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A HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

**“Jesus of Nazareth in Fulfillment of the Feasts of the Passover and
Unleavened Bread: A Prologue to the New Testament”¹**

by

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¹ Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022).
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“I am a Jew, and Jesus is my Rabbi!”

-- Messianic Judaism

² Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022).
www.roderickford.org.

Introduction

The Early Church at Jerusalem was arguably a “Messianic Jewish Church”³ in that it was organized within the Second Temple and various synagogues of ancient Judea and retained all of the traditional Jewish laws, customs, and holidays. This Church at Jerusalem predated, and was organized separately and distinctly from, the newly emerging churches of the Gentiles that were established throughout the Roman empire.

<u>Church of the Jews</u> (Jerusalem) ⁴	<u>Church of the Gentiles</u> (Ceasarea ⁵ ; Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch). ⁶
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Today, the Christian religion can be broadly divided into two categories—the Jewish Christian Church and the Gentile Christian Church.

³ See, e.g., “What is Messianic Judaism,” <https://www.bethammessiah.org/what-is-messianic-judaism>, stating:

Messianic Judaism is actually 2,000 years old, dating to the time of Yeshua Himself. Yeshua was (and is) Jewish. He was raised in a Jewish home and ministered to Jewish people in the Land of Israel. His disciples were all Jewish. The apostles were all Jewish. The writers of the Brit Chadashah (New Covenant) were all Jewish (with the possible exception of Luke, and a very good case can be made that he was also Jewish), and for a time, the faith was strictly Jewish. By the middle of the first century AD, tens of thousands of Jewish people believed that Yeshua was the Messiah (see Acts 2:37-42, Acts 4:4, Acts 21:20). This is how Messianic Judaism began.

⁴ The Church at Jerusalem: Acts 2:1-47; Acts 3: 1-26; Acts 4:1-37; Acts 5:1-41; Acts 6: 1- 15; Acts 7: 1-60; Acts 8: 1-40; Acts 9: 1 – 43.


⁵ The Church of the Gentiles: Acts 10: 1-48; Acts 11: 1- 30.

⁶ The Church of the Gentiles (Greeks): Acts 11: 19-30.

Both of these broad categories are only generalizations—the Jewish Christian Church is itself splintered into many different independent sects and expressions, for example:

- Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA);
- Jews for Jesus;
- Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC);
- Chosen People Ministries (CPM);
- Tikkun Ministries
- Messianic Jewish Fellowship International (MJFI)
- International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS)
- Chosen People Ministries (CPM)
- HaYesod (First Fruits of Zion)
- Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council
- Israel United In Christ (IUIC)
- Israelite Church of God in Jesus Christ (ICGJC)

The major characteristic of these Messianic churches is their ongoing celebration of the major Jewish holy days such as:

Feast Day	Old Testament Scripture	General Judaism ⁷	Messianic Judaism 	General Christianity ⁸
Feast of the Passover	Leviticus 23: 5-8; Numbers 28: 16-25	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Acknowledged but not celebrated
Feast of Unleavened Bread	Leviticus 23: 5-8; Numbers 28: 16-25	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Not acknowledged or celebrated
Feast of Pentecost	Leviticus 23: 5-22	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Not acknowledged or celebrated
Feast of Trumpets	Leviticus 23: 23-25	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Acknowledged; and celebrated	

⁷ The term “General Judaism” includes all of the various denominations and sects within the Jewish religion.

⁸ The term “General Christianity” includes all of the various denominations and sects within the Christian religion.

				Not acknowledged or celebrated
Feast of Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)	Numbers 29: 7-11	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Not acknowledged or celebrated
Feast of Tabernacles	Leviticus 23: 33-44	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Not acknowledged or celebrated
Feast of First fruits	Leviticus 23: 9-16	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Acknowledged; and celebrated	Not acknowledged or celebrated

Although both Messianic Judaism and General Christianity acknowledge *that Jesus Christ fulfilled all of these Old Testament feasts*, only Messianic Judaism requires the continued administration or celebration of these feasts.

Within General Christianity, I surmise that antisemitism is one major reason why many Christian denominations do not acknowledge or celebrate these Jewish feast days. Within the Reformed Church tradition, John Calvin (1509 – 1564) has explicitly held that these Jewish feast days constitute “ceremonial laws” which have been abrogated through Christ’s work on the cross and resurrection. While Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD) tacitly agrees with Calvin on this point, he nevertheless honors the Jewish “ceremonial laws” as having inherent value in testifying about Christ, because they all point to Him, stating:

This same [Jewish] nation, too, was afterwards dispersed through the nations, **in order to testify to the scriptures** in which eternal salvation in Christ had been declared. For not only **the prophecies** which are contained in words, nor only the precepts for the right conduct of life, which teach morals and piety, and are contained in the sacred writings—not only these, but also **the rites, priesthood, tabernacle or temple, altars, sacrifices, ceremonies, and whatever else belongs to that service** which is due to God, and which in Greek is properly called *hatpeia*—all these signified and fore-announced those things which we who believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life

believe to have been fulfilled, or behold in process of fulfillment, or confidently believe shall yet be fulfilled.⁹

Similarly, the “Jewish” example and teachings of the Apostle Paul also support Augustine’s conception of the Jewish holy days as well, especially where Paul writes:

[T]he law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ....¹⁰

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.¹¹

Therefore, as an expression of Reformed theology, this paper endorses the “Pauline” and “Augustinian” viewpoints on the Jewish feast days, and holds that these feast days are both good for instruction of the Christian faithful and, therefore, suitable for Christian practice within the churches.

Notably, this paper *does not conclude* that acknowledging and celebrating the Jewish feast days are mandatory, or that Christian churches must adopt them in order to remain orthodox or to be scripturally compliant. However, this paper does endorse Messianic Judaism as a valid expression of Christianity, because Messianic Judaism helps to safeguard the Christian faithful against antisemitism and against a very strange forgetfulness of the Hebraic-Jewish foundations of the Christian religion.

Accordingly, this paper on Reformed theology is *the first* in a series of papers on the Jewish feast days, namely, the **“Feast of the Passover”** and the **“Feast of Unleavened Bread.”**

⁹ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 238-239.

¹⁰ Galatians 3:24.

¹¹ 2 Timothy 3: 16-17.

Chapter One

“What is the Feast of Passover?”

Slavery and oppression are the touchstones of story of the Passover. For some reason, the LORD God of the Old Testament did not approve of the Egyptian enslavement of his beloved Children of Israel.

As the story is told in the Old Testament, God sent his prophet Moses from out of the desert to Egypt in order to deliver them from this awful human bondage.

Notably, such an oppressed people as these ancient Israelites did not have the education, material resources, or means of deliverance— only an all-powerful force in the universe known as the LORD God could effectuate their liberation.

This historical event was as marvelous as the creation of world. Here through God’s prophet Moses a testimony was made not simply for the Jews but for all of humanity, — a testimony as to the nature and character of the LORD God.

For one thing, this Old Testament story of the Passover instructs us that this LORD God is *imminently political*: He intervenes in secular, worldly, and political affairs. Not only does this LORD God intervene but He alone is the Sovereign. For this *spiritual law* regarding God’s sovereignty over global politics is amply stated in the Psalms, as follows:

God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.

How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah.

Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.

Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.

They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course.

I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.

But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.

Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.¹²

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying,

Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.

Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.¹³

The Passover story in the Old Testament suggests that God punishes national sin. Significantly, from God's vantagepoint and perspective, both the Egyptians (i.e., the slave-owners) and the Israelites (i.e., the slaves) were altogether sinful and worthy of punishment. But the only difference between these two groups was sacrificial blood of the lamb.¹⁴ God instructed Moses to inform the Children of

¹² Psalm 82: 1-8 (KJV).

¹³ Psalm 2: 1-12 (KJV).

¹⁴ Exodus 11: 4-10; Exodus 12: 1- 13.

Israel to, according to “the house of their fathers,”¹⁵ to kill “a lamb for an house,”¹⁶ a “lamb... without blemish, a male of the first year...”¹⁷ They were then instructed to “take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door of the houses,” and to roast and to eat the Passover lamb.¹⁸ While this Passover meal was being eaten, the Lord God would thus execute his divine judgment:

For I will **pass through the land of Egypt this night**, and will **smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt**, both man and beast; and **against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment**: I am the Lord.

And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and **when I see the blood, I will pass over you**, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.¹⁹

But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.²⁰

The firstborn males of all the Egyptians were executed on the night of the Passover. This was the very last plague which forced Pharaoh’s hand to let the children of Israel go free. God’s awesome power that was demonstrated in this divine execution of judgment cannot be understated.

Now for some reason, God wished that the Jews would communicate this divine judgment to all of the nations of the world through testament by virtue of a

¹⁵ Exodus 12: 3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Exodus 12:5.

¹⁸ Exodus 12: 5-11.

¹⁹ Exodus 12: 12-13.

²⁰ Exodus 12: 7.

feast day called the Passover, and to commemorate this feast day “**by an ordinance for ever.**”²¹

And so, to this very day, the Jews celebrate the Passover by hosting a Passover meal. Today, many the Jews still celebrate the Passover, as follows:

Jewish Celebration of Passover

“Jews celebrate Passover, commemorating the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt, with a special meal called a Seder, avoiding leavened foods, and attending synagogue services.

“Here's a more detailed look at Passover traditions:

“**The Seder:** The Seder is a ritual meal held on the first two nights of Passover, where the story of the Exodus is retold through readings, rituals, and symbolic foods.

“**Haggadah:** The Seder is guided by the Haggadah, a book containing the liturgy and story of the Exodus.

“**Symbolic Foods:** The Seder plate includes items like matzah (unleavened bread), bitter herbs (maror), and charoset (a sweet paste), each representing a different aspect of the Exodus story.

“**Four Cups of Wine:** Participants drink four cups of wine (or grape juice) during the Seder, symbolizing freedom.

“**Asking the Four Questions:** Children traditionally ask the Four Questions, prompting their parents to explain the significance of Passover.”²²

In keeping with these Jewish traditions (i.e., Exodus 12: 14, “ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever”), the Messianic Jewish churches continue to commemorate the Passover.

The Passover is held during the Spring time and typically falls around the same time as the Easter season within the Christian calendar.

²¹ Exodus 12: 14 (“And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.”)

²²“Passover,” *Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Passover>

Chapter Two

“What is the Feast of Unleavened Bread?”

Now the Feast of the Unleavened Bread is closely connected to the Feast of the Passover.

“The Feast of Unleavened Bread or *Hag HaMatzot* (Hawg Hah-MAHT-zot) is considered a separate feast that is observed during Passover week. These two Holy Days celebrated together represent the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt.”²³

Beginning on the day after the Passover, the Old Testament states that Moses thus instructed, “[s]even days shall ye eat unleavened bread.”²⁴

No leaven bread can be eaten for seven days. And, in fact, leaven must be removed from the houses of the Israelite faithful.²⁵

The scriptural interpretation of this Feast is centered upon symbolic meaning of the “leaven” which is removed from the bread.

“Leaven is often seen as a symbol of corruption or evil influence in the Bible. There is a good reason for this interpretation: “leaven” is a remnant of dough that was allowed to rot or ferment. As it is spoiled or fermented, yeast (a fungus) from the air lands on and breeds in the dough. This remnant of “corrupted” dough was then added to the next day’s batch of dough, creating a bread that would rise and grow. Leaven signifies anything that rots and corrupts physically, spiritually, and morally.”²⁶

On the first day of the Feast, there must be a “holy convocation.”²⁷

²³ “What is the Feast of Unleavened Bread?” <https://vojisrael.org/feasts/feast-of-unleavened-bread/>

²⁴ Exodus 12: 15.

²⁵ Ibid; Exodus 12: 18-20 (the Feast of Unleavened Bread is to be kept during first month, the 14th day to the 21st day of the month; [y]e shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.”).

²⁶ “What is the Feast of Unleavened Bread?” <https://vojisrael.org/feasts/feast-of-unleavened-bread/>

²⁷ Exodus 12: 16.

On the seventh and last day of the Feast, there must be a “holy convocation.”²⁸

During this seven-day period, “no manner of work shall be done in them,”²⁹ and the basic remembrance shall be made of the fact that the LORD God had delivered the Children of Israel from Egyptian bondage.³⁰

The scriptural foundation of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread is contained in various passages of Exodus. In summation, “[t]he feast of Unleavened Bread celebrates the journey of the children of Israel through the wilderness. Following Passover and the Exodus, they ate unleavened bread for thirty days, which was then substituted by the manna (actual food) that Yahwah Himself provided for the rest of their journey to the promised land of Israel. The fact that it was unleavened signified that they were not taking any of the contaminating influence of Egypt, only the pure bread of life.”³¹

Notably, this Feast of Unleavened Bread must be kept “by an ordinance for ever.”³² Hence, the Jews still honor this divine commandment.

However, when Messianic Jews commemorate the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, they expressly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is that true unleavened bread which came down from heaven.³³

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Exodus 12: 17.

³¹ “What is the Feast of Unleavened Bread?” <https://vojisrael.org/feasts/feast-of-unleavened-bread/>

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., stating:

The Feast of Unleavened Bread points to Jesus as the bread from heaven without leaven (sin). His life, death, and resurrection parallel the Yachatz ceremony, which shows the middle piece of three sections, broken, hidden, then found, and shared with everyone. Jesus was beaten and broken for our transgression, his glory hidden as he was convicted and nailed to the cross, and in his resurrection, he was revealed (or found) as the “Son of God” and redemption for all to receive and share.

As Jesus ate his last Passover with his disciples, he took the bread (matzah), gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them saying, “This is my body given for you” (Luke 22:19). In this short statement, he revealed his Father’s plan of redemption to save us ALL from our slavery to sin.

The Messianic Jewish denominations' (1) continued celebration of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread and (2) continued interpretation³⁴ of Jesus Christ being the fulfillment of that feast is certainly within parameters of orthodox Christian practice.³⁵

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Sir, they said, "from now on give us this bread." Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." John 6:32-35

³⁴ See, e.g., "Unleavened Bread: Partaking of the Bread of His Affliction"
https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Spring_Holidays/Unleavened_Bread/Anavah/anavah.html

³⁵ See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 238-239, stating:

This same [Jewish] nation, too, was afterwards dispersed through the nations, **in order to testify to the scriptures** in which eternal salvation in Christ had been declared. For not only **the prophecies** which are contained in words, nor only the precepts for the right conduct of life, which teach morals and piety, and are contained in the sacred writings—not only these, but also **the rites, priesthood, tabernacle or temple, altars, sacrifices, ceremonies, and whatever else belongs to that service** which is due to God, and which in Greek is properly called *hatpeia*—all these signified and fore-announced those things which we who believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life believe to have been fulfilled, or behold in process of fulfillment, or confidently believe shall yet be fulfilled.

Chapter Three

“Jesus kept the Feasts of the Passover and Unleavened Bread”

Jesus of Nazareth, being a Jew, celebrated the Passover and Unleavened Bread feasts throughout his life and ministry.

“As a Jew, Jesus celebrated Passover. Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem every year for Passover, as God had directed (Luke 2:41), and as an adult, Jesus continued to return to Jerusalem for the Passover and is recorded going more than once with His disciples (John 2:13).”³⁶

Jesus’ last Passover and Unleavened Bread feasts coincided with his “Last Supper,” where he served and ate unleavened bread.³⁷

However, it is not clear—as most Christian churches hold—that Jesus himself ever meant to for the “Last Supper” to create *a cessation* of, or to serve as a substitute for, the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread within his newly-organized churches.

Since Jesus celebrated the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread throughout his earthly ministry, there is no valid reason to prohibit present-day Christians from making the same celebrations while also acknowledging Christ as the fulfillment of these feast days.³⁸

³⁶ “Why Don't Christians Celebrate Passover if Jesus Did?”

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/holidays/why-dont-christians-celebrate-passover-if-jesus-did.html>

³⁷ “What is the Feast of Unleavened Bread?” <https://vojisrael.org/feasts/feast-of-unleavened-bread/>, stating:

As Jesus ate his last Passover with his disciples, he took the bread (matzah), gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them saying, ‘This is my body given for you’ (Luke 22:19). In this short statement, he revealed his Father’s plan of redemption to save us ALL from our slavery to sin.

Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’ Sir, they said, ‘from now on give us this bread.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’ John 6:32-35

³⁸ See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 238-239, stating:

Chapter Four

“The Early Church kept the Feasts of the Passover and Unleavened Bread”

The plain text of the New Testament suggests that most of the First Century Jews did not readily accept or adopt the cessation of “Jewish customs and practices” with the Early Church at Jerusalem. Instead, the old Jewish customs and practices remained central to their Jewish identity.³⁹

This same [Jewish] nation, too, was afterwards dispersed through the nations, **in order to testify to the scriptures** in which eternal salvation in Christ had been declared. For not only **the prophecies** which are contained in words, nor only the precepts for the right conduct of life, which teach morals and piety, and are contained in the sacred writings—not only these, but also **the rites, priesthood, tabernacle or temple, altars, sacrifices, ceremonies, and whatever else belongs to that service** which is due to God, and which in Greek is properly called *hatpeia*—all these signified and fore-announced those things which we who believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life believe to have been fulfilled, or behold in process of fulfillment, or confidently believe shall yet be fulfilled.

³⁹ See, e.g., Acts 18:21 (Apostle Paul saying, “I must by all means keep this feast [of the Pentecost] that cometh in Jerusalem...”). At Jerusalem, the Apostle Paul himself acknowledged two denominations of Christian faithful: one for **the Jews (i.e., Messianic Judaism)**, and another for **the Gentiles (i.e., the Christian church)**. See, e.g., Acts 26: 17-26 (NIV), stating:

Paul’s Arrival at Jerusalem

¹⁷ When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly.

¹⁸ The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.

¹⁹ Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

²⁰ When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law.

²¹ **They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.**

²² What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³ so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow.

²⁴ Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know **there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.**

²⁵ As for **the Gentile believers**, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.”

²⁶ The next day **Paul took the men and purified himself along with them.** Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

Here the Apostle Paul acknowledges that Jewish converts shall, or may, retain the traditional Mosaic laws and customs—this Christ himself did not abrogate. However, Paul also acknowledges that the Church at Jerusalem (which included a sect of converted **Christians who were also Pharisees** [see Acts 15:5]), with the Apostle James presiding over the question of whether the Gentiles must be circumcised in accordance with the Law of Moses, that the whole Church in Jerusalem devised a separate standard for the Gentiles, as recounted in **Acts 15: 12-29** (NIV), to wit:

12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. 13 When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me.

14 Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

16-18 ““After this I will return
and rebuild David’s fallen tent.
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,
that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things’[b]—
things known from long ago.”

19 “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

21 For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

The Council’s Letter to Gentile Believers

22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers.

At the same time, the New Testament amply informs us that this Early Church at Jerusalem expressly relaxed or completely abrogated these “Jewish customs and practices” within the Early Church of the Gentiles, which the Apostle Paul and others established throughout the Greco-Roman world.⁴⁰

As such, the Church at Jerusalem continued to follow Jewish laws and customs,⁴¹ while simultaneously acknowledging the need to alleviate Gentiles from having adhering to the same law and customs—such as, for instance, the law of circumcision.⁴² In one sense, both the Christianity of the Gentiles and Messianic Judaism hold the same core principles and beliefs; but in another sense, Messianic

23 With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

Hence, the Apostles and the first Jewish Christians were “Messianic Jews” or “Messianic Jewish Christians,” who kept the traditional Mosaic customs and traditions.

Though the **Christians had decided that the Gentiles need not be circumcised** (i.e., Acts 15: 12-29), the Apostle Paul decided that his new associate minister named **Timothy**, whose mother was a Jew and whose father was Greek, should be circumcised because Paul “wanted to take him along on the journey.” Acts 16:3. This would clearly indicate that the Apostle Paul conceptualized himself as being a “Messianic Jew,” and not a “Gentile” who had been converted to the Christian religion.

⁴⁰ At Jerusalem, the Apostle Paul himself acknowledged two denominations of Christian faithful: one for the Jews (i.e., Messianic Judaism), and another for the Gentiles (i.e., the Christian church).

⁴¹ Id.

⁴² Id.

Judaism has retained within its understanding of the Torah various elements of orthodox Judaism not practiced in Christianity.⁴³

At Antioch, the apostles Paul and Barnabus preached the Gospel at first to the Jews (as well as to Gentiles who were in attendance) within their synagogues, on several consecutive Sabbaths.⁴⁴

Paul's and Barnabus's preaching was so powerful and persuasive that "almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord."⁴⁵

But "[w]hen the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying."⁴⁶

But Paul and Barnabas insisted that their mission was to be a "light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."⁴⁷ Henceforth, many influential Jews fomented defamation and persecution against Paul, Barnabas,⁴⁸ and their fellow Christians, many of whom were fellow Jews.⁴⁹

⁴³ See, e.g., "What is Messianic Judaism," <https://www.bethammessiah.org/what-is-messianic-judaism>, stating:

In one sense, Messianic Judaism and Christianity are the same thing. There is only one faith. Messianic Jews and Christians share the same core beliefs. Christianity (the faith of the Gentiles in Messiah Yeshua), which originally began within the context of Messianic Judaism, is the same faith, although it's primary expression is culturally different than Messianic Judaism. Theologically, the major difference between Messianic Judaism and Christianity lies in keeping the Torah. Clearly, the early Messianic Jews followed after Messiah Yeshua, who kept the Torah perfectly. Consequently, Messianic Judaism continues today to have a favorable view in keeping the Torah, and are zealous to live in accordance with it (see Acts 21:20). The Gentile Believers were not required, in the same manner as the Jewish Believers, to observe the Law of Moses (see Acts 15:5,19-20).

⁴⁴ Acts 13: 14- 52.

⁴⁵ Acts 13: 44.

⁴⁶ Acts 13: 45.

⁴⁷ Acts 13: 47.

⁴⁸ Acts 14: 2 ("But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.")

⁴⁹ Acts 13: 48-52.

Nevertheless, the Council of Jerusalem sought to ensure that Jewish holiness standards—including the history of the Old Testament church— would be taught and preached to the newly-converted Gentiles:

Council of Jerusalem

Acts 15: 21

“But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is **read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.**”

Paul’s Epistle to Timothy

2 Timothy 3: 16-17

“**All scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”⁵⁰

In other words, the bare minimum standards utilized for the Gentiles to become Christians were to refrain from idolatry, fornication, things strangled, and blood; but *afterwards and simultaneous with their continued growth in the Christian faith*, the imposition of Jewish holiness standards through the preaching and teaching of things taught in the Old Testament would be utilized for *further guidance* and theological or spiritual development.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Here the words “[a]ll scripture” must construed as a reference to the “Old Testament” only, since during the time when the Apostle Paul wrote these words, the New Testament had not yet been assembled.

⁵¹ There is a school of thought that does not hold this viewpoint, but instead emphasizes Christianity’s complete cessation with the synagogue and Jewish law. See R. L. Solberg, “Acts 15:21, Hebrew Roots and the Jerusalem Church.”

In the Reformed Theological tradition, there nothing fundamentally inconsistent between the ceremonial feast days of Passover and Unleavened and the Christian religion. Since Jesus celebrated both of these feasts throughout his earthly ministry, there is no valid reason to prohibit present-day Christians from making the same celebrations while also acknowledging Christ as the fulfillment of these feast days.⁵²

⁵² See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 238-239, stating:

This same [Jewish] nation, too, was afterwards dispersed through the nations, **in order to testify to the scriptures** in which eternal salvation in Christ had been declared. For not only **the prophecies** which are contained in words, nor only the precepts for the right conduct of life, which teach morals and piety, and are contained in the sacred writings—not only these, but also **the rites, priesthood, tabernacle or temple, altars, sacrifices, ceremonies, and whatever else belongs to that service** which is due to God, and which in Greek is properly called *hatpeia*—all these signified and fore-announced those things which we who believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life believe to have been fulfilled, or behold in process of fulfillment, or confidently believe shall yet be fulfilled.

Chapter Five

“Should the Black Church Keep the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread?”

For the “Black Church”⁵³ of the United States⁵⁴ — whether they be Black Christians, Jews, Black Messianic Jews,⁵⁵ or Black Muslims⁵⁶—the Feasts of the

⁵³ In this chapter, the definition of the word “Black church” has been borrowed from the following text: C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 1 (“We use the term ‘the Black Church’ as do other scholars and much of the general public as a kind of sociological and theological shorthand reference to the pluralism of black Christian churches in the United States.”) See, also, James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Vol. One: 1966- 1979* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 217, citing Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, and adopting the same definition of “Black Church.”

⁵⁴ Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1921), p. 282 (“The [Negro] church serves as a moral force, a power acting as a restraint upon the bad and stimulating the good to further moral achievement. Among the Negroes its valuable service is readily apparent....”); W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of Black Folk,” *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986), p. 496 (“[T]he [Negro] Church often stands as a real conservator of morals, a strengthener of family life, and the final authority on what is Good and Right”); and James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Vol. One: 1966- 1979* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 218 (“[T]he Black Church of the nineteenth century... thought of itself as God’s judgment upon racism... converted thousands, stabilized the Black family... founded schools and colleges.... And provided the social, cultural, economic, and political base of the entire African American community in the United States.”)

⁵⁵ Here I note that many black Messianic Jews are deemed “radical” on account of their firm and very serious opposition to white racism in the United States. They have founded their theology upon the idea that they—not the white Jews—are the original Hebrews. On the other hand, there are black Messianic Jews who are not so radical or anti-white in their theological views but nevertheless hold that African Americans have a special commission from God towards liberation. In this sense, this paper considers the black Messianic Jews to comprise one definitive branch of the “Black Church” in the United States. In making this broad definition of the “Black Church,” I am borrowing heavily from James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume One: 1966 – 1979* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 217 – 223. (“... what we usually mean when we use the term ‘Black Church’....”)

⁵⁶ The Black Muslims—such as the Nation of Islam—are quite similar to the radicalized black Messianic Jews. Similarly, there are groups of Black Muslims who are not so radical or anti-white in their theological views but nevertheless hold that African Americans have a special commission from God towards liberation. Arguably, because of the high profile of great black Muslims such as Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, and Louis Farrakhan, the Black Muslims have become incorporated into the “Black Church” in the United States. See, generally, “Million Man March,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Million_Man_March (“The Million Man March was a large gathering of African-American men in Washington, D.C., on October 16, 1995.”); and see “Million Man March” <https://www.britannica.com/event/Million-Man-March>, stating:

Passover and *Unleavened Bread* have a special spiritual, theological, historical, racial, political, and social significance.

That special significance revolves around the transatlantic slave trade, chattel slavery in both the Americas and in Arabia, and African colonialism.

There is perhaps no better summation of the spiritual significance of the plight of African Americans than W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903),⁵⁷ which poetically analogizes African American spiritual strivings and religion to the plight of the ancient Hebrews emerging from Egyptian slavery.⁵⁸

The religious dimension of black churches is found in the black sacred cosmos, a unique Afro-Christian worldview that was forged among black people from both the African and Euro-American traditions

Million Man March, political demonstration in Washington, D.C., on October 16, 1995, to promote African American unity and family values. Estimates of the number of marchers, most of whom were African American men, ranged from 400,000 to nearly 1.1 million, ranking it among the largest gatherings of its kind in American history. The event was **organized by Louis Farrakhan**, the often controversial leader of the Nation of Islam, and directed by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., the former executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to bring about a spiritual renewal that would instill a sense of personal responsibility in African American men for improving the condition of African Americans. Among other prominent African Americans who supported and spoke at the event were Jesse Jackson, Rosa Parks, Cornel West, and Maya Angelou, along with Marion Barry and Kurt Schmoke, then the mayors of Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Maryland, respectively. "Let our choices be for life, for protecting our women, our children, keeping our brothers free of drugs, free of crime," Schmoke told the crowd, which assembled on the Mall. It was reported that in response to the march some 1.7 million African American men registered to vote.

⁵⁷ See W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of Black Folk," *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986).

⁵⁸ See, e.g., C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), p 16, stating:

The dialectical model of the Black Church is reflective of W. E. B. Du Bois's phenomenology of consciousness, his poetic articulation of 'double-consciousness' as summarizing both the plight and potential of the African and Euro-American heritage of black people; 'two struggling souls within one dark body.' Du Bois did not provide any final resolution of this double-consciousness, but he did recognize the need for complete freedom for African Americans in order that their human potentials could be fully realized. The Black Church institutionalizes the dialectical tensions and constant struggles that Du Bois wrote about. The black churches are not reified social institutions, but they represent the collective double-consciousness of the African American subculture expressing itself as a religious community in the uncertain shadow of an established tradition.

during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The black sacred cosmos permeated all of the social institutions and cultural traditions of black people.

While the general structure of beliefs, rituals, and organization of black churches remained the same as white churches, black Christians often gave different nuances and emphases to their theological views. For example, the **paladin God of deliverance** is given a much more prominent role in **black worship practices**.⁵⁹

Substantively, this “paladin God of deliverance” is contained within the Old Testament’s description of the ancient Hebrews from Egyptian slavery.⁶⁰ “In the Exodus-event,” writes the distinguished theologian Dr. James Cone, “God is revealed by means of his acts on behalf of a weak and defenseless people. He is the God of power and of strength, able to destroy the enslaving power of the mighty Pharaoh.”⁶¹ “God’s election of oppressed Israelites has unavoidable implications for the doing of theology. If God had chosen as his ‘holy nation’ the Egyptian slave-masters instead of the Israelite slaves, then a completely different kind of God would have been revealed.”⁶² “The word ‘liberation’ [in the term “Black Liberation Theology”] was derived from the past and contemporary struggles for political freedom and the biblical story of the Exodus, as defined by the Black religious experience in the United States.”⁶³

Since then, many other scholars have gone on to describe the Black Church as a special and unique institution that is oriented around the liberation of the African American people from both slavery and the lingering effects of that institution.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁰ James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume One: 1966 – 1979* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 160 – 167.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 160.

⁶² Ibid., p. 162.

⁶³ James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume Two: 1980 – 1992* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 1.

⁶⁴ See, generally, James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume One: 1966 – 1979* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993); and James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume Two: 1980 – 1992* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993).

For this reason, I believe the “Black Church”— black Christians, black Jews, and black Muslims— ought to commemorate an Africa-centered, biblical

- Feast of the Passover; and,
- Feast of the Unleavened Bread

The God Yahweh whom each of these three major religions serve and who instituted these feast days did so for the benefit of oppressed slaves, so that they would not forget the source from whom their liberation comes.⁶⁵

A final note, but certainly not the least important one, is the spiritual nature of the old “Black-Jewish” alliance during the early 20th century, wherein a shared understanding of the God of the Old Testament and a shared experience with oppression helped to form an alliance between African Americans and Jews.



Though this “Black-Jewish” alliance is in shambles, due in part to events developing in the state of Israel and the Middle East, it is the stern duty of Christian clergy and Jewish rabbis—through the Feasts of the *Passover* and *Unleavened Bread*—to rise above this politics in order to remind the world of God’s eternal love and redemption for mankind.

⁶⁵ The predominantly-black churches which do not celebrate Passover—the reminder that God intervened to liberate oppressed slaves from bondage—is a grave ecclesiastical and theological malpractice which unwittingly undermines a central message of African and African American liberation which is at the heart of the Black Church. For this reason, black Messianic Jews could be a great service to mainline Black churches—such the black Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Roman Catholic churches—which do not customarily keep Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

CONCLUSION

Jesus of Nazareth, who was a “Rabbi” within the meaning and customs of ancient Judea’s egalitarian institutions of the synagogue system — including independent prayer or study groups (e.g., minyans) led by teachers of Jewish law (i.e., rabbis)⁶⁶ — kept all of the Jewish festivals and holy days, such as Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. After Jesus’ earthly ministry, death, and resurrection, the first Apostle and the Church at Jerusalem continued to kept these traditional Jewish festivals and holy days.

Hence, the first Christian church was a “Messianic” Jewish Church, and thus Messianic Judaism has special archeological value for mainline or general Christianity.⁶⁷

For Calvinism and Puritanism, “Messianic” Judaism conflicts with John Calvin’s holding that Jewish “ceremonial laws” have been suspended, fulfilled, or

⁶⁶ See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 238-239, regarding Israel and the Jews, stating:

This same nation, too, was afterwards dispersed through the nations, in order to testify to the scriptures in which eternal salvation in Christ had been declared. For not only the prophecies which are contained in words, nor only the precepts for the right conduct of life, which teach morals and piety, and are contained in the sacred writings—not only these, but also the rites, priesthood, tabernacle or temple, altars, sacrifices, ceremonies, and whatever else belongs to that service which is due to God, and which in Greek is properly called *hatpeia*—all these signified and fore-announced those things which we who believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life believe to have been fulfilled, or behold in process of fulfillment, or confidently believe shall yet be fulfilled.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Aaron Eby, “What is a Messianic Jew?” *Beth Immanuel Messianic Synagogue* <https://www.bethimmanuel.org/articles/what-messianic-jew> (“At Beth Immanuel, we embrace **Messianic Judaism** as our system of thought, belief, and practice. We feel that this perspective best reflects the ancient faith of Jesus and his first followers.”) Notably, for Protestant reformers, such as, e.g., Martin Luther (1483 – 1546), John Calvin (1509 – 1564), or John Knox (c.1514 - 1572), looked to “Messianic Judaism” for their archeological evidence regarding the true religion of Christ and for support for their various theological arguments against the ecclesiastical systems of the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, and other forms of hierarchical church abuses. Although the Protestant Reformation was not, in essence, Messianic Judaism, both Reformed theologians and Jewish theologians (especially Messianic Jews) reached eerily similar theological interpretations of the Old Testament’s teachings about civil and ecclesiastical polity. For this reason, in the United States, many Jewish immigrants embraced the Calvinistic-Puritan heritage of colonial New England and dubbed their new homeland an “American Zion.” See, e.g., Jerold S. Auerbach, *Rabbis and Lawyers: The Journey from Torah to Constitution* (New Orleans, LA: Quid Pro Books, 2010).

abrogated through Christ's work on the cross. However, for Augustinianism—which is a type of Reformed theology—the Jewish “ceremonial laws” can be classified as a prophetic witnessing of Christ. For practical Christian theology, the Augustinian approach not only connects the Old Testament to the New Testament in a way that teaches the fulfilment of Christ's work on the cross, but it also safeguards against Christian heresies that stem largely from a lack of understanding of the central relevance of the Old Testament.

Because Christ said “think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfill,” meaning that the holiness standards set forth in the Old Testament can be carried out—with Christ's help—once the “heart” becomes “circumcised.”⁶⁸ Messianic Judaism is not inconsistent with this basic theological concept but, rather, it is a most wholistic expression of it.

This paper thus concludes that it is extraordinarily productive for the Christian faithful to keep the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, while simultaneously acknowledging that Christ fulfilled both.

THE END

⁶⁸ See, e.g., the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 30: 6 “the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart”); Romans 2: 29 “[b]ut he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”)

