

Passover and Easter: What are You Celebrating?

By www.messianicsabbath.com

Passover and Easter usually occur close together on the calendar, and presumably both commemorate the same event. Are they the same or what's the difference? I assumed Passover was Jewish and Easter was Christian. But what I found surprised me.

Passover celebrates an historical event. Recorded in Jewish and Egyptian history, it occurred around 1260 BCE. In the Torah (the Bible's first five books) Exodus recounts that it eventually took ten plagues upon Egypt before Pharaoh would allow the Jewish (originally called Israelite) slaves to leave his land to worship God. Despite warnings that the tenth plague would kill all the eldest sons and livestock, Pharaoh still refused to let them go. So God instructed the Israelites to mark their doorposts with the blood of a lamb, so that the plague would *pass over* them, hence the name.

The Israelites were spared, and Pharaoh finally relented but pursued them as far as the Red Sea. Moses, the Israelite leader, miraculously parted the Sea and led the people across, the Egyptian army drowning behind them. Commonly known as "The Exodus," this event ended 400 years of Israelite slavery. Forty years later, the Jewish people began celebrating the event annually. Today Passover still celebrates the supernatural victory, deliverance from bondage and protection from the ten plagues that befell Egypt. A meal (a "Seder") is prepared according to the Torah's instructions.

The name Easter is derived from "Eostre," an ancient Saxon fertility goddess, thus the use of bunnies and eggs even early on. Various holidays based on the vernal equinox have honored pagan deities in many cultures for several centuries. Today, Wiccans and Neopagans still celebrate this day (now typically called "Ostara" after a Germanic fertility goddess) to welcome spring and the new life it brings.

Christians' Easter observance also celebrates an historical event occurring around 27 CE. According to the Bible, Yeshua, the long awaited Jewish Messiah, hosted a Passover Seder shortly before he

was crucified by the Roman government. Three days later he was resurrected. Christians believe Yeshua's blood saves their souls, just as the Passover lamb's blood saved the Israelites' lives. Yeshua's resurrection promises believers victory over death and eternal life with God.

Easter was first referenced as a celebration of Yeshua's resurrection by the church in the second century. In America, colonial Puritans dismissed Easter as pagan due to lingering influences from its origins. However, it became widely observed by Christians in the mid-late 1800s. Many now call it "Resurrection Day."

I found aspects of Passover and the Christian Easter that closely connect the two. Yeshua was Jewish and celebrated Passover annually. He died on Passover, which is why Christians often call him the "Passover Lamb" or "Lamb of God," and why the holidays occur together. Moreover, while many Jewish holy days have always included ceremonial wine and bread, the Christian ceremony of Communion is attributed to Yeshua's specific mention of wine and bread during his last Passover meal.

I also realized points of irony which cause confusion between the two. Yeshua and his disciples after him celebrated Passover, but the Bible never mentions Easter or a resurrection celebration. Jews celebrate Passover even if they don't believe Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah, because it's commanded in the Torah (the Bible). However, most followers of Yeshua don't celebrate Passover, but opt for Easter. When celebrated by Christians, Passover usually commemorates Yeshua's "Last Supper" since He was crucified shortly afterward.

Ultimately, exploring age-old customs can unearth long-held assumptions. By questioning these traditions, I gained a more honest understanding of both celebrations. This year, I encourage you to celebrate knowledgeably, choosing practices that truly reflect your religious convictions.