoid sin** for the rest of our lives! Obviously, we can only avoid sin with God's daily help and his Holy Spirit within us.

Paul told Christians, "**Therefore let us keep the Festival!**" Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread have great meaning for us today. We must **honor** these days and ignore them no longer! Our Savior could have died on any day—but he and the Father selected the very day of Passover, the 14th, to be the day of his sacrifice! It was NOT a random day—it was planned to fulfill what the day originally looked towards—the coming of the Messiah who had to die for our sins! The Passover lambs ALWAYS stood for the Messiah and his sacrifice!

The First Century Disagreement over the date of "Passover"

Over time the temple Jews started calling the "High Day" on the 15th by the name of "Passover" instead of referring to the 14th as Passover. They began referring to the 14th only as "the Preparation Day". This practice was confusing things in the first century, and still confuses many today. You'll notice that Jesus refers to the 14th as "this Passover" in Luke 22:15, "I have eagerly desired to eat **this Passover** with you before I suffer." Jesus knew the correct day to call Passover. Meanwhile you notice in John 18:28 that the temple Jews are thinking of the 15th as "Passover" and didn't want to become ceremonially

unclean and unable to eat the special meal at sunset which starting the 15th, a meal they were now calling the "Passover".

The community at Qumran famous for the Dead Sea Scrolls identified the 14th as the Passover in the first century.² Besides Leviticus 23:4-6, there is Biblical proof that the 14th is the correct day to call Passover.

"On **the fourteenth day** of the first month **the LORD's Passover** is to be held." Numbers 28:16, NIV

The Israelites set out from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, **the day after the Passover**. Numbers 33:3, NIV

Events of Passover Week the year Jesus Died

It is easier to keep all the events straight with this simple chart.

Days are from sunset to sunset instead of midnight to midnight.

Dark Part of the Day	Daylight Part of the Day
<u>14th of Abib, The day Jesus called Passover, also called Preparation Day</u>	
After sunset Jesus observes Passover	Jesus is tried and crucified
Jesus is arrested that same night.	Jesus dies about 3 p.m.
Disciples escape	Jesus is put into the tomb

<u>15th of Abib, Day One of the Days of Unleavened Bread, a "High Day"</u>	
Sunset begins the yearly Sabbath	Worship Services are held
Many Jews are calling this day "Passover".	No work is to be done
It is Jesus' first night in the tomb	and first day in the tomb

<u>16th of Abib, Day Two of the Days of Unleavened Bread</u>	
	Mary buys spices after resting on the yearly Sabbath the day before.
Jesus spends his second night	Jesus' second day in the tomb.

<u>17th of Abib, Day Three of the Days of Unleavened Bread</u>	
	Mary prepares the spices
Jesus spends his third night	Jesus' third day in the tomb.

<u>18th of Abib, Day Four of the Days of Unleavened Bread</u>	
Jesus is resurrected!	Mary goes to the tomb and finds the stone rolled back.
	Mary sees the resurrected Jesus!
The SIGN Jesus gave us of THREE DAYS and THREE NIGHTS is true!	

Jesus' own life became our Sacrifice for Sin on Passover Day. **He became our Passover Lamb** and our **hope of resurrection!**

How do Christians Observe these Days?

We prepare by examining our lives and comparing our actions and habits with the Ten Commandments listed in Exodus 20. These commandments show us what God defines as sin. We have to be willing, with God's help, to "throw out" of our lives the things that violate God's principles. Then we gather up from our kitchen cabinets everything that contains leavening. Leavening, as you may remember, is baking soda, yeast, and baking powder. This includes cookies, most crackers, breads, baking mixes —anything and everything that is leavened. Any leavened products that remain uneaten are thrown away on Tuesday, April 7th. **The evening of April 7, 2009 is the anniversary of the night Jesus celebrated Passover**, it is the night portion of the 14th of the first month of the Hebrew calendar. The wine and unleavened bread symbols are taken on this night just as Jesus commanded, and the next day, April 8th is still the 14th of Abib until sunset.

In 2009, Wednesday, April 8, at 3 p.m. marks the true anniversary of the death of our Savior —not "Good Friday".
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Thursday of that week, **April 9, 2009, is the "High Day" First Day of Unleavened Bread** and a day of worship and rest. Then for seven days, we eat bread with our meals that is not leavened to symbolize taking in the sin-free ways of our Savior. We avoid eating anything with leavening in it during these days to symbolize avoiding sin.

Wednesday, April 15, is the Last Day of Unleavened Bread and is another "High Day" of rest and worship. As it becomes dark that evening, the Days of Unleavened Bread conclude and we again eat leavened products. In 2010 the days will fall on different days of the month and days of the week.

You may be able to find some Christians observing Passover night with the symbols of wine and unleavened bread that Jesus instigated. Our independent church observes this night. And there are churches scattered around the United States that observe the first and last days of Unleavened Bread as days of worship as our church does. The United Church of God is one large church organization that also commemorates these Spring Holy Days. Whether you are by yourself or with others, make this the year that you start **revering and**

honoring the days that Jesus used to picture himself. These are the days that our Messiah even **honored with his own life's blood!**

¹ The Passover Controversy, Eusebius, Hist. Ecc V, xxiv Chapter 24. The Disagreement in Asia. See the letter written by Polycrates which Eusebius reprints in full.

² Calendars of Priestly Courses (4Q320) from the Dead Sea Scrolls, according to the calendar used by the priestly descendants of Zadok in Qumran, the Passover was observed on the 14th day of the first month. *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* by Geza Vermes, Pages 336-340.