

## PASSOVER DIFFERENCES: Another look

Wil Berg, March 2022

Last spring, I wrote the paper "Passover Observance Early 15<sup>th</sup>" (posted on *AShortWORK* 3.21.21). This year, in preparation for Passover, I re-examined my beliefs and practices along with other current ekklesia beliefs and practices. Also, with newly acquired historical information, I hope the following comments and observations will increase understanding of how significantly the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) influenced Passover practices, by means of a number of decrees made two centuries after the Messiah's death.

Differences about the date of Passover observance have varied amongst God's people (ekklesia) for many years. Most Churches of God observe Passover on the beginning night of Abib 14, believing Jesus' last supper signified the correct date for it. Others believe the beginning night of Abib 15 is the correct date.

Some who think early Abib 14 is the new Passover time acknowledge that Abib 15 is its correct Old Testament date that was based on Exodus 12. But they believe Abib 15 Passover observance does not carry forward into the present new covenant era.

However, it should be noted that a Passover observance during early Abib 14 disregards and conflicts with Exodus 12:14-15 which states that the feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread is a memorial "feast to the Lord throughout your generations - - - by **an everlasting ordinance**. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread."

To me it is presumptuous for some to claim that the early Abib 15 Passover date does not carry forward, or to conclude there is a new, different, early Abib 14 Passover date, when there is no specific Scriptural statement to support such a change.

With God's Exodus 12 instructions in mind, instead of thinking Jesus followed His Father's will by changing the Passover date during His last supper, I feel Jesus carried out His Father's will by teaching His closest disciples the added new Passover symbolic meanings before being crucified and placed in a tomb. Jesus made no mention that night of changing the

Passover date, which to me indicates His Father had no intention of changing His original Exodus 12 Abib 15 Passover date.

Scripture warns against adding to the text, with God the Father (YHWH) Himself instructing, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it" (Deuteronomy 4:2). Similar warnings are stated in Matthew 5:17-19, and Revelation 22:18-19. Also, 1 Corinthians 4:6 tells us "not to think beyond what is written."

Such warnings should also serve as a caution against over-emphasizing the Messiah's sufferings during Passover. There is no focus on the Passover lamb suffering in Exodus 12. Jesus always did His Father's will (John 5:30), and never sought to be worshipped. Therefore, the main focus should be on the Father's love for the world through the offering of His Son's sacrifice (John 3:16)- which includes the Son's broken body and shed blood enabling the Father's deliverance of mankind from sin and eternal death.

Exodus 12:18 clarifies further: "On the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening."

The term "at evening" can only be understood correctly as being the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>/beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> day to have 7 days of unleavened bread through the 21<sup>st</sup> (Abib 15-21). For a similar example and explanation of a day see Leviticus 23: 27, 32. In comparison, if one counts Passover/UB from the beginning of Abib 14, it indicates eating unleavened bread for 8 days, instead of the commanded seven days.)

Also, to show its permanency, the Passover instructions and dates of Exodus 12 are still in force during the Millennium (Ezekiel 45:21)- "In the first month, on the [end of the] fourteenth day of the month, you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days, unleavened bread shall be eaten."

### **Jesus' Last Supper was not the Passover**

Jesus' last meal on the evening beginning of Abib 14 was a special singular event, *but not a commanded holy time*. He knew He was going to be killed

that afternoon as the anti-typical fulfillment of the Passover lamb, and that His disciples were not expecting this.

We can reasonably assume that Jesus desired to have this supper with His closest disciples because He realized it was His last opportunity before His death to do His Father's will by explaining the addition of new Passover bread and wine symbols and their meanings.

The disciples who ate with Jesus at the Abib 14 supper would have known this supper was not the biblically commanded Passover meal. Like Jesus, they had all observed Passover with their parents and families while growing up and knew its correct biblical date (Luke 2:41-42; John 2:13, 23).

I believe this is further supported by Jesus using leavened bread (Greek="artos") throughout this last supper (recorded in all the Gospel accounts and 1 Corinthians 10-12). Had this been Passover, Jesus would have had to use unleavened bread (Greek="azimos") which the Father commanded in Exodus 12:8.

A NT Greek/English Interlinear and a Greek/English Lexicon verify these points regarding "artos".

### **The Quartodecimans: A Different Custom**

On a related matter, the little understood beliefs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD Quartodecimans (aka "fourteenters") need to be explained, as these people often come up in discussions about Passover. Because the word "Quartodeciman" indicates a connection with the number fourteen, some use this to conclude that the "fourteenters" kept the Passover a day earlier on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib.

However, according to the extensive documentation in *The Messianic Feast*, (T. Alex Tennent, 2014, Table I, pages 3-21), the assumption that fourteenters kept Passover at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> is not true. Instead, their name came from their voluntary (not commanded) practice of fasting from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib until 3 PM of that day.

**The name and practice of the fourteenthers was not about the date of Passover, but about the day of Christ's crucifixion. Their tradition regarded Abib 14 as a special day to honor and remember the Messiah's anti-typical sacrifice for the payment of human sin.**

The fourteenthers' voluntary fasting practice during most of the 14<sup>th</sup> was in direct conflict with teachings of the early RCC which made the Friday preceding Easter Sunday a commanded fast day. In reality, differences between the two groups went beyond when people fasted. There were also major disagreements in practice between Rome's somber ritualistic Passover practices in church buildings, and the ekklesia's family-centered joyful but reverent Passover practice in homes that followed the original Exodus 12 example and pattern.

There is no biblical command to fast on Abib 14, or prohibition of doing it.

After fasting until 3 PM, following the practices of the apostle John and Polycarp, the fourteenthers concluded Abib 14 by preparing for and observing the seven day Feast of Passover/ Unleavened Bread from the night of Abib 15 through 21, with the added new understanding of the Passover symbols that the Messiah taught before He was crucified.

### **Overview of Quartodeciman History**

Polycarp (69-165 AD), bishop of Smyrna, instructed by John, a loved apostle of Jesus Christ who followed His teachings and practices, was an early fourteenthers. His fourteenthers practices as an early Eastern Church leader put him at odds with the western church leaders at Rome about Passover/Easter date and observance.

Polycarp journeyed to Rome in AD 150 to meet with Roman Bishop Anicetus in an effort to discuss his convictions in hopes of resolving their differences. However after much discussion, neither could change the belief and practices of the other and they separated in peace.

39 years later, Victor became the new Bishop of Rome (189-199 AD). However, being a very different man than Anicetus, Victor pressured the

Quartodecimans to change their 14<sup>th</sup> day fasting and Passover week practices to the developing Good Friday/Easter rituals of the RCC.

Objecting to this, Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, with other Asiatic bishops, replied by writing a letter to Victor, that “my relatives always observed the day [by fasting] when the people of the Jews threw away the leaven [on Abib 14].” But this did not change Victor’s hostility toward the fourteenthers. Rather, he called them heretics and threatened them with excommunication. But because many bishops opposed the excommunication of the fourteenthers, it did not happen at that time.

In 325 AD Roman Emperor Constantine presided over the Council of Nicea with the desire to separate from and abolish all Jewish practices. Constantine condemned the Quartodecimans as heretics and adversaries because they practiced “old Jewish customs” instead of those taught by the RCC and considered “God’s Divine Will.”

Sixteen years later at the Synod of Antioch in 341 AD, the fourteenthers (eastern ekklesia Christians) were officially excommunicated. This illustrated the effect of the Roman church’s consolidation of power, with the office of pope raised above the bishops.

Today, as in the days of the fourteenthers, the choices for Christians remain essentially the same: adopt/modify the Roman church ritualistic “Passover”/Easter-like practices for “members only” in church buildings, or observe God’s Exodus 12 family-centered Abib 15 Passover night meal in homes with newly added meanings.