

Agathos Ministries Sunday School

Easter 2007

Easter, Dates, and Jesus

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Definition:

Easter — originally a Saxon word (Eostre), denoting a goddess of the Saxons, in honour of whom sacrifices were offered about the time of the Passover. Hence the name came to be given to the festival of the Resurrection of Christ, which occurred at the time of the Passover. In the early English versions this word was frequently used as the translation of the Greek pascha (the Passover). When the Authorized Version (1611) was formed, the word “passover” was used in all passages in which this word pascha occurred, except in Act 12:4. In the Revised Version the proper word, “passover,” is always used.¹

Easter, the Christian festival that celebrates Jesus’ resurrection. The name ‘Easter’ derives from the Anglo-Saxon goddess of Spring (Eostre or Ostara), but the Christian festival developed from the Jewish Passover (²Heb. pesach, ³Gk. pascha), because according to the Gospels the events of Jesus’ last days took place at the time of Passover. Easter was originally observed on the day following the end of the Passover fast (14 Nisan), regardless of the day of the week on which it fell. In the mid-second century, however, some Gentile Christians began to celebrate it on the Sunday after 14 Nisan, with the preceding Friday observed as the day of Christ’s crucifixion, regardless of the date on which it fell. The resulting controversy over the correct time for observing the Easter festival reached a head in a.d. 197, when Victor of Rome excommunicated those Christians who insisted on celebrating Easter on 14 Nisan. The dispute continued until the early fourth century, when the Quarto-decimans (from Latin for ‘14’) were required by Emperor Constantine to conform to the empire-wide practice of observing Easter on the Sunday following 14 Nisan, rather than on that date itself. Currently celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox, Easter falls differently for Orthodox Christianity which, unlike Western Christianity, did not accept the Gregorian calendar reform in 1582. Originally a unitary feast celebrating the Exodus and the Christian redemption, Easter was split up in the fourth century into its component parts, Easter Day becoming a separate commemoration of Christ’s resurrection. For a long time it was also the preeminent occasion for Christian initiation (baptism), understood as a participation in the paschal mystery.⁴R.H.F.

⁵ The world over celebrates this event in many varied and different ways

Jerusalem- Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Jerusalem. Thousands of believers from all over the world flock to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for the “Saturday of Light” ceremony, held between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The ceremony opens with morning prayers in the church. The Greek Orthodox patriarch enters the Chamber of the Holy Sepulchre and is sealed inside with a wax seal. The lights in the church are extinguished and the huge congregation waits for the new fire, symbol of the moment of resurrection, when the patriarch exits the chamber. From this fire the people light candles, lamps and torches and push with all their strength to go outside and bring home the holy flame. A special lamp lit from this fire is flown to Athens and from there spread to all the churches in Greece and other Balkan countries.

¹ Easton, M.G.: *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996, c1897

² Heb. Hebrew

³ Gk. Greek

⁴ R.H.F. Reginald H. Fuller, M.A.; Molly Laird Downs Professor of New Testament; Virginia Theological Seminary; Alexandria, Virginia

⁵ Achtemeier, Paul J. ; Harper & Row, Publishers ; Society of Biblical Literature: *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. 1st ed. San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1985, S. 233

6 Via Dolorosa – Procession

Jerusalem. During Easter many processions follow the route of the Via Dolorosa. They pass fourteen Stations, following Jesus' Way of Sorrow from the place where he was tried, where he took up the cross, where he fell for the first time, where he met his mother Mary, where Simon of Cyrene helped him to carry the cross, where Veronica wiped his face with a cloth, which became imprinted with his image, where he fell the second time, where he spoke to the women of Jerusalem, where he fell for the third time. The last five stations are inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, including the Crucifixion and the Burial.

7 Crucifixion Re-Enactment at Gua Gua, Pampanga, Phillipines

The crucifixion, which draws large crowds of local and foreign tourists, started in 1946 and has endured ever since. Last year, 15 people were crucified, the highest number since the ritual began. No one has ever died from the bloody rites. The Philippines is predominantly Roman Catholic. The Catholic Church frowns upon the ritual, which combines Catholic fervour with primitive beliefs. The Lenten season is also a period of fasting and penitence in Asia's only majority Catholic country. <http://asiabill.pages.web.com/id11.html>

The Precision of God's Word

Last Sunday was Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter. This event, also known as "the Triumphal Entry," involves one of the most astonishing passages in the entire Bible. The book of Daniel, which was written centuries before the birth of Christ, predicts the exact day that Jesus would make his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The story behind Palm Sunday begins, not in Jerusalem in the time of Christ, but in Babylon several hundred years earlier. The prophet Daniel, who was among the Jews taken captive by the Babylonians, was reading in the Book of Jeremiah. He understood that the seventy years of servitude were almost over and he began to pray for his people. The Angel Gabriel interrupted Daniel's prayer and gave him a four-verse prophecy that is unquestionably the most remarkable passage in the entire Bible: Daniel 9:24-27.

The Meshiach Nagid

The first verse of the prophecy, Daniel 9:24 says: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy Place."

This verse is essentially an overview of the entire prophecy. The idiom of a "week" of years was common in Israel. The prophecy encompasses seventy weeks, that is, seventy times seven years, or 490 years. However verse 26 indicates that there is an interval between the 69th and 70th weeks.

A very specific prediction occurs in the next verse: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times (Daniel 9:25)."

This includes a mathematical prophecy. The Jewish (and Babylonian) calendars used a 360-day year; 69 weeks of 360-day years totals 173,880 days. In effect, Gabriel told Daniel that the interval between the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem until the presentation of the Messiah as King would be 173,880 days. The "Messiah the Prince" in the King James translation is actually the Meshiach Nagid, or "Messiah the King."

⁶ Isachar, Hanan: *Images of the Holy Land*. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, 1997

⁷ Isachar, Hanan: *Images of the Holy Land*. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, 1997

The Countdown Begins

The commandment to restore and build Jerusalem was given by Artaxerxes Longimanus on March 14, 445 BC. (The emphasis in the verse on "the street" and "the wall" was to avoid confusion with other earlier mandates confined to rebuilding the Temple.)

But when did the Messiah present Himself as a King? During the ministry of Jesus Christ there were several occasions in which the people attempted to promote Him as king, but He carefully avoided it, saying "Mine hour is not yet come."

Then one day He meticulously arranges it. On this particular day he rode into the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey, deliberately fulfilling a prophecy by Zechariah that the Messiah would present Himself as king in just that way: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass (Zechariah 9:9)."

Whenever we might easily miss the significance of what was going on, the Pharisees come to our rescue. They felt that the overzealous crowd was blaspheming, proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah the King. However, Jesus responded by saying "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out (Luke 19:40)."

This is the only occasion that Jesus presented Himself as King. It occurred on April 6, 32 AD. When we examine the period between March 14, 445 BC and April 6, 32 AD, and correct for leap years, we discover that it is 173,880 days exactly, to the very day!

It is amazing to realize that Jesus Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem was predicted, to the very day, hundreds of years in advance. The Meshiach Nagid, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

And it does not end there. Look at the correlation of the final week from triumphant entry to the crucifixion. As we saw earlier in our definition of Easter the word "pascha" or Passover. A coincidence that the Passover is 7 day festival? Note what is done during this festival:

3957 π???? [*pascha* /*pas·khah*/] ⁸n n. Of Aramaic origin cf 6453; ⁹TDNT 5:896; ¹⁰TDNTA 797; ¹¹GK 4247; 29 occurrences; ¹²AV translates as "Passover" 28 times, and "Easter" once. **1** the paschal sacrifice (which was accustomed to be offered for the people's deliverance of old from Egypt). **2** the paschal lamb, i.e. the lamb the Israelites were accustomed to slay and eat on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan (the first month of their year) in memory of the day on which their fathers, preparing to depart from Egypt, were bidden by God to slay and eat a lamb, and to sprinkle their door posts with its blood, that the destroying angel, seeing the blood, might pass over their dwellings; Christ crucified is likened to the slain paschal lamb. **3** the paschal supper. **4** the paschal feast, the feast of the Passover, extending from the 14th to the 20th day of the month Nisan¹³

In fact we find that the early church changed the day of Easter observation which according to Chuck Missler is clearly defined in Scripture:

⁸ n n: noun or neuter

⁹ TDNT Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

¹⁰ TDNTA Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume

¹¹ GK Goodrick-Kohlenberger

¹² AV Authorized Version

¹³ Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.* electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. G3957

The Quartodeciman Controversy

It may come as a shock to learn that the early church deliberately committed to separating itself from the explicit record of Scripture. The practice of those Christians insisting on celebrating Passover on the fourteenth day of Nisan from the Old Testament calendar¹ was known as Quartodecimanism (“fourteenism,” as derived from Latin).

It is nothing short of astonishing to discover that not only was this was a major emotional controversy within the early church,² but that the commitment to deviate from the Scriptures was driven by a deep anti-Semitism!

The controversy surrounding this issue was a principal topic at the Council of Nicea in 325 a.d. Emperor Constantine presided over this council—note his own words:

*It was, in the first place, declared improper to follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this holy festival, because their hands having been stained with crime, the minds of these wretched men are necessarily blinded ... Let us, then, have nothing in common with the Jews, who are our adversaries ... avoiding all contact with that evil way ... who, after having compassed the death of the Lord, being out of their minds, are guided not by sound reason, but by an unrestrained passion, wherever their innate madness carries them ... a people so utterly depraved ... Therefore, this irregularity must be corrected, in order that we may no more have any thing in common with those parricides and the murderers of our Lord ... no single point in common with the perjury of the Jews.*³

The early church father, Eusebius, also records Emperor Constantine as writing: ... *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 Saviour a different way.*⁴

Setting a Date for Easter

The council unanimously ruled that the Easter festival should be celebrated throughout the Christian world on the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox; and that if the full moon should occur on a Sunday, and thereby coincide with the Passover festival, Easter should be commemorated on the following Sunday. As a result of the Council of Nicea, and amended by numerous subsequent meetings, the formal church deliberately attempted to design a formula for “Easter” which would avoid any possibility of it falling on the Jewish Passover, even accidentally!

A principal astronomical problem was the discrepancy between the solar year and the lunar year, and thus, the Julian calendar then in use. Numerous alternatives for fixing the date of the feast were tried by the church but proved unsatisfactory, so Easter was celebrated on different dates in different parts of the world.

In 387, for example, the dates of Easter in France and Egypt were 35 days apart. About 465, the church adopted a system of calculation proposed by the astronomer Victorinus, who had been commissioned by Pope Hilarius to reform the calendar and fix the date of Easter. Elements of his method are still in use, although the Scythian monk Dionysius Exiguus made significant adjustments to the Easter cycle in the 6th century.

Refusal of the British and Celtic Christian churches to adopt the proposed changes led to a bitter dispute between them and Rome in the 7th century. Reform of the Julian calendar in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII, through adoption of the Gregorian calendar, eliminated some of the difficulties in fixing the date of Easter and in arranging the ecclesiastical year. Since 1752, when the Gregorian calendar was also adopted in Great Britain and Ireland, Easter has been celebrated on the same day in the Western part of the Christian world.

The Eastern churches, however, which did not adopt the Gregorian calendar, commemorate Easter on a Sunday either preceding or following the date observed in the West. Occasionally the dates coincide; the most recent times were in 1865 and 1963.

In 1928 the British Parliament enacted a measure allowing the Church of England to commemorate Easter on the first Sunday after the second Saturday in April. Despite these steps toward a consolidation, Easter continues to be a “movable” feast.

In the church’s zeal to separate itself from the Biblical text, confusion has continued.

Friday or Wednesday?

Another controversy continues concerning “Good Friday.” While there are many scholars who continue to defend a Friday Crucifixion, there are many who find this doubtful, for at least three reasons:

- I. Jesus specified that there would be “three days and three nights”—His words—between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection;⁵
- II. Jesus went from Jericho to Bethany six days before Passover;⁶ that would require more than a “Sabbath day’s journey” to occur on the Sabbath if Passover was on a Friday;
- III. There were two Sabbaths between Passover and Sunday morning,⁷ including the Feast of Unleavened Bread, one of the seven high Sabbaths each year.

This is why many serious scholars believe the Crucifixion occurred “between the two evenings” on a Wednesday Passover, not on a Friday. Three days later—“the morrow after Shabbat after Passover,”⁸ the Feast of First Fruits, was, indeed, our First Fruits, discovered on that Sunday morning.

Other Issues

There are, of course, many other misunderstandings about the details surrounding those pivotal events.

They had not planned to take Jesus on a feast day, for fear of the Romans.⁹ The timing was controlled by Jesus Christ Himself. Even in the garden of Gethsemane, it was Jesus who was giving the orders.¹⁰

Every detail of the six trials that Jesus endured was illegal.¹¹

Satan was hoping for a “righteous death,” which, in the Torah, was a death by stoning. But the Romans had removed the Jews’ right to capital punishment. The death by crucifixion was detailed in the Scriptures 700 years before crucifixion was invented.¹²

What Is “The Gospel”?

The “Good News” can be summed up in five words: Jesus died and rose again! (See 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.) Perhaps the greatest failure by most renderings of the events of those crucial days—even Mel Gibson’s remarkable movie, *The Passion*, is the portrayal of the Crucifixion as a tragedy: it wasn’t a tragedy, it was an achievement! Literally hundreds of specifications were fulfilled to accomplish a goal set before the foundation of the world.

Prophecies of the Final Week

There are many Old Testament prophecies quoted in the Gospels specifically about Jesus' final week. Here's a brief list:

- He would make a triumphal entry in Jerusalem (Zechariah 9:9, Psalm 118).
- He would be smitten like a shepherd (Zechariah 13).
- He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:1-13 and Psalm 41:9).
- He would be given vinegar and gall (Psalm 69:21).
- They would cast lots for His garments (Psalm 22:18).
- His bones would not be broken (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20).
- His side would be pierced (Zechariah 12 and Psalm 22:16).
- He would die among malefactors (Isaiah 53:9, 12).
- His dying words were foretold (Psalm 22:1,31).
- He would be buried by a rich man (Isaiah 53:9).
- He would rise on the third day (Jonah 1:17; cf. Genesis 22:4 with Hebrews 11:19).
- His resurrection would be followed by the destruction of Jerusalem (Daniel 9, 11 and 12).

Furthermore, The Passion also failed to indicate the most important point: Who He was! He wasn't just a great figure, a teacher, or a positive influence. He was the Creator-God, humbling Himself to become our Kinsman-Redeemer!

It Is Finished!

Now that we have explored Easter what it is and what it is not and the incredible power that God demonstrates in His timing of events that appear to circumvent man's free will lets take a look at the "man" Jesus and one of his attributes that he consumates here with the phrase "it is finished!"

Jesus is a Finisher

"I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do." (John 17:4, NASB95)¹⁴

Stu Weber of Tender Warrior says " To be a finisher requires at least four key elements – "the right stuff" deep down in the chest. Things like:

- A clear eye for the goal – *a focused pursuit*. Call it vision.
- A strong heart to get there – *an undivided heart*. Call it single-minded-ness.
- A little fire in the belly - *a driving intensity*. Call it determination.
- A certain confidence – *a biblical optimism*. Call it faith.

Those qualities spring straight out of the life of the Bible's greatest character ever. Jesus. These same qualities you will find in others in the bible too like Caleb, Joshua, and David. You and I have also been called to be finishers – to complete the calling that God has given each one of us. But how do we get to the finish line? What is the process? What needs to change in me? I think that if we look a little closer at these 4 qualities we will begin to see that we too can be mighty warriors for God!

¹⁴ *New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update*. LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995