

WEDNESDAY NIGHT BIBLE STUDY

April 8, 2020

I'm often asked why Easter is always on a different date than the preceding and succeeding year. The answer can be complex, but the simple answer is that Easter is the first Sunday after the full moon that occurs on or after March 21. The reason behind this is because the date of Easter is determined by the Jewish Passover.

As you study the week of our Lord's crucifixion, timing and dating can be confusing. The reason behind this is because Jewish time is reckoned differently than ours. Our days begin anew at midnight each night, following Roman reckoning of time. Jewish days begin at sundown and continue until the following sundown. The basis for this calculating of time is found in the wording of Scripture. In Genesis 1, the Word says "and the evening and the morning were the first day" and subsequently follows that pattern for the days of creation. Therefore, the Jewish people reckon their day as starting in the evening.

Also, Hebrew months are lunar; that is, they are based upon the appearance of the thin crescent of the new moon. The moon orbits the earth, passing through its phases to the next New Moon, approximately once every 29 ½ days. For this reason, Jewish months generally alternate between 29 and 30 days in length. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for month is (*hodesh*), which is also the word for moon. Thus, Passover is based on the lunar cycle and falls on differing dates on our calendar.

All of this is significant to us because of the connection between Passover and Easter. As Christians, we understand that the Jewish feast of Passover pointed to, and was fulfilled by the crucifixion of Jesus; which occurred during the Jewish Passover feast. Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul noted for all time that "**Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us**" (1 Cor. 5:7)

Looking briefly at the timeline we must first note that the feast known as Passover is actually three feasts that are recognized by the singular name of Passover. They are Passover, Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits.

As we mentioned last Sunday morning, it all began on Nissan 10; the Passover lamb was to be set apart and inspected. We celebrate this day as Palm Sunday, when Jesus publicly presented Himself to the house of Israel.

Four days later would begin the **Feast of Passover**. On that day, Nissan 14, a male lamb was to be slain for each household. This would represent and commemorate Israel's **redemption** from bondage in Egypt. It was on this day that Jesus was crucified, **redeeming** the world from the bondage of sin and death.

God appointed another feast which was to begin the next day after Passover, on the 15th of Nissan. It is called the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**. It was to last for seven days. Simply put, unleavened bread was to be eaten for seven days. It was the bread of haste as when they left Egypt there was no time to allow bread to rise. It was also to signify purification of the home. Leaven, or yeast, causes fermentation, which is the first stage of decay. Leaven is often equated with sin and error in the Bible; Jesus warned of the "leaven" of the Pharisees. Therefore, observant Jews, even today, will rid their homes of any leaven during this feast.

The decay brought by the sin of the first Adam, was arrested by the death of the second Adam... Jesus. This is signified by the fact that though He was dead, and placed in a borrowed tomb, His body experienced no decay. (See Acts 2:27; Psalm 16:10) Jesus fulfilled this feast by halting the corrupting scourge of sin on humanity by His sacrificial death as confirmed by the fact that although dead, the Sinless One's body experienced no decay.

The third feast occurs on the second day of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is called **The Feast of Firstfruits** and is celebrated on Nissan 16...the third day after Passover!

On this day, the first fruits of the winter barley crop would be made into sheaves and carefully presented in a meticulous ceremony before the Lord. The Lord's acceptance of this offering was an "earnest", or pledge, on His part for a full harvest.

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man after his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming" I Cor. 15:20-23 (emphasis mine)

Remember, the feast is called "the feast of the Lord" (Lev 23:4). Remember also that the Hebrew word translated "feast" means *appointed times*. The idea is that the sequence and timing of each of these feasts have been carefully orchestrated by God himself. Each is part of a comprehensive whole. Collectively, they tell a story. The story of God's appointed times!

God the Father had appointed a time at which the salvation of the world would be accomplished. He foretold that event through His prophets and through His feast. Jesus fulfilled everything precisely. **There is no other name!**