

# The Passover or Easter?

This year (1999), there has been a remarkable coincidence of events. This weekend is Easter weekend and the "Christian" world is celebrating one of its two principle festivals. At the same time a Passover was conducted on Tuesday evening. The Jewish world started celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread (or the Passover period of time as they refer to it) also. It does not end there, because at the same junction of time, the Islamic world has been celebrating what it refers to as Id al' Adha (the Feast of the Sacrifice). For them, their sacrifice is based upon the account in Genesis chapter 22 where, according to Islam, Ishmael rather than Isaac, was offered on Mount Moriah.

It seldom happens. You appreciate how infrequently Easter and Passover coincide. That is for a reason. The "Christian Church" decreed that the "Feast of the Resurrection" should never coincide with the Jewish observance of the Passover. They were normally separated. The coincidence of the Islamic Feast is even more remarkable because they operate on a totally different calendar. It is a very unique occasion when all three of these religions come together at the same point in time.

All three, have central to them, the sacrifice of a lamb, although the aspect of the lamb has been downplayed within Christianity.

I would like to take the opportunity today to focus on two of those festivals; the two which are known most to us. It will help you understand some of the issues involved, and the differences. I would like to focus on the Passover and Easter. We might ask ourselves; why does the Christian world keep Easter? Why is Easter of such importance to the Christian world?

Going back to Luke's gospel, we find Jesus Christ giving instruction to the disciples at the last Passover. I would like you to bear in mind that this is Luke who was writing, and Luke was writing in support of the Work which the apostle Paul was undertaking amongst the Gentile peoples. He was addressing this, not necessarily to a group of Jewish converts, although they may well have read what Luke was saying. Luke had put this together in support of the work that Paul was doing; an account of the life of Christ to back up the teachings of Paul. Luke is bearing in mind, very much, the needs of the Gentile converts to Christendom.

***Luke 22: 14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.***

***15 Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;***

***16 "for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."***

***17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves;***

***18 "for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."***

***19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."***

"... do this as an act of remembering who and what I am."

***20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.***

They were to take that in remembrance of Him as well. We find the same thought, of doing something in remembrance of Jesus Christ, referred to in 1st Corinthians 11. We find the apostle Paul giving the instruction relating to the Passover, and the way in which they were to correctly take it, as opposed to the way in which they were abusing the situation. We don't need to go into all the details, but I do want you to focus upon one particular facet in terms of what we have just read in Luke:

***1 Corinthians 11: 23 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; 24 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." 25 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."***

Once again, Paul reiterates the same thought that Luke had presented in his gospel account, of eating the bread, and drinking the wine in remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ.

The concept of remembering the death is not something which is current to all civilisations. All civilisations do not remember the day of a person's death. Once a year I have a message from my mother telling me; *"Today is the anniversary when your father died"*. I think the remaining spouse can oftentimes be more aware of that, and attuned to that, whereas the rest of us in the family oftentimes can move along. Our life carries on. We have a general recollection of when the death occurred, but it is not something that we highlight in our calendar.

To the Jews, the concept of remembering a death is SIGNIFICANT. In other words, the day of a person's death, as Solomon said, in Ecclesiastes 7, is more important than the birthday. You remember the entirety of the life of that person. You look back at what that person has accomplished; the contribution they made; the things you can be grateful to them for.

So within Jewish society to this very day, you will find that families will remember the death of an important family member, or an ancestor, or an important figure within the Jewish community. When is it done? It is done only at one point in time of the day. It is done in the evening, at the start of that day. They have an act of remembrance.

It is important to bear in mind that here, both Luke and Paul were speaking to a group of people who were, in the main, Gentiles. They were not part of the House of Israel, in any way whatsoever. This remembrance implies the concept of an ongoing memorial, repeated on an annual basis. This was initially practised in the sacrificial system of the lamb. Those things were done as memorials, as an act of remembrance. It is very, very important to see the scene in which the gospel writers, and the apostles, present the aspect of the Passover.

So we have the situation of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and His instruction to the Church, to "remember" Him. This is a simple word in English which we can oftentimes gloss over. It means very little to us, yet to a person in the first century it was a word absolutely LADEN with meaning. To a Jewish convert today, coming into the Church, those words would mean a lot more than they do to us. I am not saying you do not remember. You do remember. It is just that you don't appreciate some of those cultural emphases that are placed upon that word. When we gather together for the Passover service, we "remember" the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

We find considerable emphasis throughout the New Testament on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As John the Baptist introduces Jesus Christ to his disciples as they gathered near the River Jordan, he said:

***John 1: 29 ... "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away (bears) the sin of the world!"***

We find the apostle Peter focusing upon the sacrificial role of Jesus Christ:

***1 Peter 1: 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,***

We have not been redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold. Money, education, intellectual development, all of those things that can be obtained through money, and through the use of the physical

world, cannot redeem us from the aimless conduct that we received, by tradition, from our fathers. Let us bear that in mind, as we proceed through the sermon.

The problem that leads humanity to war is the aimless conduct that we have received from our fathers. Peter is focusing on something else. He is focusing on hope. Hope is the underlying message of Peter's epistles. We have been redeemed ...

***19 ... with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.***

... a spotless lamb.

***20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you  
21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.***

Here, Peter is talking about the Lamb of God, the One who redeemed us. It was through His precious blood that we have been redeemed from the aimless conduct of this world. We have hope through His resurrection.

Chapter 2 talks about Christ's sacrifice. It is quoting from Isaiah 53.

***1 Peter 2: 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes you were healed.***

Here is the apostle Peter, writing towards the end of his life, about the sacrifice of Christ. What is it that is of importance to him? It is the sacrifice of Christ as the Lamb of God.

It is interesting to do an extensive study of the New Testament Scriptures, and you will find absolutely nothing about the observance of the Resurrection. There is NOTHING mentioned in Scripture about the observance of the Resurrection. People try to wrest various Scriptures to their own ends. Here is an example of that. Paul is writing to the Church at Colossae, instructing them in terms of the way of life that they are to live, and what they are to avoid. I don't want to get into a detailed exposition of this particular chapter today, but I want to introduce it because one of the things that Paul does in the book of Colossians, is that he mentions yet another church. He refers to the Church in Laodicea, a companion church. He tells them ...

***Colossians 4: 16 Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.***

Here was another epistle, that the apostle Paul had written to another church, that has not been preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures. Paul said he wanted the 2 churches to swap these letters eventually. *"I want you to hear what I have said to them, and I want them to listen to what I have said to you."*

Paul was writing this to a group of people who were in Asia Minor. Colossae could easily have been included by John in the 7 Churches in Revelation 2 and 3. One of the things that people create for themselves is a problem in history. They claim that Paul is doing away with the Holy Days here; that Paul is doing away with all Jewish observance.

In Colossians 2:14, Paul talks about the handwriting of requirements or ordinances (Greek "cheirographon domasin"), that was against us.

***Colossians 2: 14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.  
15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of***

*them, triumphing over them in it.*

*16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths,*

Some interpret this as to say that people cannot sit around judging you, saying you are supposed to be keeping the Sabbath. They say you do not have to do that any more. It is a little difficult to maintain that view, when you realise that the Churches to whom this epistle went eventually had to have an edict issued by the Supreme Catholic Church, firstly in 325 AD, and then in 350 AD, to stop them keeping Jewish festivals!

The only conclusion you can draw, is that if that line of approach is correct, the people had a great difficulty in understanding what the apostle Paul was trying to teach them. Or else they were stubborn, recalcitrant, unteachable, unbending and unwilling to hear an apostle of God. I speak as a fool!

Many scholars are coming to realise the approach they have taken over the last 2 centuries does not hold water any more. In other words, you can read this as though these people were, in fact, keeping the Holy Days, the Festivals, and the Sabbaths, and that they were being criticised for it.

That fits in very much more with the picture that is then laid out by history, of a group of people in Asia Minor, keeping the festivals. We should bear in mind that the apostle John eventually died, we understand, in this area. When he died, probably at the earliest in A.D. 98 according to the historical record, he was in Ephesus, a city that was close by Colossae and Laodicea.

So we have a situation where, for almost 4 1/2 centuries, people in Asia Minor kept the Passover, but eventually they were being put under the literal threat of excommunication, to give up keeping the Passover, to stop doing what the Bible said: keeping something in remembrance of Jesus Christ.

As I said, we can search the Scriptures but there is nothing within Scripture about the observation of the Resurrection.

In 1st Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul talks about the Resurrection, and about the importance of it. Let us never forget that. Yet in talking about it, at no point in time does he give an understanding that it is supposed to be a time that is to be celebrated by the Church, as a special time. I do believe there is very good reason for that.

We accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ at one point in time. We are supposed to be ALIVE TO JESUS CHRIST from thence forth! Every day it is a continual act of living to Jesus Christ, as the apostle Peter said. He bore our sins on the tree, so that we, being dead to sins (we die once), can LIVE TO GOD, which is a continuing process, of living and participating in that Resurrection, in righteousness. That is the life to which we are called. The apostle Paul spoke of the Resurrection, but not in terms of a day, or an act of remembrance in any way whatsoever.

It is interesting to note the difference in the 2 festivals, Passover and Easter. I would like to read to you from a Greek manuscript that was written at the end of the 2nd century by a man called Melito of Sardis. I would guess if we were to characterise Melito, we would have to use John's words ...

***Rev 3: 4 "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.***

This man wrote at the end of the 2nd century, maybe at the beginning of the 3rd century. In the early 1940s this manuscript "*A Homily on Passover*" was discovered. Since then, it has been possible to reconstruct his complete manuscript. As one writer said, it is one of the earliest Christian sermons that we possess outside of the Scriptures. It is also important, he said, in an understanding of early Christian use of Scripture, and of the relations between early Christianity and Judaism, which depends ultimately on the thought of Paul and the author of the 4th gospel, John. Where did Melito come from? He came from Sardis. We all know where Sardis is. It is one of the 7 Churches of Revelation, in Asia Minor.

Melito's treatise is marked by considerable reference to Scripture and typology of events in the Old

Testament, and their relevance to Christians. He shows the underlying basis of the difference between those who kept to the Passover, and those who espoused Easter. He discusses the origin of the term Passover as follows:

"What is the Pascha (*the Greek term for Passover*)? The name is taken from what in fact "came to pass". "To keep Passover" (paschein) comes from the word "to have suffered" (pathein).

"Learn then, who it is who suffers and who shares his suffering, and why the Lord is present on the earth, in order that, having garbed Himself in a sufferer, He may carry him away into the heights of the heavens.

"He arrived on earth from the heavens, for the sake of one who suffered. He clothed himself and the sufferer by means of the virgin's womb, and came forth as a human being. He took to Himself the sufferings of the sufferer by means of a body capable of suffering. He destroyed the sufferings of the flesh."

That is quite remarkable statement by Melito. I think he had also read Hebrews chapter 2 where it talks about Christ and His role; the way in which He came to literally free people from the bondage which they had been in. For Melito, the death of Christ was very much of paramount importance.

He was not alone in that. Various other writers of that time understood the very importance of the Passover to characterise, and to portray to us, the willingness of Christ to suffer in our place; His willingness to suffer for us.

On the other hand, let us look at some derivations of the word "Easter". The origin of the word Easter is related to the concept of resurrection, especially in terms of the sun rising in the East:

"... according to the Ven. Bede (*De temporum ratione*, I,v), [Easter] relates to Eôstre, a Teutonic goddess of the rising light of day and spring (*The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Easter").

- April was called "the Eustur monath". It was a time of the resurrecting.
- The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church under the term "Easter" classifies it this way:

"At any rate, it seems clear that, as in the case of Christmas, the Christian feast of Easter has superseded an old pagan festival; a festival which was very much involved in the aspect of resurrecting."

- "The same goddess from which the Assyrians use the name "Ishtar", was called "Astarte" by the Phoenicians. Her name appears on Assyrian monuments found by the archaeologist Layard in the excavations at Nineveh, as for Ishtar.

According to Sumerian law, Ishtar was the wife of the god Tammuz. (We find him referred to in Ezekiel, chapter 8. Ishtar is also called "Ashtoreth" (Judges 2) and "The god of heavens" (Jeremiah 44). For more than a thousand years before Christ's birth, a festival of "Ishtar", or "Eastre", was celebrated in the spring. It was the season of the budding of new life, a resurrection of nature after the dead of winter. It was a feast of regeneration.

Throughout the inhabited world in ancient times, spring festivals and various sex rituals were observed, to honour the fact that the sun's welcome rays were once again imparting life and warmth. The exaltation of fertility played a prominent part in the festivities. That is where the egg and the rabbit came into the picture.

From the 2nd century onwards, pagans saw the spring festivals as natural symbols of Christ's resurrection to a new life. The Easter Sunday observance did not enter the Church suddenly. It entered slowly, under the pretext of being a Christian custom.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica's 11th edition states:

"There is no indication of the observance of Easter festival in the New

Testament."

This is absolutely true. Acts 12: 4 in the Authorised Version of the Bible says:

***Acts 12: 4 ... he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.***

The word 'Easter' should not be there at all! It was a translation error, because the Greek word is "Pascha". It should read:

***Acts 12: 4 ... intending to bring him before the people after Passover.***

"There is no indication of the observance of Easter in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic fathers. The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals foreshadowed; thus the Passover with a new concept added to it of Christ as the true Paschal Lamb, and the firstfruits from the dead, continued to be observed and became the Christian Easter."

They gloss over an incredible amount in making a comment like that!

Looking at the aspect of Passover and Easter, we have 2 entirely different concepts being dealt with. On the one hand, is the suffering of the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world; to bring about reconciliation with God. Notice what was foremost in Christ's mind, and what is so often downplayed, when one makes the transition from the Passover, the death, to the Resurrection.

***Hebrews 2: 14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He (Christ) Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.***

***16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.***

***17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation (to make payment) for the sins of the people.***

***18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.***

The sacrifice of Christ was to provide hope for us. He was resurrected, that is not a question, but bear in mind that He died TO DESTROY THE POWER OF SATAN.

This is one of those things that is so easily overlooked in the whole aspect of the Passover, and the importance of it. You move on into groups that focus upon the Resurrection and ask "*Do they really see a Satan in the world?*" Often, Satan is lost. He has been covered up somehow along the line. He has done a disappearing trick!

Let us briefly go back to John 12, to the time when Jesus entered Jerusalem. This, most likely, was on the 10th day of the month, the day in which the lamb had to be taken as the lamb for the sacrifice. We find that Jesus Christ talked about how He was being glorified:

***John 12: 27 "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.***

"... I am not going to walk away from the challenge that lies ahead of me, because this is the whole raison d'être of my life! I have come for this purpose, for this hour."

**28 "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again."**

**29 Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him."**

**30 Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake."**

**31 "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."**

**32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."**

**33 This He said, signifying by what death He would die.**

He realised very clearly that His death was also going to be the way whereby humanity could be freed from the control of Satan. It was the only way in which it could be done.

***Exodus 12: 12 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.***

How was that judgment going to be executed? Through the shed blood and the roast flesh of the lamb. That was the only way in which a person could be spared from being part of that judgment.

The Egyptians, as a result of that Passover event, the death of the firstborn, realised that if they did not do something, they were all dead. The God that could destroy the principle god of Egypt left everybody naked and exposed. *"If it was the firstborn tonight; it could be the 2nd born tomorrow night, the 3rd born the night after."* Where would this end?

God told Moses and Israel:

***Exodus 12: 12 ... against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment ...***

The blood and flesh of the lamb was given, so that they could avoid the death that Egypt suffered, at that point in time.

We have 2 distinct reasons for these 2 festivals. The suffering and the death of the Passover, versus the *"resurrection, regeneration and new life"* of Easter.

For some people the natural response might be *"Let us keep both"*. Is that what God instructs us to do? God tells us NOT TO LEARN THE WAYS OF THE HEATHEN!

I would like to read to you about various aspects of pagan, secular festivals at the time of Christ. This is from a book by Robert Markus, entitled "The End of Ancient Christianity".

"From the time of Polybius, Roman religion had often been seen as the secret of Roman power and greatness. The Roman governing classes never doubted the proper discharge of the city's duties to its gods was essential to its success. Public life and official business was embedded in traditional religious ceremony to ensure that success.

"Varro, the great Roman antiquarian, had labelled this aspect of Roman religion the "civic" duty, and said of it *"This is what the citizens, and especially the priests must know and practice"*.

"Religion and civic life were deeply interwoven at every level. This axiom is what gave urgency to the problem raised for Christians, especially as they took a growing part in the public life, and a greater share of office, by the traditional celebrations surrounding public life" (Markus 107).

He talks about how the 3rd century, from the time of Tertullian, to the Council which met at Elvira in Spain, soon after A.D. 300 ...

"... high class, and not only high class, Christians were exposed to conflicting pressures on this score."

Please bear in mind his definition of "Christians" is not necessarily what WE would define as Christian.

"One way of reconciling the claims of public life, and those of Christian exclusivism, was through devaluing the religious significance of traditional civic celebrations."

... *"Let us take those things, and let us purify them a little; get rid of some of the things that seem overtly pagan, so that Christians can then find them acceptable."*

"If a case could be made for treating these as no more than secular in nature, they could be celebrated without the stain of idolatry, but how could such a case be made?" (Markus 97).

"The roots [of these festivals] lay deep within the pagan past. Christian writers - in earlier days - denounced the circus games, and especially the pompa circensis with which they opened, [and] the solemn procession from the god's temple to the circus. They knew the ancient religious symbolism - they carried, and, duly condemned them as the image of the Devil's seductive display" (Markus 108).

... the way in which they were characterised at the beginning!

"Had they now been sanitised, and allowed to survive in the calendar of festivals celebrated by Christians, shorn of their religious significance? Could religious cult, perhaps be disassociated from purely secular celebration, in the way Constantine had in mind, when he allowed the inhabitants in Hispellum to honour him with games and a temple, but without "the pollution of any contagious superstition".

"This certainly was a view taken by the Christian Emperors, who continued to safeguard what they saw as traditional amusements of their subjects, even while seeking to eliminate the religious context with which they had been traditionally associated" (Markus 108).

You find that throughout those first few centuries, there was an attempt to sanitise the pagan elements. 2,000 years later we are still very much involved in that. We are still into fertility, Easter eggs, rabbits and all of those things that are and were associated with paganism.

I would think that if some of those Romans from the 1st century were resurrected to life and taken into any of our major cities in the Western world, they would want to climb back into their graves with horror at the level of sexuality they see in our society today. I am sure they would be amazed and, in fact, alarmed at it. Go back and ask why was it so important? Why were they driving towards this end? Why even try and sanitise these festivals to make them acceptable to Christians? That is really where the focus needs to be. Why should they be wanting to do that? Why should a Christian feel compelled to be involved in these things?

The previous chapter of this particular book states:

"The cycle of Christian festivals developed independently and remained based on the Lord's resurrection."

Yet we know clearly from Scripture, there was no instruction to keep the Resurrection! I have a book entitled "The Lord's Supper". It is fascinating to read through some of the essays in it, because people go out of their way to try and squeeze something out of the Scriptures, to justify keeping "The Lord's Day" as the 1st day of the week, etc.

It is fascinating to look at Luke's account of when Jesus had been resurrected. The first time that He saw anybody was on the 1st day of the week. He saw the ladies who had come to the tomb early, and then he met with the 2 who were on their way to Emmaus:



***Luke 24: 28 Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther.***

***29 But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them.***

Here is Jesus, out in a village called Emmaus, at the end of the 1st day of the week, with 2 people who do not know Him. It is only as they sit down at the meal, and He does something before them, that suddenly God allows their eyes to be opened, and they realise who it is who they have walked some 15 miles with! Maybe we should all go on a 15-mile walk on the 1st day of the week! That is what Jesus did! It is only then that He returns to Jerusalem and reveals Himself to all of the disciples, save one, Thomas, who was absent. Could I ask you a question. What day of the week was it then? It was, in fact, the 2nd day of the week!

***32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"***

***33 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together,***

***34 saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"***

Here are the disciples at this point in time, gathered in Jerusalem at the start of the 2nd day. They are saying "*Jesus has been seen by Simon*". He had not been seen by all of them yet. The 2 men said "*Yes, we have seen Him too*".

***35 And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.***

***36 Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you."***

This was the 1st time that Jesus had appeared to all the disciples. It is now the 2nd day of the week. It is probably fairly late at night by this point.

***37 But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.***

***38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?"***

As I said, not all the disciples were there. Thomas was not there on that occasion. Thomas had to wait for another occasion.

Coming back to Robert Markus' book:

"The cycle of Christian festivals developed independently and remained based on the Lord's resurrection. For the faith of the early Church, the Resurrection of Jesus was so decisive that in the last resort only one festival seemed essential to it. The Resurrection was thus the hinge on which the cycle of sacred time turned."

They felt there had to be sacred time, and that sacred time had to TURN on something. So the 1st day of the week and the resurrection became the focus of that.

"The year and the week both revolved around it. Every Sunday was a weekly celebration of Easter; every Friday, a weekly Good Friday. A second cycle came to cluster around the festival of the Lord's birth and went on developing in the fourth century and beyond."

Why was it essential that they do that?

"This need gave the impetus to the vast elaboration of the annual cycle of the Christian scheme of sacred time. But another shift was also to contribute to the creation of this time scheme, until, in the course of the 3rd century,

Christians began to enter the mainstream of Roman life in sizeable numbers. Their main need was for a calendar of religious observance which would set them apart from the Jews."

Where do we find in Scripture that they had to develop something that would "set them apart from the Jews"? There is nothing in Scripture relating to that at all. The whole development of things like Easter became a matter of an identity issue. *"What identifies me as a Christian?"*

People say *"We have to have sacred time"*. The Eternal says *"No. I have already established what identifies you as a Christian. It is not the time, or the space, that you have to create"*.

These events gave rise to what is known as the "Quartodeciman" controversy as to whether the Passover should be on the 14th, or whether it should be kept at a later time.

" Their main need was for a calendar of religious observance would set them apart from the Jews. The Lord's Day superseded the Sabbath, Easter, the Passover. The date of Easter was eventually to be reckoned in such a way as to make coincidence impossible.

... the 2 cannot coincide.

"All the days are the Lord's" is thought often to be found, usually as a justification for abstaining from Jewish, sometimes pagan, festivities. The idea seems to undermine the importance of festivals; but this was not the intention" (Markus 100).

So we find over a period of time, this development of a desire to separate themselves from anything that seemed to be Jewish; to create an identity for themselves which was distinct from Judaism. It is to that point that God has brought us back again. The New Testament nowhere gives us justification for having an identity that is different from the people of God, in any shape or form!

The approach has been used that there were various "markers" in the 1st century that were used to identify Judaism. The 3 principle ones were circumcision, the Sabbath and the food laws. We can appreciate some of the challenges that have been issued over the past few years, even amongst our own people, and others as well.

It is interesting in terms of circumcision, while the provision was given whereby a Gentile adult did not have to be circumcised to enter the Church, there is never any comment made about circumcision and a child. In other words, if you live by all of God's word, the net result would be that if you had a male child, you would have him circumcised. That may seem heretical, but in terms of God's Word, that is what you are instructed to do.

One of the most fascinating things about circumcision is that most of the argument about circumcision focuses upon Paul's epistle to the Galatians. His epistle to the Galatians was written, possibly, prior to the Council of Jerusalem in 49 A.D., described in Acts 15. In Acts 16, we find Paul circumcising a young man called Timothy. Most people have no idea where Timothy came from. Do you know where Timothy came from. Do you know where Paul met Timothy? In Galatia! So here was a young man from Galatia being circumcised by the apostle Paul.

What I would like to suggest to you is that a lot of what people have read into Galatians about circumcision, is not necessarily what the apostle Paul had in mind in the first instance. It is what people have read into that epistle, because of their distance from it, and their failure to understand the issues that are really involved.

We have already touched a little on the arguments for the Sabbath in terms of Colossians, chapter 2. There never was a time which the Church stopped keeping the Sabbath. In fact, it may surprise you, that it eventually was the leaders of the synagogue who stopped Christians meeting in the synagogue on the Sabbath!

One of the 18 benedictions that was introduced in the latter part of the first century, was designed to reveal a person who believed in the Deity of Christ; hence they could be hustled out of the synagogue. If you were really a true Christian, you would not utter one of the benedictions, so the leaders of the synagogue would sit around and watch whether someone would state all 18 of them. *"If they do not, get that person out of here. They are a Christian"*

So here we have a community of God's people who are meeting together still in synagogues, just as in the book of Acts. Even in Corinth, Paul and the disciples got hustled out of the synagogue because the Jews were against them on that occasion.

So the aspect of the Sabbath and food laws, certainly were not things that were destroyed in terms of markers of Christianity. As Jesus Christ said, love is the hallmark of Christianity. It is the identifier of a Christian.

***John 13:35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."***

***John 15:13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."***

"You are my disciples if you love one another." We could then tie that aspect of a new commandment, as an UNUSED COMMANDMENT that ties right back into the second great commandment, a commandment that people had NEVER lived by. He said *"You go back and you start to keep the laws of God, in the way in which God intended them to be kept, not in the letter of the law, but in the spirit of the law, with the aid of God's Holy Spirit"*.

It is interesting to note Paul's comment to Timothy:

***2 Timothy 3: 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.***

***16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,***

All doctrine, all teaching is given by inspiration of God. It is an interesting concept to bear in mind. The end result ...

***17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

The identity of a Christian is not found in the absorbing of pagan times, or creating new time scales, nor in the making of new space scales. To give you an example of that, in Jordan is a little town called Madaba, down by Mount Nebo. In the Church in Madaba, they found a rather interesting mosaic of Israel, prepared in the Byzantine times in the 5th and 6th centuries. It was quite a remarkable mosaic because at the centre of it was Jerusalem. They found various features of Jerusalem that nobody had ever known about before. From that particular mosaic, they went back to Jerusalem, mapped out the city and said *"Let's dig here and see what we find"*.

They started to excavate and they found a place called The Cardo today. No one knew it existed. They found out its existence from a mosaic map in Madaba. It is interesting to see what is at the centre of Jerusalem. It is not the temple. It is not Mount Zion. It is not the Mount of Olives. It is none other than the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. That was the centre of their universe. They were creating an alternate world. They were seeking to create an identity for themselves, that was distinct from anything that had gone before.

It did not matter to them that the prophets talked about Jesus Christ returning to the Mount of Olives. They chose a mount on the other side of town which had been the site of a pagan temple, and used that for the centre of their space, just as they chose pagan festivities, and "sanitised" pagan festivities for their religious time.

Yet Paul said: *"All teaching, all instruction, comes from Scripture."* That is where we go to find it, not anywhere else, not to the pagan philosophers, not to the historians.

***2 Timothy 3: 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,***

... how to live that righteous life that we have been called to live.

***17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

That is the way in which Paul understood things. If we go back to Luke 24, to the point after Thomas has seen Jesus ...

***Luke 24: 44 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."***

... referring to the 3-fold, tripartite division of what we refer to as the Old Testament today, the law, the prophets and the writings; the Tanakh as it is known in Hebrew.

***45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.***

He gave them something whereby they could comprehend the Scriptures. They could understand them in the way in which God desired them to be understood. The apostle Paul as we read in 2nd Timothy, chapter 3, had that same understanding as well. He desired for them to live their lives accordingly.

The concept of the need for Christianity to have a new identity all of its own, was not something that God required. It was not something that God even requested. We could go back to the Old Testament, and look at Scriptures that tell us that we are NOT to learn the way of the heathen, nor to be amazed at their doings. Those are the things we are NOT to be involved in. We are to be involved in the death and the suffering of our Lord and Master. We are to remember that. We are to remember what was done for us. We are to remember the freedom that it gives us, to live the life that God desires us to live, according to His Word.

Realise as well, that that is a blessing that lies in store for all humanity. May that day soon come!

...Peter Nathan  
03 Apr 99

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