

The Passover of the New Creation
Volume 6 of Studies in the Scriptures – Chapter XI
Study 6 of 6
Pages 479 – 484

Easter-Passover
Extracts from McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia

Note: The outlines for the 2026 Memorial studies are based on the Volume 6 chapter entitled, “The Passover of the New Creation.” Please read the pages noted (and included) on this outline in advance, as there will not be time to read the paragraphs during our meetings. Wherever possible, please use scriptures to support your answers.

1. How did the Easter holiday come to be? What were the differences between the early Asiatic and Western Churches on this matter, and how did they shape the timing of the Easter holiday? (Par 1-3,6-11)
2. How has the celebration of Easter and its timing confounded the proper view of our Lord's Memorial? What is the significance of this confusion? (Par 1-3,6-10)
3. How does this understanding of the origin of the Easter celebration influence your understanding of when to celebrate our Lord's Memorial and His resurrection? (Par 1,4-5)
4. What do you think is meant by “the two rites” and the development of the “nature of the relationship in which these... stood to each other?” In other words, explain Paragraph 12.

Easter-Passover

1. The word "Easter" occurs once in the Scriptures (Act 12:4), and there it is a mistranslation; it should be rendered "Passover." The name Easter was adopted from the heathen. It is of Saxon origin, and imports a goddess of the Saxons, or rather of the East, Estera, whose festival was celebrated in the spring of the year, about the Passover season. The adoption of this name, and the application of it to the period celebrating our Lord's death and resurrection and ascension, down to the coming of the Pentecostal blessing, was evidently an attempt to let Christian institutions the more easily supplant those of heathenism. Like most of these concessions, it dates from somewhere about the third century. This heathen origin of the name Easter need make no particular difference in our minds, for we no longer use it to celebrate the goddess of the East. Amongst Protestants the name has been definitely attached to one day instead of to a period, as in old time, and as it is still used by Catholics. That one day is called Easter Sunday. Any memorial of our - F480 - Lord's resurrection will always be precious with his people, but to those who rightly appreciate the matter, every Sunday is an Easter Sunday, because every Sunday is a Memorial commemorative of our Lord's resurrection from the dead.

2. Our thought in introducing the subject here is more particularly to draw attention to the larger view of the term Easter, held by Catholics, which includes Good Friday as well as Easter Sunday, and is merely used as a synonym for the Passover season. The introduction of the Mass, and its frequent observance, might have been expected to have entirely made void the annual celebration of our Lord's death on its anniversary; but not so. The original custom of the early Church, to celebrate the great central fact, and the very foundation of her existence, continued, although the celebration of the supper at its appropriate time ceased, superseded by the numerous sacrifices of the Mass--and thus this one particular memorial lost its meaning.

3. For centuries it was the custom to count the date of our Lord's crucifixion according to the Jewish calendar, as we have already explained it; but subsequently, with a desire to cut loose so far as possible from Jewish institutions, a change in the method of counting the date of the death of Christ, our Passover, was instituted. "The Ecumenical Council" of Nice decreed that thenceforth Easter should be celebrated on the Friday following the first full moon after the Spring equinox. This not only fixed the celebration of the Lord's death universally on a Friday, called "Good Friday," but additionally it insured that the celebration would very rarely indeed be exactly in accord with the Jewish celebration of the Passover. The difference in the method of counting, be it remembered, is that the Jews then waited and still wait until the Spring Equinox, and begin their month with the first new moon thereafter, and keep the Passover at the full of that moon, or the 14th day. This change occasionally makes a difference of nearly a month between the two methods of counting.

- F481 -

4. It is not for us to say which is the superior method, but our preference is to hold to that which the Lord and the apostles practiced--not with a subserviency which would make us feel that we had committed a crime if we erred in the calculation, and celebrated on a wrong date, but nevertheless with a satisfaction that we have endeavored to follow as closely as possible the divine institution, the pattern. Someone might perhaps suggest that it would be still better to fix the date according to our modern calendar--say the 15th of April or the 1st of April, or other date--and all calculations, etc., would in consequence be unnecessary. We answer, that the Lord

evidently had a reason for arranging the Jewish calendar as he did, and we prefer in this matter to continue to recognize his institution.

5. In a particular sense we see that as the sun is the symbol of the spiritual Kingdom of God, the moon is the symbol of the Law Covenant, and of the people who were under that Law Covenant. Thus there was a special appropriateness in our Lord's being crucified by them exactly at the full of the moon, and that by God's predetermination as concerned the time, so that they could not take him previously, though they desired to do so, because "his hour was not yet come." (Jhn 7:30; Jhn 8:20) His crucifixion at the **full** of the moon, and the fact that the moon immediately began to wane, points a lesson to the effect that there Israel brought upon itself as a nation a divine rejection, or casting off for a season, symbolized by the waning of the moon, which represented their national decline.

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We append here some pertinent extracts from a recognized authority, corroborative of the foregoing, as follows:

From McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia

6. "EASTER, i.e., PASSOVER--Easter is a word of Saxon origin, and imports a goddess of the Saxons, or rather of the East, Estera, in honor of whom sacrifices being offered annually - F482 - about the Passover time of year (Spring), the name began to be attached by association of ideas to the Christian festival of the resurrection, which happened at the time of the Passover: hence we say Easter-day, Easter Sunday, but very improperly, as this by no means refers to the festival then kept to the goddess of the ancient Saxons. So the present German word is used, Ostern, for Easter, and refers to the same goddess, Estera or Ostera. The occurrence of this word in the Authorized Version (Act 12:4)--'Intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people'--is chiefly noticeable as an example of the want of consistency in the translators. ...At the last revision 'Passover' was substituted in all passages but this....

7. "The Churches of Asia Minor celebrated the death of the Lord on the day corresponding to the 14th of the month Nisan, on which day, according to the opinion of the whole ancient Church, the crucifixion took place. The Western Churches (Rome), on the other hand were of opinion that the crucifixion should be annually commemorated on the particular **day of the week** on which it occurred, i.e., Friday.... The Western Churches viewed the death-day of Christ as a day of mourning, and they did not terminate the time of fasting until the day of the resurrection. The Churches of Asia Minor, on the other hand, looked upon the death of Christ wholly as for the redemption of mankind, and terminated the day of fasting at the hour of Christ's death, three o'clock in the afternoon, and immediately afterward celebrated the agape and the Lord's Supper. Both parties (orthodox Eastern and Western Churches) adhered to the name PASCHA (Passover), by which they understood sometimes the specially festive days of this week, and sometimes the whole week commemorating the Passover.

8. "The first serious dispute between the parties within the old Church broke out about 196 (A.D.), when Bishop Victor of Rome issued a circular to the leading bishops of the Church, requesting them to hold synods in their various provinces, and to introduce the western practice (the practice of celebrating on Friday and Sunday, instead of on the - F483 - exact day, 14th and 16th of Nisan). Some complied with the request, but the synod held by Bishop Polycrates, of Ephesus, emphatically refused, and approved the letter of Bishop Polycrates, who in the defense of the Asiatic practice referred Victor to the authority of the Apostles Philip and John, to Polycarp, and to seven of his relations who before him had been bishops of Ephesus...

9. "Thus far the controversy between the Asiatic and the Western (Roman) Churches had only concerned two points, viz., (1) whether the day of the week or the day of the month on which the death of Christ occurred should be commemorated; (2) whether the fasting ought to be terminated. Now a third point in dispute arose, as to the time when the 14th day of Nisan really occurred. Many of the Church Fathers are of the opinion that, according to the original calculation of the Jews up to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, the 14th of Nisan had always been after the Spring equinox, and that it was only in consequence of that miscalculation of the later Jews that the 14th of Nisan occasionally fell before the equinox. They therefore insisted that the 14th of Nisan, which for both parties within the Church determined the time of Easter, should always be after the equinox.

10. "As the year of the Jews is a lunar year and the 14th of Nisan always a **full-moon** day, the Christians who adopted the above astronomical view, whenever the 14th of Nisan fell before the equinox would celebrate the death of Christ one month later than the Jewish Passover. As the Christians could now no longer rely on the Jewish Calendar they had to make their own calculations of the time of Easter. These calculations frequently differed, partly from reasons already set forth, and partly because the date of the equinox was fixed by some at the 18th of March, by others at the 19th, by others at the 21st of March. The Council of Arles in 314 endeavored to establish uniformity, but its decrees do not appear to have had great effect. The subject was, therefore, again discussed and acted upon by the Ecumenical Council of Nice, which decreed that Easter should be - F484 - celebrated throughout the Church after the equinox on the Friday following the 14th of Nisan. It was also provided that the Church of Alexandria, as being distinguished in astronomical science, should annually inform the Church of Rome on what day of the Calends the Ides of Easter should be celebrated, and the Church of Rome should notify all the Churches of the world. But even these decrees of the Council of Nice did not put a stop to all difference, and it was reserved to the calculation of Dionysius Exiguus to gradually introduce uniformity of practice into the old Church. Some countries, like Great Britain, did not abandon their ancient practice until after a long resistance. At the time of Charlemagne **uniformity** [in observing Friday and in disregarding the Jewish reckoning of full moon day] seems to have been established, and [thereafter] **no trace is to be found** [of the observance] **of the Quarto decimani (the celebration according to the actual day--the 14th of Nisan, the full moon after the spring equinox)....**

11. "The revision of the Calendar by Pope Gregory XIII, on the whole retained the Dionysian era; but determined more accurately the Easter full moon, and made careful provision for avoiding any future deviation of the calendar from the astronomical time. By these minute calculations, however, the Christians' Easter sometimes, contrary to the decrees of the Nicean Council, coincides with the Jewish Passover."

The same authority says respecting the word:

12. PASSOVER--"It was the representative festival of the year, and in this unique position it stood in a certain relation to circumcision as the second sacrament of the Hebrew Church. (Exo 12:44) We may see this in what occurred at Gilgal, when Joshua, in reviewing the divine covenant, celebrated the Passover immediately after the circumcision of the people. But the nature of the relationship in which these two rites stood to each other did not become fully developed until its antitypes were fulfilled, and **the Lord's supper took its place** as the sacramental feast of the elect people of God."