

CHAPTER 7

PASSOVER TO EASTER: PAGAN TRANSFORMATIONS

*They have dealt treacherously with the LORD,
for they have begotten pagan children.*

—The Lord God

THERE IS ABUNDANT historical evidence establishing the roots of the various pagan holidays foisted upon the Christian world, and how many of these pagan days were cleverly used in an attempt to draw the Gentile masses. This attraction of the Gentile masses was accomplished in part by replacing God's richly meaningful and commanded holy days and Sabbaths with old pagan holidays that were whitewashed, Christianized, and renamed. Over time this approach resulted in a complete transformation of many of God's feasts into worldly holidays. It was as if Passover and Pentecost went through a complete pagan morphogenesis, while other of God's holy feasts

were simply ignored, forgotten, and replaced with completely different ancient pagan commemorations.

After the death of Yeshua's apostles, Pentecost suffered a myriad of pagan interpolations supplanting rich meaningful lessons from God, and remarkably, this was done in the name of "Christianity." God's meaning *Feast of Shavuot* (Pentecost) was known as the Feast of Firstfruits (representing the first harvest of God's elect and the firstfruits of those receiving His Spirit and law into their hearts and souls) and the Feast of Weeks (reminding us to recall, recount, and remember our journey between sin and God for seven weeks unto day 50). To the masses, Shavuot or Pentecost became only a twisted specter of the beautiful holy feast day God gave us. It developed into yet one more pagan-rooted holiday, with a focus on the day named after the sun god. God prophesied this kind of thing would happen (Dan.7:25). *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (1911 edition) has much to say in regard to these types of changes. Also, *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop, under the section "Festivals," is quite revealing as to the methods used to entice the masses by Christianizing pagan holidays as substitutes for God's commanded holy days.

Various church historians have recorded many attempts of a far-reaching ancient apostate Roman Church trying to Christianize pagan religious days by changing their names into names that depict real or so-called biblical events. These same "religious authorities" also sought to change the dates for God's appointed holy feast days to that of their renamed pagan

holidays. For example, Passover was quickly changed to Easter. While, biblically, the date of Passover would fall on various days of the week, Easter was fixed to the Sunday of the Passover week.¹

Lent and “Easter Sunday” are inferior substitutes for

- Passover, commemorating Christ as our Passover Lamb and Savior of both Israel and ultimately the whole world;
- Turning all people to God in meaningful ways through belief in the Messiah and by real repentance from transgressing God’s laws to God’s rich and loving way of life as pictured by the Days of Unleavened Bread; and
- The hope-filled preparation and anticipation of God’s help and instruction that is brought about by faithfully numbering the countdown to and keeping of Pentecost when God’s Holy Spirit, the holy Seed of the Father, established God’s church. (Please see this author’s companion book, *PENTECOST: A Countdown to Freedom*, for more on the rich meaning and purpose of God’s holy feast of Pentecost and what the holy Seed of the Father can do for you.)

Passover depicts Christ as the perfect, sinless, humble (unleavened), and atoning Passover sacrifice given for the sins of humankind, while the Days of Unleavened Bread signify the beginning of a new

journey out of this sin-laden world. The Passover season teaches God's people to put away their old, sinful ways and eagerly anticipate and count down the days to the real freedom that the giving of God's law and Spirit on Pentecost would bring. Compare that with Lent, which lacks real godly repentance, and Easter Sunday, which was founded to honor the Babylonian Easter goddess (the goddess of fertility) and Baal the sun god!

This early attempt at Christianizing pagan holidays, and calling them "Christmas" (which originally was kept in honor of the sun god) or "Easter Sunday" in honor of the popular goddess Ishtar, (pronounced "Easter") was a very popular and effective way of drawing the masses into this new, spurious religion that sought to dominate and replace the small flock that Jesus kept in His Father's name (John 17:12). This clever and diabolical move was also designed to Christianize the first day of the week (Sunday)—named after the sun god Baal—by teaching Easter Sunday in place of Passover as the first perceived important "Christian" day. By teaching and focusing on the falsehood that Yeshua rose at sunrise on a Sunday (called Easter Sunday), it was implied and later taught that God's weekly Sabbath—which falls upon the seventh day of the week—was abrogated by this newly found importance of Sunday. According to Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, a graduate of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, "Today Italians still refer to Sunday as 'pasquetta,' which means little Easter."²

JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED ON A WEDNESDAY NOT A FRIDAY

God's Word clearly shows Christ was buried on a Wednesday afternoon, just before the High Holy Day of the Passover week called Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is why God's Word refers to the date of Yeshua's death and burial as a "preparation day." But many, because they are not familiar with God's seven annual Sabbaths called "Feasts of the LORD," *assumed* the preparation day was preparation for the weekly Sabbath. Thus they *assumed*, and thus they still believe, it was a Jesus was crucified and put into the tomb on a Friday. But that is not what the Bible teaches. God's Word clearly says Jesus was crucified on the day before the High Sabbath of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Notice the time and date of Jesus' crucifixion as detailed by the apostle John: "Now it was the **Preparation Day of the Passover**, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!'" (John 19:14).

It was *NOT* the preparation for the weekly Sabbath, but for the High Sabbath of the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread. The approaching High Holy Feast Day was also regularly called a "Sabbath," but the designation "high day" was reserved exclusively for the annual holy feast days.

John 19:31 says, "Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away."

As we read our Bibles carefully and learn to keep God's holy festivals, a depth of clarity in understanding takes place (Ps 119:98). Once a truth seeker sees clear biblical proof that the "preparation day" before Jesus' burial was not referring to the *weekly* Sabbath, they naturally begin to understand He was not buried on a Friday—the sixth day of the week. But to date, most Christians seem unaware of these biblical facts.

There also seems to have developed a marked effort by some to ignore or undermine God's feasts and to hide or ignore their existence in New Testament Scripture, in part to facilitate their observance of a Sunday resurrection. Once misinformation is taught by widely respected teachers and organizations, it becomes very difficult to get people to reexamine the scriptural evidences without bias.

Admirable and blessed are you readers who carefully examine and accept biblical facts without bias. Blessed be the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Yeshua who opens our eyes and minds to receive and understand His precious words. Let's not let men or tradition steal God's words away from us (Jer. 23:30-32).

Do you remember the only sign Yeshua said He would give to verify His messiahship?

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days *and* three nights

in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be *three days and three nights* in the heart of the earth.

—Matt. 12:38–40, emphasis added

It is absolutely impossible to fit three days and three nights between a Friday afternoon burial and a Sunday morning resurrection.

I trust that God's people understand that three days and three nights from any afternoon will always end on another afternoon! Any count that includes three days and three nights will always end at the same time of day that the count began—three days later! That's obvious. But some, perhaps well-meaning teachers, influenced by an amalgamation of pagan Easter Sunday traditions with an acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, would have you believe Jesus did not mean, "three days and three nights," as He said. This, even though Jesus Himself said this would be the only sign He would give of His being the Messiah. Would you rather accept their *interpretations* of Jesus' teachings, over Jesus' clear words? Jesus warned us that many false teachers would proclaim Him as Christ but would deceive many with a false gospel about Him (Matt. 24:5). Do you believe those who want to minimize Jesus' words and claim those three days and three nights can fit into a one-and-a-half-day period? Take a look:

1. Friday afternoon to Saturday afternoon is one day (1 Day).

2. Saturday afternoon to Sunday morning is only half of another day (½ day). (Total 1½ days).

That's only half of the time Yeshua said He would be in the heart of the earth—a full one-and-a-half days short of the length of time Yeshua Himself said His body would remain in the grave.

These teachers deny the holy days Messiah and His apostles and disciples kept and replace them with Christianized, ancient, pagan rituals and days that honor the fertility goddess Ishtar and her sacred animal the hare, as well as Baal the ancient sun god. They put aside the Lord's Passover and Sabbaths and keep in their place a pagan, Gentile Easter and Sunday! Once the example of Jesus, His disciples, and His church keeping God's holy festivals began to be ignored, the precious guiding meanings and lessons each of God's enlightening feasts teach us began to be lost to most people. All of God's Sabbaths are a guiding sign, like a beacon in the night (Ex. 13:6–9; 31:13; Ps. 119:105). Many goodly people who love the Lord have unknowingly accepted a pagan transformation away from God's holy festivals to keep inferior, ancient, renamed Gentile holidays instead. They've had God's words stolen from them. Have you fallen into this snare?

Indeed, through deception, Satan has cleverly held many good people captive against their will (2 Tim. 2:26). But thanks be to God, because as He grants us each repentance, more and more people will

come to the full truth (2 Tim. 2:25). The acceptance of a pagan morphogenesis of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost will not survive much longer.

Jesus demonstrated that He knew how many hours are in a day and the distinction between the day and the night: “Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him’” (John 11:9–10).

No one denies that the expression “in three days” could include portions of each of three days. However, when the Hebrew expression “three days and three nights” is used, it always means three full twenty-four-hour days.

From the beginning, God’s method of counting time has always been to divide days into two periods, one of light and one of darkness. Therefore, “the evening and the morning,” makes up one day (Gen. 1:5). Jesus understood that each day began with the evening, and that it was made up of the dark evening hours followed by the daylight hours.

Christ did not just say He would be in the grave for three days. He specifically said He would be in the grave, “three days and three nights,” for a full seventy-two-hour period—just like Jonah (Matt. 12:40).

Now let’s count the time Jesus was actually in the tomb:

- Wednesday afternoon to Thursday afternoon (Abib 14 to 15), high day of unleavened bread, makes up the first day and first night.
- Thursday afternoon to Friday afternoon (Abib 15 to 16), the second day of unleavened bread, makes up the second day and second night.
- Friday afternoon to Sabbath afternoon (Abib 16 to 17), the third day of unleavened bread, makes up the third day and third night.
- Christ rises Sabbath (Saturday) afternoon.

This is why He was *already gone before Sunday morning sunrise*, when Mary went to visit the tomb while it was yet in the dark of night!

Notice what *The Companion Bible* appendix notes say regarding Jesus' promise to be in the tomb "three days and three nights":

The fact that "three days" is used by Hebrew idiom for any part of three days and three nights is not disputed; because that was the common way of reckoning, just as it was when used of years. Three of any number of years was used inclusively of any part of those years, as may be seen in the reckoning of the reigns of any of the kings of Israel and Judah.

But, when the number of "nights" is stated *as well as* the number of "days," then the expression ceases to be an idiom, and becomes a literal statement of fact.³

Jesus was placed in the tomb on a Wednesday afternoon before the beginning of the High Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After resting in the grave for three full days and three full nights, Jesus rose late on Saturday afternoon (the weekly Sabbath) during the days of Unleavened Bread. Two good articles setting forth the Scriptures on these points are published in *The Companion Bible* (appendixes 144 and 156).

The fact that Jesus' resurrection was on that Saturday afternoon is the reason why Mary found the tomb already empty when she arrived early Sunday before morning broke—before sunrise—while it was still dark. Notice:

Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."

—John 20:1–2

Therefore, since we know Jesus was put into the tomb in the afternoon of Passover day (Wednesday) just before the High Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it stands to reason that "three days and three nights" later He rose on an afternoon! What afternoon? Since Jesus had already "risen" (past tense) "very early" on the first day of the week—before light even began to break (John 20:1)—and since the preceding day

was a weekly Sabbath, the true biblical chronicle of time dictates that Jesus' resurrection was on Sabbath afternoon.

Please note: The gospel accounts do not say Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, but that His tomb was visited early on the first day of the week and found empty. There were no eyewitnesses of His resurrection. The eyewitness accounts are of His death, and that He appeared alive to His disciples again after three full days.

We are left with the very sign Jesus gave of His being the Messiah—that He would be raised seventy-two hours after He was put into the tomb. Jesus was raised then from His rest, on the afternoon of the weekly Sabbath that fell within the Feast of Unleavened Bread—thus the empty tomb Sunday morning.

Therefore, it is clear that from the afternoon of Passover day, Wednesday (when Yeshua was put into the grave), to Saturday afternoon (weekly Sabbath) during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, there were exactly three days and three nights! The Word of God is not broken!

How clear and refreshing God's Word is when we derive our beliefs from what God's Word says instead of trying to fit the Scriptures into our beliefs.

Notice what *The Companion Bible* (appendix 156), says were the difficulties and causes that led to the misinterpretation of the time of Yeshua's crucifixion and resurrection:

“We are furnished by Scripture with certain facts and fixed points which, taken together, enable us (1) to determine the events which filled up the days of “the last week” of our Lord’s life on earth; (2) to fix the day of His crucifixion; and (3) to ascertain the duration of the time He remained in the tomb.

The difficulties connected with these three have arisen (1) from not having noted these fixed points; (2) from the fact of Gentiles’ *not having been conversant with the law concerning the three great feasts of the LORD*; and (3) from not having reckoned the days as commencing (some six hours before our own) and running from sunset to sunset, instead of from midnight to midnight.”⁴

—emphasis mine

Satan has cleverly hidden this truth from people, who think they understand, and he has continued to deceive people through a continued undermining of God’s feasts and laws. Thus the masses confident in their way follow and believe their teachers who say Jesus rose at sunrise on Sunday morning, and then proclaim Sunday to be a holy day in honor of this supposed Sunday sunrise resurrection. But the impossibility of this teaching is beginning to be realized by more people every day. Historically, Satan used this false teaching to effectively bring in the pagan masses who already worshipped Baal and their other Babylonian gods and goddesses on the pagan day of the sun. Today, Sunday is just accepted by the masses, and though the history and roots of what

they believe and practice is available, they seem not yet able to see or digest it. God speed the day when the great deceiver is bound and silenced (Rev. 20:3)! But even today, God is opening the eyes of many of His people, and as God promised through Daniel, in the latter days knowledge is increasing (Dan. 12:4, 9).

In the meantime, this clever deception has served to confuse the truth of Christ and His Passover, turning it into yet another reason to assemble the masses on the day of the sun. But that's not all it did. It also set up the second perceived New Testament "holy day" as also being on a Sunday: Pentecost. Many historians believe Pentecost, fitting in with Easter, was changed to always fall on a Sunday. It's interesting to note that the time between Easter and Pentecost is still called by many churches the "seven weeks of Easter." Many people will have a hard time accepting the fact that human beings also changed Pentecost to be on Sunday, but it is a fact, nonetheless.

Concerning the changing from Passover to Easter and its association with Pentecost and Sunday, Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi wrote,

In numerous patristic testimonies the weekly and annual Easter-Sunday are treated as basically the same feast commemorating the same event of the resurrection. In a document attributed to Irenaeus it is specifically enjoined not to kneel down *on Sunday nor on Pentecost, that is, the seven weeks of the Easter period*, "because it is of equal significance with the Lord's day." The reason given is that *both* feasts are

“a symbol of the resurrection.” Tertullian confirms that custom but adds the prohibition of fasting as well: “On Sunday it is unlawful to fast or to kneel while worshipping. We enjoy the same liberty *from Easter to Pentecost.*”

He continues, quoting F. A. Regan: “*In the season extending from Easter to Pentecost, the same custom was followed, thus showing the relation between the annual and weekly feasts.*”⁵

The link between Passover being “changed” to Easter Sunday, and the “seven weeks of Easter” always culminating in a Sunday Pentecost, as part of a broader attempt by a new and counterfeit church to make these two Sundays (and thus all Sundays) the new Sabbaths or “holy days,” cannot be honestly or factually denied.

Many historians have recognized the historical effort to attach Pentecost to Easter Sunday as an effort by a new group of “formerly” pagan theologians to “Christianize” their former method of worshipping on Sunday. This was done by claiming Sunday to be the new “holy Sabbath” by proclaiming it as both the day our Savior arose from the dead and the day the church was founded. Thus, these Gentiles, who now called themselves “Christian,” also changed the day upon which God’s Feast of Firstfruits (called “Pentecost” by the Gentile Greeks) was kept. (No one can actually change God’s appointed times or laws, though some may deceive others into believing that they have [Dan.7:25].) Again, this was done by linking Pentecost

to Easter Sunday, instead of the biblical Hebrew link to Passover and the first annual Sabbath of the Days of Unleavened Bread.

When one uses the ancient standard Hebrew biblical method of establishing Pentecost, one finds that Pentecost can fall on a variety of days of the week. This is borne out by the context of Leviticus 23 and the account in Deuteronomy 16.

Roman Catholics called this new, so-called Christian holiday, “Whit-Sunday,” meaning “White Sunday.” This Greek Pentecost, which means, “count fifty,” began to be counted from Easter Sunday to another Sunday, fifty days later. This change, and the change of focus, seems to have fooled all but the Jewish Christians, who continued to number Pentecost as they had always counted it, beginning on the day after the first annual Sabbath of Unleavened Bread, regardless of which day of the week it happened to fall.

As many church historians have noted, a new church, totally unlike the one Jesus founded, was formed within less than seventy years of the original Jerusalem church of God.

Jesse Lyman Hurlbut wrote, “For fifty years after St. Paul’s life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D. with the writing of the earliest church fathers, we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul.”⁶

The faithful little flock Jesus established (usually called Jesus’ disciples or saints in the Bible) was soon

overshadowed by a new and much larger Gentile church with an amalgamation of Christianized pagan doctrines and holidays, intermingled with some biblical truths—all in the name of Christ. This new church proclaimed and took to itself the name of Christ, while its message deceived the masses because it did not proclaim the same gospel Christ proclaimed (Matt. 24:5). This new religion was a spurious bastardization of the church Jesus founded. It was so far reaching that it influenced even some of the true church of God leadership (Rev. 2:13–16, 20–21).

Soon the clergy of this new Roman church (based out of Rome instead of Jerusalem) twisted and changed many doctrines. It began to abandon the holy days, the Hebrew calendar (Dan. 7:25), and the true teachings of the original primarily Jewish disciples and apostles of Christ. A strong anti-Semite bias quickly took hold in this new Roman church as the Jews were blamed for the death of the Messiah—although the Romans participated and Jesus died for the sins of us all. Although Jesus Himself was a Jew, as were most early disciples of Christ, anything considered Jewish or perceived as going in the direction of Judaism was soon frowned upon as anti-Christian.

So strong and pervasive was this anti-Jewish influence that this prejudice is still felt and practiced by many today—even among God's church. This is evidenced by the feelings some still harbor against messianic Jews and Judaism. Many thoughtful people in the fellowship of the Sabbath-keeping church of God have no qualms about using various commentaries

written by Sunday-keeping authors who reject God's holy Sabbath days. However, many of those same people would shun any commentary from the Talmud or from a messianic Jew. One receives the impression today that many well-meaning Sabbath-keeping churches of God, under the influence of this misguided anti-Semitic fear of Judaism, are more accepting of teachers and scholars who are steeped in pagan ideas and customs than they are of anyone (or anything taught by anyone) whom they perceive as Jewish or related in any way to Judaism. In light of the fact that one of the main purposes of Messiah's sacrifice was to tear down the wall of division that separated Jews from Gentiles (Eph. 2:14), any continuing form of anti-Semitism in the church is dumbfounding.

This often unconscious prejudice is sufficiently prevalent so that many students of God's Word have closed their minds to a valuable vein of knowledge, because they perceive it as Judaism. This influence has affected what many teachers have taught. This includes the way one counts Pentecost seven weeks from Easter Sunday, instead of from the first annual Sabbath of the Days of Unleavened Bread (as the Jews yet do) and as many Jewish and non-Jewish historical sources cite as the ancient practice from Old Testament times.

Is it possible that this pagan influence regarding Pentecost also deeply affected and infected past and present teachers and members of God's church? History suggests that it has.

There is no denying that an incredibly deceptive transformation of Passover and Pentecost—with pagan-rooted teachings—has taken hold, and that the early church of God battled but eventually succumbed to many Gentile heresies that were being foisted upon God's flock (Rev. 2:13–16, 20–21; Gal.1:6–7; Acts 20:30).

Thankfully, for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, we still have scriptural and historical evidence to counter this confusion. The strong who are led by God's Spirit will have their eyes opened, for they are free indeed (John 6:32), and the light of the holy days that reflects from His body blesses us all.

