

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 169

“Should Adventists Celebrate Passover or Easter-Sunday?”

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UPDATE ON MY MEDICAL CONDITION

The recovery from my colon cancer surgery that took place on February 20, 2007, has been excellent. The new challenge I am facing now is the battle against the liver cancer. To get a more accurate picture of the presence of cancer in my liver, I underwent a combined Pet/Cat Scan at the Center for Cancer Care in Goshen, Indiana.

The results of these tests were quite revealing. The three dimensional pictures show that the right lobe of the liver is 70% affected by cancer cells, while the left lobe about 50%. There is no question that the situation is serious.

The strategy adopted by Dr. Seza Gulec, a leading Nuclear Oncologists who is directing my clinical treatment, consists of both chemotherapy and microspheres. On Monday, March 26, I was infused with a special brand of chemotherapy. Then on Tuesday, March 27, microbeads were placed with a catheter on the right lobe of the liver. I am told that these beads are like micro atomic bombs. What this means is that this past week I have felt the effects of a double dosage of radiation. I feel like a bionic man with plenty of radiation power to spare.

Overall I am doing quite well. None of the major side effects like the loss of hair have affected me. With a shining top no one could tell if I loose a few hairs. My major problem has been a sense of weakness and some temperature. Thank God for granting me enough energy to write this newsletter. Forgive me for failing to reply to your messages. As I get stronger, I will take time to respond to your gracious messages.

I am scheduled for another chemo treatment on Monday, April 9. A week later I will undergo another Pet/Cat Scan that will reveal the effectiveness of this dual radiation, consisting of chemo and microspheres. I am looking forward to report to you the results of this clinical study, which so far has give very positive results in similar cases of liver cancer.

Please keep us in your prayers. My wife needs your prayers too, because this testing experience is taking its tool on her. On our part we are using the latest conventional and unconventional resources. But, after we have done our best, we can only trust in God to do the rest. Thank you for remembering us in your prayers. We are of good courage because we know that God is on our side.

SPECIAL OFFER ON *THE PASSION OF CHRIST* EXTENDED UNTIL APRIL 30, 2007

The response to the special offer on *The Passion of Christ* has been very encouraging. Many churches and individual believers have ordered the book by the case of 34 copies for only \$100.00, that is \$2.95 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$25.00 per copy. Since the book is an ideal witnessing tool at this Easter time when the Christian world celebrates Christ's death and resurrection, I decided to extend the special offer until April 30, 2007.

In the previous newsletters I explained the mistake I made by asking the printer to reprint twice *The Passion of Christ*, forgetting completely that he had already delivered me the reprint of book two weeks earlier. I sense that this was a providential mistake that will help many people to appreciate the unique Adventist understanding of the Cross.

In many ways *The Passion of Christ* complements this newsletter on “Should Adventists Celebrate Passover or Easter Sunday?” It exposes the prevailing Catholic and Protestant misconceptions of Easter Sunday. It is an ideal book for witnessing. It will help many people at this Easter time, to appreciate and accept the beauty of our Adventist Message.

To make it possible for many people to benefit from *The Passion of Christ*, we are extending until April 30, 2007 the special offer of \$2.95 per copy for a case 34 copies (\$100.00 for the case, postpaid), or \$5.00 per copy for a smaller case of 10 copies (\$50.00 for the case, postage paid). The regular price of the book is \$25.00 per copy. You will also receive as a special bonus TWO FREE DVD ALBUMS with the two hours 3ABN live interview, where I share the highlights of the book. The DVD ALBUM regularly sells for \$50.00, but you receive it free with your order as a special bonus.

The DVD album contains the two hours the 3ABN interview, where I share the highlights of the book. After the interview, the phone kept on ringing for three weeks, as viewers from different parts of the world were calling to order a copy of the book which sold out in three weeks. This double reprint came out at the right time, because in few days most Christians will celebrate Christ’s Passion and Resurrection on Easter-Sunday (April 8, 2007).

The book *The Passion of Christ* and the accompanying DVD album, are ideal witnessing tools. They will help both your church members and friends to appreciate more fully the meaning of the Cross. Your help in promoting and distributing this timely book is greatly appreciated.

This is the Special Offer for quantity orders of *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*.

- **1 copy** of the book for **\$25.00**, postage paid.
Plus ONE free 3ABN DVD album included.
- **2 copies** of the book for **\$35.00**, postage paid. (\$17.50 each).
Plus ONE free 3ABN DVD album included.
- **10 copies** of the book for **\$50.00**, postage paid. (\$5.00 each).
Plus ONE free 3ABN DVD album is included.
- **34 copies** (one case) of the book for **\$100.00**, postage paid.
(\$2.95 each). Plus TWO free 3ABN DVD albums are included.

Four Ways to Order *The Passion of Christ*

(1) Online: By clicking here: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/cart/catalog/index.php?cPath=25>

(2) Phone: By calling us at (269) 471-2915 to give us your credit card number and postal address.

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(4) Regular Mail: By mailing a check to BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 4990, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

“Should Adventists Celebrate Passover or Easter Sunday?”**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,****Retired Professor of Theology and Church History,****Andrews University**

This Endtime Issues Newsletter on “Should Adventists Celebrate Passover or Easter-Sunday?” is posted with haste, because during the past few days I received numerous inquiries about Passover Services and the Easter Sunday morning services that will be conducted in some Adventist churches.

Initially I was inclined to ignore this timely question, because the intense radiation has weakened me considerably. But the gracious Lord gave me sufficient strength to complete this newsletter. Thank God for His daily strength which I have come to appreciate as a daily gift of His divine grace.

Adventist Celebration of Passover in Los Angeles

For example, the Department of Religious Affairs and Religious Liberty of the North Pacific Union of SDA, has invited Pastor Richard Elofer, President of our Adventist Mission in Israel to Los Angeles “to

help us celebrate the Passover, a sacred memorial for Jews and Christians alike, a Festival of Freedom. He will be joined by Alan J. Reinach, Esq., Director of Public Affairs & Religious Liberty for the Pacific Union Conference.”

The announcement that has been forwarded to me reads: “Come Celebrate a Passover Weekend from a Seventh-day Adventists Perspective, April 6 & 7, in Los Angeles, California. . . . A special service will be conducted at the Burbank Seventh-day Adventist Church on Friday evening, April 6th at 7:30 p. m. Admission is free. Come sing some traditional Jewish songs, and learn the spiritual significance of the Passover. The ‘Last Supper’ that Jesus ate before his crucifixion was in celebration of the Passover, and was a traditional Seder meal. For Christians, an understanding of the Seder service gives depth and meaning to some of the final events in the life of Christ. Discover why Passover is the favorite Jewish holiday, beloved by children!

“On Saturday evening, April 7th, Pastor Elofer will conduct a Passover Seder at the New Otani Hotel, in Los Angeles, beginning at 6:00 p.m. A traditional Jewish meal [feast] will be served. This event is being sponsored by the Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in cooperation with the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This is an occasion where Seventh-day Adventists and Jews can come together to celebrate some common elements of their religious faith, so please invite your Jewish friends. All should understand that this is not a ‘proselytizing’ event, as is often conducted by Messianic Churches, but is one that respects both Jewish and Christian religious traditions.”

I commend this initiative to celebrate Passover, the Feast of Redemption—a Feast that can help Christian and Jews to rediscover their common religious heritage. After all Passover was a major Festival celebrated by both the early Christians and Jews at the same date of Nisan 14 and with similar rituals. In my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*, I explain how the Passover was changed to Easter Sunday for the same reasons that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday. We shall discuss this point shortly.

Pastor Richard Elofer is to be commended for pioneering a re-examination of the spiritual significance of the Old Testament Holy Days for the Adventist Church today. I first met him on Tuesday, October 24, 2006, at a Jewish-Adventist Conference held on the campus of Andrews University. At the conference I was invited to make a presentation “How I Came to Appreciate the Spiritual Meaning of the Holy Days.” The response was very encouraging.

In my paper I summarized the highlights of my two volumes on *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History*, where I examine the Holy Days historically, prophetically, and christologically. The first volume deals with the *Spring Festivals* and the second volume with *The Fall Festivals*. When these two volumes came out in 1995 and 1996, I was bitterly attacked even by well-meaning brethren, who misunderstood the intent of my study. To calm their apprehensions, I placed a disclaimer at the opening of the book, saying: “This book does not promote a ceremonial observance of the ancient Feast of Israel. Rather, it proposes to remember during the course of the year the redemptive acts of the Plan of Salvation typified by the Feast.” Surprisingly, ten years later, this research is being read by thinking Adventists with a more open and receptive mind. The encouragement I have received lately for this controversial research, teaches me not to become discouraged.

If you would like to receive the two volumes on *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History*, we will mail them to you immediately. At the end of this essay, you will find a description of each volume and order information. A reading of these two volumes will offer you a fresh appreciation of our Adventist eschatology, which is largely based on our prophetic understanding of the Day of Atonement.

But our Adventist eschatology can be enriched by taking a closer look also at the three Fall Feasts: Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles. These helps us to appreciate the three steps leading to the consummation of Christ’s redemptive ministry: *repentance*, *cleansing*, and *rejoicing* for the final restoration. The Feast of Trumpets represents God’s last call to *repentance* while the destiny of God’s people is being reviewed by the heavenly court during the antitypical ten days preceding the Day of Atonement. We refer to this period as the “Pre-Advent Judgment.”

The Day of Atonement typifies Christ's final act of *cleansing* that will be accomplished at His coming when He will cleanse His people of their sins and will place all accountability on Satan (Azazel). The cleansing accomplished by Christ at His Return makes it possible to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles which foreshadows the *rejoicing* at the inauguration of a new life in a new world.

A Way to Enrich Church Worship

During the course of my research, it became evident that the Biblical Festivals can enrich church worship by focuses during the course of the year on the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's First and Second Advents. We cannot preach the whole Bible in one sermon. We cannot celebrate the whole story of redemption in one Sabbath. A church calendar patterned after the calendar of Israel can help us to do justice to all the important saving acts of God.

Many pastors go for years without taking their congregation through the central truths of the history of redemption: Christ's suffering and death, His resurrection, ascension, inauguration of His heavenly ministry, His sending of the Holy Spirit, the final judgment, Christ's Second Advent, the punishment of impenitent sinners, and the final restoration of this world. A church calendar patterned after the religious calendar of Israel challenges pastors and members every year to explore more fully each of these fundamental truths of the Plan of Salvation. It can also serve as a deterrent against the temptation to use the Sabbath religious services to promote various kinds of secular agendas. Our Adventist church calendar is largely promotional (religious liberty, education, famine relief, building programs, mission programs, etc), not religious.

Remembering Passover, the memorial of redemption, can lead us to appreciate God's provision of salvation through Christ's atoning sacrifice. Remembering Pentecost, the memorial of the outpouring of the early rain of the Holy Spirit to launch the Christian mission, can reassure us of the outpouring of the latter rain to complete the Christian mission.

Remembering the Feast of Trumpets, the reminder that we must all appear before the judgment seat of God (2 Cor 5:10), challenges us

to live morally responsible. Remembering the Day of Atonement, the reminder of the final redemptive act of Christ who will cleanse His people and dispose of their sins at His second Advent (Heb 9:28), reassures us of a divine solution to the sin problem that affects mankind. Remembering the Feast of Tabernacles, the reminder of God's past providential leading, gives us reasons to believe in God's ability to lead us to the Promised Land.

What I intended to accomplish *theoretically* by publishing the two volumes on *God's Festivals*, Pastor Richard Elofer has implemented *practically*, especially in Israel, where our Adventist Mission has grown from about 100 members to over 3000 members. He is doing a great work in trying to recover the Jewish roots of our Adventist faith, without giving up the distinctiveness of our beliefs. The results speak for themselves.

Adventist Celebration of Easter-Sunday at Pacific Union College

While some Adventist congregations will be celebrating Passover, other Adventist Churches in the USA and overseas will hold Easter Sunday services for their congregations and community people. Some of these Adventist churches are listed in GOOGLE. This is the announcement I received from the Pacific Union College SDA Church.

“There will be **Good Friday** and **Easter Sunday** services this year. Nathaniel Gamble, a PUC theology student, will coordinate the programs.

The **Good Friday service** will begin with foot washing from 7:15-7:45 p.m. The main service will start at 8 p.m. and share The Lord's Supper at the end.

“**Sabbath morning** Pastor Mitchell will preach at both services, “Trading Places: The Story of a Father's Two Sons.”

“**The Easter Sunday service** will take place at 9:30 a.m. All who are planning on coming to these two events should arrive at least 15-30 minutes before the start of the service for seating.”

Pastor's Mitchell's Corner

Pastor Mitchell, senior Pastor at PUC, encourages the older congregation to participate in the “Palm Sunday Celebration” with these words: “So here’s what I’d like to ask of us. For ‘Palm Sunday’ and beyond, let us go out to meet Jesus with the young people. Let’s raise a holy ruckus with them. Maybe we’re too old to take our cloaks off (don’t even think about it!) but maybe we could wave some palms a little more than we usually do. Maybe we could hold the hymnal with one hand and raise the other, just a little, in non-verbal praise. Maybe we could say a loud amen or ‘praise the Lord’ once in a while.

“Most of all, let’s not ask them [the young people] to be quiet (or ask me to tell them to be quiet). Let’s encourage them with a shout! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’ It’s the start of passion week, His for ours, ours for His.”

Pastor Mitchell must be commended for proposing creative ways to get the younger and older congregation excited about Christ’s Resurrection. After all Christ’s Resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith. Paul makes it abundantly clear that our faith, hope, and preaching stands or fall on Christ’s Resurrection. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Cor 15:17-18).

The essential difference between Passover and Easter Sunday is to be found in the focus of these celebration. Passover is the Feast of Redemption. Its focus is on the suffering and death of Jesus, though the Resurrection is included in the celebration, as shown in the *Paschal Sermons* that have come down to us. By contrast, the focus of Easter Sunday is the celebration of Christ’s Resurrection, which is seen as the climax and most important event of the Passion Week.

Should Adventists Celebrate Christ’s Resurrection on Easter Sunday?

The question many have posed to me is: “Should Seventh-day Adventist Churches join the rest of the Christian world in celebrating Christ’s Resurrection with a special church service on Easter Sunday

morning?" In answering this question a distinction must be made between conducting a church service on Easter Sunday morning for an evangelistic purpose and holding a formal service to celebrate Christ's Resurrection.

Evangelistic meetings are conducted on every day of the week. Scheduling a meeting for Easter Sunday morning can be a unique opportunity to help people understand that the real meaning of Christ's Resurrection is an *existential reality*, and not a *liturgical celebration*.

Planning for a special Easter Sunday service in Adventist churches to celebrate the event of Christ's Resurrection, poses two serious problems. First, it assumes that Christ's Resurrection is an event to be celebrated liturgically on Sunday by a special church service. We shall see that this assumption is devoid of biblical and apostolic support.

Second, Easter Sunday services indirectly supports Sunday observance, since it is a known fact that both the weekly Sunday and the annual Easter Sunday, are viewed by many Christians as memorial days of Christ's resurrection. For Adventists to reject the weekly Sunday's celebration of the Resurrection, while participating in the annual Easter Sunday celebration of the Resurrection, is a contradiction that indirectly supports Sunday observance.

Evaluation of the Resurrection

The New Testament references to the resurrection reveal the incomparable importance of the event, but they do not offer any indication regarding a special day to commemorate it. The reason is that the Resurrection was seen as *an existential reality experienced by living victoriously by the power of the Risen Savior, and not a liturgical practice associated with Sunday worship*.

Had Jesus wanted to memorialize the day of His Resurrection, He would have capitalized on the day of His Resurrection to make such a day the fitting memorial of that event. But none of the utterances of the risen Savior reveal an intent to memorialize the day of His Resurrection by making it the new Christian day of rest and worship. Biblical institu-

tions such as the Sabbath, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper all trace their origin to a divine act that established them. But there is no such divine act for the institution of a weekly Sunday or an annual Easter Sunday memorial of the Resurrection

The silence of the New Testament on this matter is very important since most of its books were written many years after Christ's death and resurrection. If Christ or the apostles had enjoined the observance of Sunday as a memorial of the resurrection, then we should find in the New Testament some indications of such a commandment and of its observance. Instead, we find no trace of any commandment regarding the celebration of the Resurrection on a weekly Sunday or annual Easter Sunday.

In fact, **Sunday is never called "Day of the Resurrection"** in the NT, but consistently "First Day of the Week." Paul prays that he may know "**the power of the resurrection**" (Phil 3:10), not **the day of His resurrection**. The first reference to Sunday as the "Day of the Resurrection" occurs in the fourth century in the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea. The obvious reason for this late appearance is that in earliest centuries Sunday was not viewed as the weekly memorial of the resurrection.

The Origin of Easter Sunday

Most Christians ignore is that Passover was changed to Easter Sunday for the same reasons that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday. Both changes were introduced to show separation and differentiation from the Jews at a time when Emperor Hadrian adopted new repressive measures against the Jews, prohibiting categorically the observance of the Jewish religion in general and of the Sabbath and Holy Days in particular. This question is examined at great length in my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*.

Perhaps the most explicit and forceful expression of anti-Judaism for the repudiation of the traditional Passover dating, is found in the letter that Emperor Constantine formulated at the Council of Nicea in A. D. 325. In desiring to establish a religion completely free from any

Jewish influence, the emperor wrote regarding Passover: “It appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. . . . Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd: for we have received from our Savior a different way. . . . Strive and pray continually that the purity of your soul may not seem in anything to be sullied by fellowship with the custom of these most wicked men. . . . All should unite in desiring that which sound reason appears to demand, avoiding all participation in the perjured conduct of the Jews.”

The Council of Nicea (A. D. 325) put an end to the controversy over the date of Passover by decreeing that it should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring. To ensure that Easter Sunday would never be celebrated at the same time as the Jewish Passover, the council decreed that if the 14th of Nisan fell on a Sunday, then Easter was to be celebrated on the following Sunday. This rule is still respected today.

Nicea represents the culmination of the Passover controversy initiated two centuries earlier and motivated by strong anti-Judaic feelings. Unfortunately, the controversy was “settled” at Nicea, not Biblically but politically. It was settled by suppressing the traditional observance of Passover and by adopting instead Easter Sunday as championed by the church of Rome.

Summing up, the celebration of Christ’s Resurrection on the weekly Sunday and annual Easter Sunday is a post-apostolic phenomenon, devoid of biblical support. These festivals were introduced to enable Gentile Christians to show separation and differentiation from the Jews and identification with the Roman society. What most Christians ignore is that the adoption of weekly Sunday and Easter Sunday was motivated more by hate for the Jews than love for Jesus Christ. It was because of expediency rather than obedience to God’s commandments.

What the Resurrection Means to Me!

While the Christian world celebrates Christ's resurrection liturgically through a church service, Seventh-day Adventists can capitalize on this occasion by reflecting on the personal, existential meaning of the resurrection. The seven points below represent a summary of a sermon I was invited to preach on Easter Sunday in the North West.

(1) Christ's resurrection tells me that truth is stronger than falsehood. "You seek to kill me," Jesus said, "a man who told you the truth" (John 8:40). Jesus was put to death because He spoke and revealed the truth about God and His plan for our salvation. If Christ's enemies had succeeded in silencing Christ for ever, then falsehood would have been stronger than truth. For me the resurrection is the final guarantee of the indestructibility of truth.

(2) Christ's resurrection tells me that good is stronger than evil. The forces that crucified Christ were the forces of evil. Jesus said: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desire. He was a murdered from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth" (John 8:44). If Christ had not risen there would be no hope that goodness will ultimately triumph over evil.

(3) Christ's resurrection tells me that love is stronger than hate. It was virulent hatred that procured Christ's crucifixion. It was hatred that ascribed Christ's healing to the power of the devil. If there was no resurrection it would mean that human hatred had conquered God's love. The resurrection is the triumph of God's love over all what human hatred could not do.

(4) Christ's resurrection tells me that life is stronger than death. If Jesus had not risen again, it would have meant that death had power even over the loveliest and best life that ever lived. Between the cracks of the ruins of a church in London bombed during the World War II, some corn plants came out. As the bombs could not destroy the life of the corn-seeds so death could not destroy Christ's life. The resurrection is the final proof that death cannot destroy God's gift of life.

(5) Christ's resurrection tells me that Christ died to pay the penalty of my sins, and that He lives to empower me to live victoriously. Some Christians focus on Christ's crib and others on His Cross, but ultimately it is His resurrection that gives us the reassurance that "He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25). The resurrection tells me that Christ is not on vacation recovering from the exhaustion of His earthly mission, but He is actively working at the right hand of God (Eph 1:20) to bring to consummation the redemption he accomplished on this earth.

(6) Christ's resurrection assures me that God preserves the identity and individuality of those who have fallen asleep until the Day of the Resurrection. The resurrected Christ was recognized by His followers, because He was the same Christ they had known before His death. In the same way the resurrected saints will be recognized by their loved ones because God preserves and will restore the identity of each person.

(7) Christ's resurrection gives me reason to believe in my own resurrection on the glorious day of His Coming. Being "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20), Christ's resurrection has a profound eschatological meaning. The early Christians grasped this meaning when they greeting one another saying, "Marantha-the Lord is Coming." The Lord is coming because He is risen. His resurrection is the prefiguration of our resurrection.

Ultimately the meaning of the resurrection is an existential reality in the lives of those who experience "the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:10) as the motivating force for living, loving, and serving the risen Lord.

**A Message about Easter from Dr. George W. Reid
Former Director, Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of SDA**

I take the liberty to include few comments about Easter by Dr. George W. Reid, who served with distinction for many years as the Di-

rector of the Bibicall Research Institute. You can read the whole article at: <http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/documents/easter.htm>

Dr. Reid writes: “Given this information, although the resurrection of Jesus is a historical event of huge importance, we have no biblical precedent for making it a special day of celebration. That came in later centuries of Christian history. For this reason Seventh-day Adventists have never given the attention to Easter that other churches do. Our interest is to return to the practices and faith of the early Christian church.

“However, we live in a society saturated with celebration of Easter. To a large degree this is driven, as with Christmas, by an opportunity to sell goods to people to mark the day. Clothing, in particular, is associated with Easter, as are toys with Christmas. In an effort to convey the idea that Adventists are believers in the resurrection, a few of our people have introduced Easter observances. They are fearful we will be misunderstood, and for them it is important that we be seen as orthodox and acceptable to the society around us. They conform to customs around us, at times unthoughtfully.

“Actually this practice conveys another misunderstanding—the idea that we give special significance to Sunday because it was the resurrection day. A few of our churches have introduced Sunday morning services for Easter, which for many Adventists creates problems. We recognize that we are not treating Sunday as holy time, but the public may not catch the subtle difference.

“It is important that we encourage the leaders of our congregations to consider all the factors involved when they decide what to do with Easter. Several things are involved and need to be considered before making decisions. Often choices on matters such as this are made with minimal forethought. Always it is appropriate to allow the Scriptures to be our guide and to think carefully about the direction our actions will lead the church.

“Although there exists no clear biblical reason for observing Easter as a religious festival, in parts of the world the public is so oriented to Easter observance that it is a time of year when they become open to spe-

cial studies in the Bible. An opportunity opens to reach out to the public with the fuller message of Christ, often with good response. Under such circumstances Easter and its surrounding events can lend themselves to evangelistic outreach without, however, assigning any special religious meaning to the day itself. Wherever there is opportunity to advance the message of Christ without compromising biblical truth, the “wise as serpents, harmless as doves” counsel of Christ is appropriate” (<http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/documents/easter.htm>)

Eastre: Anglo-Saxon Spring Goddess

The story of how Passover eventually became clothed with pagan myths associated with the Anglo-Saxon Spring Goddess Eastre, is fascinating reading. You will find an informative discussion in chapter 3 of *God's Festivals in Scripture and History* (vol. I). Briefly stated, the waning influence of Jewish Christians and the growing influence of Gentile Christians led not only to the adoption of a new date, Easter Sunday, but also to the acceptance of pagan speculations and fertility myths, which are foreign to the Biblical meaning of Passover.

The process which led Christianity to clothe itself in the garments of paganism began when Gentile Christians gained control of the Church, and it continued during the Middle Ages when hordes of Barbarians entered the Church with their superstitious beliefs. For the sake of brevity, I am posting here only a few excerpts of my study found in volume 1 of *God's Festivals in Scripture and History*.

Passover was renamed “Easter,” which derives from *Eostre, Eastur, Ostara, Ostar*, terms used by the Norsemen (ancient Scandinavians) to refer to the season of the rising sun. According to Bede (ca. A. D. 673-735), the “Father of English History,” the word “Easter” is derived from *Eastre*, an Anglo-Saxon spring goddess to whom sacrifices were offered at the vernal equinox (March 21). “This pagan festival probably gave way to the Christian celebration of the resurrection.”

Donna and Mal Broadhurst point out, “It is probable that Eostra/Ostara is the Anglo-Saxon version of Ishtar, the Sumerian goddess of love

and war who in Canaan evolved into a moon goddess and wife of Baal. According to Sumerian lore, Ishtar was the wife of the Sumerian god, Tammuz. Both are spoken of in the Bible—Tammuz in Ezekiel 8:14 and Ishtar, called Ashtoreth and Queen of Heaven, in Judges 2:13, Judges 10:6, Jeremiah 44:17, and elsewhere.

“When Tammuz died, Ishtar followed him to the underworld, leaving the earth deprived of its fertility. She and Tammuz were rescued from death when the Queen of the Dead allowed a heavenly messenger to sprinkle them with the water of life. This allowed them to return to the light of the sun for six months of each year. For the other six they had to return to the land of death.

“The worship of Ishtar as a nature goddess had spread throughout the ancient world. In Phoenicia and Syria her name had become Astarte. Her husband earlier called Baal, and known as Tammuz farther east, became Adon and Adonai in Phoenicia and Syria. In Greece, Ishtar and Tammuz became Aphrodite and Adonis; in Asia Minor they became Cybele and Attis. Diana of the Ephesians (Acts 19:27) probably traces to Ishtar.”

What makes these cults the forerunners of Easter is the fact that most of them had their annual festival at the vernal equinox, the Easter season, during which they celebrated the cycle of death and resurrection. In his book *Easter: Its Story and Meaning*, Alan W. Watts discusses the relationship of these pagan cults to Easter and notes that “their universal theme—the drama of death and resurrection—makes them the forerunners of the Christian Easter and thus the first ‘Easter services.’ As we go on to describe the Christian observance of Easter we shall see how many of its customs and ceremonies resemble these former rites.”

Lent from Pagan Cults

One example of the former rites is the fast of Lent, which begins forty days before Easter. This practice most likely derives from the fast practiced among various ancient cults. A Lent of forty days was observed by the worshippers of the Babylonian Ishtar and by the worshippers of the great Egyptian mediatorial god Adonis or Osiris. The rape of the goddess Proserpine also was commemorated among the Romans by forty nights of wailing. Among the pagans, this Lent period seems to have been an

indispensable preliminary to the great annual (usually spring) festivals commemorating the death and resurrection of their gods.

Lent, with the preceding revelries of carnival, was entirely unknown in the earliest Christian Passover celebration. Christians fasted the night of Passover until dawn, when they broke their fast with the Lord's Supper, which commemorated Jesus' expiatory suffering and death. The extension of the fast to forty days was apparently borrowed from pagan spring festivals.

Easter Bunny and Eggs

Pagan influence can also be seen in the replacement of the Passover symbolism of the lamb with that of the Easter hare. The Easter hare was once a bird which the goddess Eostre changed into a four-footed creature. The hare, or rabbit, became a symbol of fertility, presumably because rabbits are notably prolific. The hare laid eggs which became the symbol of the abundant new life of spring. Thus, the Easter egg is the production not of some mystical bird but of a rabbit or hare.

The origin of the Easter egg is traced back to the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Babylon, Phoenicia, and Greece, where the universe is said to have been born from a mighty world egg. "The ancient peoples of Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, and China exchanged eggs at their spring fertility festivals. In Babylonia, eggs were presented to the goddess of fertility, Astarte (Eostre)."

Christians adopted eggs for their Easter celebration because the egg was a popular pagan symbol of death and life. It was a symbol of death because the shell is like a tomb that imprisons the life-germ inside. It was a symbol of life insofar as it contains the source of a new creature.

Innumerable European folk customs are found in connection with Easter eggs. Eggs were elaborately painted with symbols, often Roman crosses and swastikas. Egg hunting in gardens was a favorite Easter game for children. In my country, Italy, eggs are blessed by the priest on Easter Sunday with holy water when he goes from home to home. The "blessed"

Easter eggs are then sold on the market with the promise of miraculous power, very much as sacrificial meat was sold on the market of ancient Rome (1 Cor 8:1-6). With the advent of the industrial era, Easter eggs were transformed into chocolate and sugar, wrapped in tin foil, or even trimmed with real gold and jewels, as was the custom among the wealthy in czarist Russia.

“Eggs laid on Good Friday are credited with miraculous powers. There is the belief that if such an egg is kept for a hundred years its yolk will turn into a diamond, or that if it is cooked on Easter Sunday it will work as a powerful amulet against sudden death or as a charm for fruitful trees and crops.”⁵⁷

As a result, the Biblical Passover themes were gradually replaced by pagan symbols and myths, which became part of the Easter celebration. In time, Easter became associated with numerous pagan practices and superstitions which are foreign to the redemptive meaning and experience of the Biblical Passover.

Conclusion

Should Adventist churches celebrate Passover or Easter Sunday? The answer that has emerged from our study is clear. Passover is a biblical institution that continues in the NT because it points to the *past*, *present*, and *future*. It points to the *past* by commemorating the suffering and death of Christ. It points to the *present* by confirming God’s covenant with His church. It looks forward to the *future* by nourishing the hope of the happy reunion with the Savior at the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

Passover was widely observed in the early church as a commemoration of the suffering and death of Jesus by many faithful Christians who were committed to be true to the teaching of the Scripture regarding the date and meaning of the feast. Their example serves as a model for us to follow.

Easter Sunday, by contrast, is a pagan celebration that gradually replaced the symbolism of the Passover Lamb with that of the Easter hare, rabbit, eggs, 40 days of fasting, carnivals, lent, and a host of other pagan practices.

In the light of these historical facts, the answer to our original question, largely depends upon the cultural or biblical orientation of our Adventist congregations. An Adventist congregation that is committed to follow the biblical tradition, will most likely observe Passover, not Easter Sunday. On the other hand, an Adventist congregation influenced by societal trends will most likely join in the Easter Sunday celebration.

The counsel of Dr. Reid, former Director of the Biblical Research Institute, offers a fitting conclusion to this study: “It is important that we encourage the leaders of our congregations to consider all the factors involved when they decide what to do with Easter. Several things are involved and need to be considered before making decisions. Often choices on matters such as this are made with minimal forethought. Always it is appropriate to allow the Scriptures to be our guide and to think carefully about the direction our actions will lead the church.”

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Israel. Such a calendar would not be bound to the exact dates of the OT Festivals, since these were keyed to the Palestinian seasons, which are different, for example, from the seasons in the USA. Barley does not ripen in the USA in March as in Palestine. The focus would be, not on the exact date, but on the spiritual message of each Feast to be remembered on special emphasis Sabbath.

The aim is to remember during the course of the year the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's First and Second Advents, as typified by the OT Feasts. We cannot preach the whole Bible in one sermon. We cannot celebrate the whole story of redemption in one Sabbath. A church calendar patterned after the calendar of Israel can help to do justice to all the great saving acts of God.

A church calendar is more than an annual cycle of recurring festivals. It provides an opportunity to experience afresh what God has done in the past, is doing in the present, and will do in the future. It enables us to take the time which God has created and offer it back to God through Jesus Christ who has redeemed it.

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