

On the Corner Fringe: Christians Historically Kept Passover

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The following text is a message from Corner Fringe Ministries that was presented by Daniel Joseph. The original presentation can be viewed at <https://cornerfringe.com/media/5kys7v2/otcf-christians-historically-kept-passover>

*Portions of this document have been edited from the video message to better present a comprehensive, written document. Special attention was given to preserve the original context, but this document is not verbatim. Scripture verses are in the red text with other quotes in blue. Therefore, it is recommended that this document be printed in color. The Hebrew words are generally accompanied by the transliteration into the English alphabet. In most cases, the Hebrew is to be read from right to left.

The Apostolic Legacy of the Christian Passover

This transcript of a message, from **Pastor Daniel Joseph** of **Corner Fringe Ministries**, provides a historical overview of why **early Christians** continued to observe the biblical **Passover** rather than modern traditions. Daniel highlights the conflict between early church leaders like **Polycarp and Polycrates**, who maintained the **14th of Nisan** observance, and the **Roman papacy**, which pushed for a separation from Jewish customs. He explains that this tension culminated in the **Council of Nicaea** in 325 AD, where **Emperor Constantine** formalistically replaced Passover with **Easter** to distance the church from Jewish influence. By examining these historical turning points, Daniel argues that the **original apostolic tradition** viewed Passover and **communion** as the same essential celebration of the Messiah. Ultimately, he encourages modern believers to embrace **Passover** as a legitimate and vital expression of their faith in **Jesus**.

[Daniel Joseph]

Welcome, everyone. I'm Daniel Joseph, and you're *On the Corner Fringe*. Today I want to talk about Passover. Passover is coming up in just over a month now. This video is going to kind of be a part two to a video I recently did on communion, which, ultimately, if you saw the video, you know that the entire gist of it was to point back to the reality that communion is Passover. Passover is communion. If you celebrate Passover, you are celebrating communion. It's what it is.



Well, this is a follow-up video to that, and I will take you back in history again. The reason I want to do this is there's some information I want to share with you which I think is important considering the days we're living in right now. What I mean by that is, there is this movement of Christians and even non-Christians who are coming to faith in Jesus and they are following Him through this expression of the

Torah, of looking to God's Word, Genesis to Revelation, and saying, "I need to apply this to my life." Everything that potentially applies to me, I need to do. Everything that pleases the LORD, I need to do.

With each passing day, we have more Christians jumping on board and experiencing a Messianic Passover, a Messianic seder for the first time. Some of whom are being ostracized and ridiculed. In other words, there are many out there in Christendom who believe that they're becoming Judaized by Judaizers and that they're abandoning Christ and that they're going after things Jewish in all of this. I think it's important to have some ground laid on this regarding church history and to know that the early church clung to the *Pesach*; it clung to Passover. The early Christians did this; they did what was Jewish, and they would have looked very Jewish in the sense that they were now keeping oracles; they were now keeping commandments which were given to the Jewish people. And it makes perfect sense because they're following a Jewish Messiah.

So, I want to share some history with you that I think will be beneficial for you to share with your fellow Christians too, so they can understand different aspects of why you keep Passover, how this has been done historically, and that we're a long way away from home.



With that said, to begin, I want to bring two men to the table, and the first is Polycarp. He was the bishop of Smyrna, and Polycarp was part of the second generation of the Church; he was a second-generation believer. What do I mean by that statement? I mean, the apostles are the first generation, if you will. And everyone they went out and preached to would end up being, in a sense, a second generation. They would be the second tier of believers. Polycarp was instructed by the Apostle

John. He was disciplined by John. Everything that Yeshua, Jesus, had preached, he was getting firsthand through John, so this is the best research you could imagine.

Understand this: Polycarp kept the Passover, and he was dogmatic about it. He was dogmatic about, we need to keep it on the right day: the 14th of the month of the Jewish calendar, the 14th of Nisan, at evening, which means you're breaking into the 15th, which is the holy day. The 15th of Nisan is the Holy Day of Passover, the first day.

Being as dogmatic as he was, he decided to take a trip to Rome and talk to the Pope, to talk to the Bishop of Rome, Anicetus. Now Anicetus was very respected, and everything that I have read about him is that he was very genuine, a man of conviction. He fought hard against Gnosticism and Marcionism, so certainly there are aspects about him that we can definitely appreciate. But Anicetus did not adhere to the historical observance, Jewish observance, or the biblical observance of Passover. He went with what we call today the traditional approach of celebrating Ishtar or Easter. Now keep in mind, this is back in the mid-second century.

And so, Polycarp goes to Anicetus and tells him, "You want to get back in line." He tries to persuade Anicetus, "You need to abandon what you're doing, you need to come back, and you need to hold fast to the biblical mandate." Polycarp is not successful in persuading Anicetus. And Anicetus, from what

we're told, tried to persuade Polycarp to come to his side of things. And after a time, neither of them could persuade one another. They'll agree to disagree in this type of situation, and then they part ways in peace. Anicetus was not, I guess, what you would say, offended. He did not get adversarial towards Polycarp, which is wonderful, but there was no movement.

Now that has become problematic, and I'm going to tell you why. This papacy, the bishops in Rome, would prove to be one of the most influential that the world would ever know. So, the fact that Anicetus is in Rome as bishop, serving as pope, becomes problematic for the future of Christendom and its approach to Passover, among other things.

Well, as time goes on, we come to the later part of the second century. And I want to take you to the writings of Eusebius. This is what he has to say; listen to this: Eusebius, Church History—[A QUESTION of no small importance arose at that time \(c.190ad\)](#). And the time he's referring to is around 190 AD. [For the parishes of, in other words, communities 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.](#)

That's true. You can go to the Torah, you can go to the book of Exodus, and you can go to Leviticus. They make it abundantly clear that Passover is to be observed on the 14th day of the month at eve, which would bring you into the 15th. And that would be a holy day, and you would eat unleavened bread, and you would have the Paschal or the *Pesach* lamb.

Now we continue—[Synods and assemblies of bishops were held on this account, and all, with one consent, through mutual correspondence drew up an ecclesiastical decree, that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be celebrated on no other, in other words, no other day, but the Lord's day.](#) In other words, what we would call today is Ishtar, or Easter.

[BUT the bishops of Asia, led by Polycrates...](#) Now, this Polycrates is the bishop in Ephesus, and he's very important. When you want to know the effective groundwork that the Apostle Paul laid, do you remember reading Acts 20:29 and him drawing the elders of Ephesus? He drew the elders to him, and he gave them one final warning. He knew that after his departure, [savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.](#) He knew this, so he gave them this warning: Acts 20:31—[Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.](#)

He had tears coming out of his eyes, mourning them. And so, he left, and the impact of what Paul left on Ephesus was still being felt into the late second century through Polycrates because there were still God-fearing righteous men of God holding the line, holding to the apostolic tradition. In other words, not so much tradition in what you typically think, but in their doctrine, in their teachings. And Polycrates is such a man, so he's holding the line. It is amazing.

And then he goes on—[... 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:](#) obviously Apostolic, right? Moving on—[“We observe the exact day; neither adding, nor taking away. For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep...](#) What do you mean by great lights? Well, biblically, this is imagery that's used of the righteous and those who turn many to righteousness. You can reference the book of Daniel. They're considered stars of heaven. These are the lights. So he's talking about these righteous, awesome men of God. These lights have fallen asleep, [which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming...](#) (Emphasis added).

And there's a little side note: when do people rise from the dead? When is there going to be a resurrection? When do people ascend into heaven? Well, here, even looking at Polycrates going back to the early second century, this is what they understood: not until Yeshua comes back.

Moving on—...when he shall come with glory from heaven, and shall seek out all the saints. Thereupon Victor, who presided over the church at Rome, immediately attempted to cut off from the common unity the parishes of all Asia, with the churches that agreed with them, as heterodox; in other words, listen Polycrates, everyone who agrees that you need to keep Passover according to the mandate that you can follow in the Torah, in the Word of God, you know what? You're not a part of us. You're heterodox. You're heretics. And he goes on, and he wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicated.

So unfortunately, Polycrates's experience with Victor, this Pope in Rome, was vastly different than what we read about Polycarp and his experience with Anicetus. Anicetus was far more laid-back—We'll agree to disagree. Victor is now out for blood. This is a turning point in history. Because what you saw is that Christians were still thriving and keeping Passover, and of course, every year that went by, you better believe the people came out and argued on behalf of, "Hey, let's get together." Let's all do this in unity. Let's keep the Word of God. It's better to obey God than to obey man. But now, with Victor as Pope in Rome, he takes a hard line, and this is significant right here: a great separation happening long before Constantine comes on the scene. You can see the church at Rome growing in power and influence.

Which, by the way, as you come to Constantine, and I'll just pull this up really quickly. This comes out of the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. You know, Constantine, when they get done with the meeting, Constantine wants to send letters out to all the churches so that they know what they've decided at this council. And one of the main things they talked about and dealt with was this issue of Passover, of when to keep it, which shows you, now we were just in the second century, about 190 AD. This shows you that it continued to thrive amongst Christians, with them observing the Passover, because here we are in 325 AD, and guess what? They're still keeping it, but this is agitating Rome because, since Victor, they've taken a very hard line against this. And so, they want this dealt with once and for all.

So, Constantine comes on the scene, and I'm just going to give you tidbits from this letter. He writes: Eusebius, Church History; COUNCIL OF NICEA 325 AD—"CONSTANTINUS AUGUSTUS, to the Churches. AT this meeting the question concerning the most holy day of Easter was discussed, and it was resolved by the united judgment of all present, and that means all that had shown up, obviously. That this feast ought to be kept by all and in every place on one and the same day. And first of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews.

Now, just think about the insanity of what's being said here. There is now, and this is really where it began to crystallize, this separation of Jew and Gentile, something that is clearly laid out in the New Testament. We would say the Old Testament as well, but especially the New Testament. You even have this in Yeshua's own prayer: Jesus prays this ultimate prayer, this intercessory prayer known in John 17:20-26, where He prays that everyone **who will believe in Me through their word**, through their testimony, ²¹ **that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me**, are *echad*, that we're one.

In other words, the Jew-and-Gentile thing that was going to happen, Yeshua's heart was that He wanted them to be so one that it needed to mirror the relationship of the Father and Himself. That's how united He wanted the church to be. That's not what this is. This is the opposite. This is absolutely demonic,

where you see these Gentile Christians wanting to separate from the Jews. And keep in mind, this is not simply Jewish unbelievers, Jews who rejected Christ; that's not what this is. This is Messianic Jews. These are Jews that are holding fast to Torah, to the truth of Passover, to the day, holding fast to that, and sympathizers. Whether Jew or Gentile, if you're a sympathizer, as would come to Constantine's mind, that you believe that, no, we need to do this, well, you would be considered in that group, and rightfully so.

Okay, so he goes on and says this: [For we have it in our power, if we abandon their custom, to prolong the due observance of this ordinance to future ages...](#) Absolute nonsense. [Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd;](#) unbelievable. And it's interesting; the fact that they're holding fast to this is what he's identifying as detestable. You must pay close attention to what he's saying here; it's absolutely demonic, [for we have received from our Saviour a different way.](#) By whom? By the Savior? By the Messiah Yeshua? No. [A course at once legitimate and honorable lies open to our most holy religion.](#) It is your religion. It's a made-up religion. It does not stem from the Bible or the New Testament.

[Beloved brethren, let us with one consent adopt this course, and withdraw ourselves from all participation in their baseness.](#) So apparently it's baseness to observe the Word of God. [They sometimes celebrate Easter twice in the same year.](#) Yes, they did. Do you know why? Because that's what the Torah prescribed: that Passover was so instrumental, so important, that no other festival listed in the Torah, or anywhere else for that matter, has a second time that you can observe it.

In other words, if you missed it, there was a consolation Passover that was given because you couldn't miss it. You had to celebrate it. And it's all picturesque, if you will, or imagery of the Gospel. It's not an option that we do not bear the Gospel, that we do not receive the Gospel, or that we don't receive Christ in our hearts. That's not an option. And this is through the expression of Passover, the actual observance of it, of recognizing what Jesus, Yeshua, did for us. And so, you couldn't miss it. If you did miss it, the Bible allowed you in the second month, on the same day, to keep it. Just in case something had happened and you were unable to travel to Jerusalem, whatever the case may be. It allowed for that. You can reference that in Numbers 9:9-12.

Now he goes on—[Why then should we follow those who are confessedly in grievous error?](#) It's the exact opposite, which is what Polycarp argued, which is what Polycrates argued. We could go on with the early Christian church that would argue this.

I want to end here for today, but I think you get a good idea that there's a lot of history here that is not okay, but it helps us understand why we are at the place we're at today, where there are still many Christians who have no idea. They think Passover simply belongs to the Jews. That's a Jewish thing; I don't need it. When actually, it's a Christ thing. If we're servants of Jesus, if we love Him, we will do what He says in the manner He says it. And you can even read in the New Testament—1 Corinthians 11:25—["... This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."](#) In other words, Passover—this is all about Him.

And so, I will leave this right here. Bless you; have a great week.

The Great Separation: How the Early Church Moved from Passover to Easter

Illustrating the historical transition of the early Christian Church from observing the biblical Passover to the institutionalized celebration of Easter.

2nd Century: The Apostolic Defense

4th Century: The Nicaean Mandate



Biblical/Apostolic Tradition



Polycarp vs. Anicetus (c. 155 AD)

Polycarp, discipled by the Apostle John, dogmatically defended the 14th of Nisan Passover.



The Hardline of Pope Victor (c. 190 AD)

Unlike his predecessors, Victor attempted to excommunicate all Asian churches for keeping Passover.



The Ephesian Stand

Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus refused to abandon the "exact day" handed down by apostles.



Passover as Communion

The early Church viewed Passover and Communion as the same historical and spiritual reality.

Conflicting Traditions

Feature	Biblical/Apostolic Tradition	Roman/Institutional Tradition
Date	14th of Nisan (Any day of week)	Sunday (The "Lord's Day")
Authority	Apostolic Succession (John/Paul)	Roman Papacy & Imperial Decree
Focus	Biblical Mandate & Messianic Seder	Ecclasiastical Unity & Distinction from Jews



Council of Nicaea (325 AD)

Emperor Constantine mandated that all churches must celebrate on the same day (Sunday).



The Rhetoric of Separation