

3-30-24 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – *Tzav* (“command”)
Torah Portion: Leviticus 6:8 – 8:36
Haftarah: Jeremiah 7:21-8:3
Suggested Acheron K’tuvim: 1 Cor 11:22-27

Under the Law – Part 4 - What About Easter?

Central question of this message: What part of “This do in remembrance of Me” is unclear?

Today we are in the second portion of the book of Vayikra (Leviticus), *Tzav*. *Tzav* means “command”.

The name of our parasha, comes from the first line of the passage, where G-d tells Moses to “command Aaron” regarding the “burnt offering”, in Hebrew the *olah*.

Lev 6:8-9 (in the Tanach 6:1-2)

8 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 9 "Command Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the law for the burnt offering: the burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire on the altar is to be kept burning on it.

וַיִּדְבֹּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: 6:1
 And spake the Lord unto Moses, saying,
 1696 3068 413 4872 559

צֵר אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בְּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תֹּרַת הַמִּצְוָה 2
 Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of
 6680 853 175 853 1121 559 2063 9999 8451

הַעֲלֵה הָיָה הָעֹלָה עַל מוֹקְדָה
 the burnt offering: It is the burnt offering, because of the burning
 5930 1931 9999 5930 5921 4169

עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה עַד־הַבֹּקֶר וְאֵשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
 upon the altar all night unto the morning, and the fire of the altar
 5921 4196 3605 3915 5704 1242 784 4196

הַתֹּקֵד בּוֹ: shall be burning in it.
 3344 871a

This parasha speaks of a number of sacrifices that are to be made upon the altar in the Mishkan. The normative church of today seems to be solidly in the position that all sacrifices were “done away with by the Cross.” To a degree, that is true. But to a degree, it is not. It is clear by Scripture that there will be sacrifices in the kingdom Temple.

Isa 56:6-8

6 "Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,
 To minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord,

To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath, And holds fast My covenant; 7 Even those I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. **Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar;** For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." 8 The Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, "Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered."

That scripture does not define which sacrifices and burnt offerings will be offered at that time. We know that Yeshua's sacrifice provided the atonement sacrifice for sin, for those who have received that gift. That cannot be reasonably in dispute. But the prophecy is also true. Precisely which sacrifices and burnt offerings will still be appropriately offered in the Temple in which Yeshua Himself will sit enthroned is the subject of another, later, teaching.

I will defer that discussion for now. But it does give me a good chance to continue our discussion in the ongoing series where I am dealing with issues that seem to give the Body of believers a bit of trouble, or are subject to misunderstanding.

The church calendar gives rise to the topic we will deal with today, and that is “What about Easter?” This year, tomorrow is declared by most Christian churches to be “Easter Sunday.” But in the Hebrew calendar for this year, Passover doesn’t come until April 22, and First Fruits (resurrection Sunday) does not come until April 28. So, there is a dramatic disconnect between the church calendar and the Hebrew calendar.¹

If both the Jews and Christians have the Tanach in their Bibles, and each recognizes the value of the important “appointed times” of G-d – for instance, Easter and Passover - then how did Jews and Christians become so disconnected with one other in the timing of this one celebration?

This disconnect developed early in Christianity. Early believers in Yeshua, even those from among the nations who came to faith, followed the accepted Hebrew calendar. There was no “Christian calendar” for a very long time, and thus no disconnect existed.

¹ Let me be quick to point out that there has historically been, and today still is, considerable controversy regarding precisely when any particular festival date falls. Much depends on how a certain leader reckons the beginning of the year, and the phases of the moon, and so on. The current Hebrew calendar that is followed by most Jews of today is a result of a mathematical calculation, and not so much the sighting of the new moon. This means that the “new moon” sighting in our hemisphere may or may not coincide precisely with that sighting in Jerusalem. Sometimes we will be ahead, and sometimes we will be behind, but for most Jews in the diaspora, we are “close enough” to allow us to celebrate G-d’s appointed times in unity. And unity is a primary benefit of this particular calendar.

To discover, and analyze, how the current disconnect came to be, and how the celebration of “Easter” came to replace, and even supplant, the celebration of Passover and Unleavened Bread in the Body of faith, some historical background is important.² Let’s begin at 2500 BCE.

Ishtar.

Ishtar is the Mesopotamian goddess of war and sexual love. Her counterpart in Canaanite pagan worship is Astarte. Ishtar is identified with the planet Venus. Ishtar is represented by a star with 6, 8, or 16 rays within a circle.

As goddess of Venus, delighting in bodily love, Ishtar protected prostitutes. Part of her cult worship practices included temple prostitution, which was thought to assure fertility for crops as well as animal herds. In later myths she was known as “Queen of the Universe.”

The ancient Sumerian legend of their pagan deities Tammuz and his wife Ishtar, is found in texts dating back to 2500 BCE. As the legend goes, Tammuz, the god of fertility who has the power for new life in nature, dies. A grieving Ishtar follows him to the underworld where she, naked and bowed low, is judged, killed, and then hung on display.

² Much of this material is sourced from, *Is Easter Pagan in Origin and Roots?* By Candice Lucey, in Christianity.com, <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/holidays/what-are-the-pagan-roots-of-easter.html>.

Deprived of Ishtar's presence, the earth loses its fertility, crops cease to grow and animals stop reproducing. Clearly, all life will end, unless something is done!

Ishtar, now missing for three days, gets help from another pagan god, who also descends into the underworld, where he gives Tammuz and Ishtar the power to return to the earth as the light of the sun for only six months.

After those six months, Tammuz returns to the underworld, to remaining there for another six months. Once again, Ishtar pursues him, prompting the pagan water god to rescue them both. And thus this six-month pattern of life and death kept repeating for all time. Thus, pagan worshippers understood how the cycle of winter (death) was followed by spring (life).

The English word Easter, which essentially is "Ishtar", also parallels the German word *Ostern*. One view, expounded by the Venerable Bede³ in the 8th century, was that it derived from *Eostre*, or *Eostrae*, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and fertility. Thus, the normative church has identified resurrection Sunday with the name of a pagan fertility

³ Much of what is known regarding *Eostre* comes from Bede, an English monk and historian from the 8th century. In his work "*De temporum ratione*" (The Reckoning of Time), Bede mentions *Eostre* as the name of a month corresponding to April and suggests that the festival of Easter may have been named after this goddess.

goddess. Let's now look at some of the symbols of Easter, and their origins.

Easter Bunnies and Eggs.

Hares and rabbits, demonstrate a robust drive for procreation, and their young are prolific in March. So, to many cultures they became a natural symbol of fertility. They were a sacred animal to the Celts, who associated them with abundance and prosperity.

Much later, in the writings of one of the brothers Grimm,⁴ we find a story of *Eostre* finding a wounded bird, and transforming it into a hare, The hare then expressed its gratitude by laying eggs as a gift. Eggs also have been in many pagan cultures a representation of fertility and newness of life, and have played an important role in pagan worship.⁵

Decorated eggs have long been featured in Spring celebrations in some Eastern European pagan regions, notably modern-day Ukraine.

Decorated eggs, called *pysanka*, were a well-established talisman long before Christianity was introduced there.

New Clothes, and New Hats.

⁴ The same Grimm who was to become famous for writing so many fairy tales.

⁵ Sadly, the Jewish people are not immune to such external cultural influences, and an egg has found its way onto the ceremonial Passover Seder plate since the time of the Babylonian exile. That pagan artifact remains even unto today.

As early as the 16th century in England, a superstition developed that if one did not honor Easter by wearing new clothing, and in particular a new hat, that bad fortune would follow him.⁶ Again, new items of clothing mimicked the new “clothing” that nature was also putting on, as the trees begin to put out leaves, and flowers bloom.

Easter Hams.

Lamb was, for many generations, the more honored traditional meat to be served at Easter, “stemming from the sacrificial lamb within Abrahamic religions. In the early years of Christianity, Christians continued many Jewish traditions, which would include the Passover lamb.”⁷ Ham became popular much later, perhaps as late as the final quarter of the 19th century.

Selecting ham over lamb also became a religious statement.

Historically, the connection of European Christians eating pork was an open statement of identity, proving that one was neither Jewish nor Muslim. This might have had an origin in the fact that one could be

⁶ New clothes are symbolic of renewal in general," observes Cindy Dell Clark, *Flights of Fancy, Leaps of Faith: Children's Myths in Contemporary America* (University of Chicago Press), 1998:97; also briefly noted in Iona Archibald Opie and Moira Tatem, eds. *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, (Oxford University Press) 1989, s.v. "Easter"; in Stephen Roud and Jennifer Westwood, *The Penguin Guide to the Superstitions of Britain and Ireland*, 2003, s.v. "clothes: new, blessing."

⁷ Beth Forrest, Ph.D., a food historian, and professor of liberal arts and food studies at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York.

turned over for “questioning” by the Spanish Inquisition for the seemingly innocent act of not eating pork.”⁸

The Divide.

With these symbols in mind, we can begin to explore how the Jewish faith in G-d, which included as a central pillar, belief that Yeshua is the promised Messiah and Savior of Israel, developed after the resurrection and ascension of Yeshua to His throne.

It is not reasonably subject to dispute that at the beginning, this messianic faith known as “the Way”⁹ as well as what would then become known as “Christianity” was predominantly held by Jews, and converts. However, once the Apostles went out into the world to proclaim the good news, that missionary effort produced great fruit.

That was good, but it also had some negative consequences. The Italian historian Gavassi reminds us, "A pagan flood flowing into the church, carried with it its customs, practices and idols".¹⁰

The writings of Paul to the Corinthian congregation seem clear.

⁸ Elizabeth Hopwood, Ph.D., a lecturer in English and acting director of the Center for Textual Studies and Digital Humanities at Loyola University Chicago.

⁹ Acts 24:14.

¹⁰ *Gavazzi's Lectures*, Page 290

1 Cor 11:22-27

What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

This passage, in context of the letter's intent and given the culture within which it was penned, refers directly to Passover. However, some in leadership in the church have long ago substituted what they call "communion," "Lord's Supper," or "Eucharist" for the breaking and distribution of the afikomen,¹¹ and the taking of the third cup of Passover – the "cup of redemption."

¹¹ The matzoh which is broken, and "buried" (hidden) at the outset of the Passover meal, and brought back at the end to be broken and distributed. This is the matzoh which Yeshua suggested was emblematic of His body, broken for us.

Soon after the death of the Apostles, the leadership of Christianity began to divest from it anything which would be seen as “Jewish.” This began with the changing of the weekly day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. Precisely how that was accomplished, and the rationale behind it, is painstakingly documented by Samuele Bacchiocchi in his seminal work, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, which is available for free on-line.¹²

This was an outgrowth of the increasing antisemitism which was beginning to infect the “church fathers” in early church history. There are many examples, but I will cite but a few.

For if we are still practicing Judaism, we admit that we have not received God’s favor...it is wrong to talk about Jesus Christ and live like Jews. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity.¹³

“Take heed to yourselves and be not like some piling up your sins and saying that the covenant is theirs as well as ours. It is ours, but they lost it completely just after Moses received it.”¹⁴

¹² *From Sabbath to Sunday*, Samuele Bacchiocchi, The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, Rome 1977.
<https://archive.org/details/from-sabbath-to-sunday>

¹³ Ignatius Bishop of Antioch (98-117A.D.) – Epistle to the Magnesians

¹⁴ *Epistle of Barnabas*, Chapter 4vs 6-7 (between 130A.D. and 138 A.D.)

“We too, would observe your circumcision of the flesh, your Sabbath days, and in a word, all you festivals, if we were not aware of the reason why they were imposed upon you, namely, because of your sins and the hardness of heart.”¹⁵

In spite of this growing animosity, the traditional annual Passover continued to be practiced by Christians in Asia for some time. However the rest of the Christian world had replaced Passover with Easter Sunday.

The custom in the rest of the world was described by Ireaneus as a duty of "celebrating the mystery of the resurrection of our Lord, only on the day of the Lord. [i.e. Sunday]." ¹⁶

Around 153 CE, near the end of his life, Polycarp visited the Roman Bishop Anicetus to discuss the differences that existed between Asia and Rome "with regard to certain things" especially the observance of Passover. They "disputed much with each other" over Passover. Ireaneus reports the exchange:

"Neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe it [Passover], because he had always observed it with

¹⁵ Justin Martyr - *Dialogue with Trypho* (Between 138A.D. and 161 A.D.)

¹⁶ Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 5:24.

Yochanan the disciple of our Lord, and the rest of the Apostles, with whom he associated; and neither did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe,..."¹⁷

Then in 194 C.E. this conflict between Rome and Asia arose again when the Asian representative Polycrates of Ephesus wrote a letter to the Roman Bishop Victor. Eusebius describes the event this way:

A question of no small importance arose at that time. For the parishes of all Asia, as from an older tradition, held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should be observed as the feast of the Saviour's Passover...But it was not the custom of the churches in the rest of the world...But the bishops of Asia, led by Polycrates, decided to hold to the old custom handed down to them. He himself, in a letter which he addressed to Victor and the church of Rome, set forth in the following words the tradition which had come down to him.¹⁸

Polycrates (c. 130-196 CE) then defended a proper worship of G-d's Passover as follows:

¹⁷Ireaneus; quoted by Eusebius; *Eccl. Hist.* 5:24

¹⁸ Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 5:24.

We observe the exact day; neither adding, nor taking away. For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming, when he shall come with glory from heaven, and shall seek out all the saints. Among these are Philip, one of the twelve apostles, who fell asleep in Hierapolis; and his two aged virgin daughters, and another daughter, who lived in the Holy Spirit and now rests at Ephesus; and, moreover, John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and, being a priest, wore the sacerdotal plate. He fell asleep at Ephesus. And Polycarp in Smyrna, who was a bishop and martyr; and Thraseas, bishop and martyr from Eumenia, who fell asleep in Smyrna. Why need I mention the bishop and martyr Sagaris who fell asleep in Laodicea, or the blessed Papirius, or Melito the Eunuch who lived altogether in the Holy Spirit, and who lies in Sardis, awaiting the episcopate from heaven, when he shall rise from the dead? All these observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith. And I also, Polycrates, the least of you all, do according to the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have closely followed. For seven of my relatives were bishops; and I am the eighth. And my relatives always

observed the day when the people put away the leaven. I, therefore, brethren, who have lived sixty-five years in the Lord, and have met with the brethren throughout the world, and have gone through every Holy Scripture, am not affrighted by terrifying words. For those greater than I have said 'We ought to obey God rather than man'...I could mention the bishops who were present, whom I summoned at your desire; whose names, should I write them, would constitute a great multitude. And they, beholding my littleness, gave their consent to the letter, knowing that I did not bear my gray hairs in vain, but had always governed my life by the Lord Jesus.¹⁹

At the Nicene Council (325 CE) the Roman Catholic Church decreed concerning "Easter":

It was decreed by common consent to be expedient, that this festival should be celebrated on the same day in every place... it seemed to everyone a most unworthy thing that we should follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this most holy solemnity, who, polluted wretches! Having stained their hands with a nefarious crime, are justly blinded

¹⁹ Eusebius. *Eccl. Hist.* 5:24

in their minds. It is fit, therefore, that rejecting the practice of this people, we should perpetuate to all future ages the celebration of this rite, in a more legitimate order, which we have kept from the first day of our Lord's passion even to the present times. Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews. We have received another method from our Savior....

But this decree did not end the disputes on the matter. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, Bede reports that this controversy arose again in Scotland in the 7th Century C.E. between those who observed Passover on the 14th day after the New Moon and those who instead "deliver the sacraments of the New Testament, to be celebrated by the church, in memory of his passion." (i.e. weekly Communion) and "Easter".²⁰

Some have pointed out that in the King James Bible, the word "Easter" appears, and thus this type of celebration must have been endorsed by none other than G-d Himself.

Sadly, those precious ones don't realize that the word "Easter" was inserted into the Bible by those translators on their own volition. This

²⁰ *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* Book 3 Chapter 25, Bede

remains a testimony to convict those translators of the many changes that they made to Scriptures as those passed from their hands into the world.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia gives biblical references to "Easter," stating,

"The word [Easter] does not properly occur in Scripture, although the King James Version has it in Acts 12:4 where it stands for Passover, as it is rightly rendered in the Revised Version (British and American). There is no trace of Easter celebration in the New Testament, though some would see an intimation of it in 1 Corinthians 5:7. The Jewish Christians in the early church continued to celebrate the Passover, regarding Christ as the true paschal lamb, and this naturally passed over into a commemoration of the death and resurrection of our Lord or an Easter feast."

I would point out in the final statement of that quotation that at no time in history did the proper celebration of G-d's Passover festival ever "naturally pass over" into an "Easter feast." G-d has not discarded His holy appointed times as set out in Leviticus 23.

Let's review precisely what G-d said regarding this time and this season.

Lev 23:1-8

23 The Lord spoke again to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'The Lord's appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations — My appointed times are these: 3 'For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings.

4 'These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. 5 'In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord's Passover. 6 'Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 7 'On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. 8 'But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.'"

By the time of the First Council of Nicaea (325 CE), the Church of Alexandria had designated March 21st as an ecclesiastical date for the Spring equinox, regardless of actual astronomical observation. Certainty seemed to be more important than science and observation.

In 395, Theophilus published a table of future dates for Easter, validating the Alexandrian criteria. Thereafter, the *computus* would be the procedure of determining the first Sunday after the first ecclesiastical full moon falling on or after 21 March. And so, man's calendar has been firmly established as a replacement for G-d's calendar, and Easter will never fall on any day other than a Sunday.

The Christian church generally has, sadly, brought into its celebrations of the resurrection of Yeshua some deeply pagan symbols and practices. It has even christened this holy time with the name of a pagan fertility goddess. It has intentionally discarded the holy appointed times of an eternal G-d, in favor of disconnected celebrations ordained by men dead long ago.

Those in the Church who are ignorant of these things are excused, because they have simply not been informed nor taught well. Their

leaders will stand before the throne on this matter, for their own failures in exercising proper leadership.

We who know more of the truth should not scorn them, nor rebuke them, for we were each as ignorant of our past failures. We are all growing up into a mature person, and we should allow our sweet brothers and sisters to do the same.

It is the job of the Spirit to draw them (and us) into all truth. It is our job to love one another while that is happening.

So, how should we behave regarding those precious ones who are our brothers in faith, but who are yet worshipping under some of the less-than-holy edicts of men? Love.

If someone asks you regarding these things, you may instruct – gently – in love. Always be ready to give a defense of your faith. But if not asked - silence is a good choice.