

INTRODUCTION

“My, this really turns the whole thing on its head,” exclaimed my editor after reading the first several chapters of this manuscript. I knew exactly what she meant. On the other hand I prefer to think of it as setting some things back down on their feet where they belong—on the feet of the first-century Jewish idioms in which the Messiah’s statements at the Last Supper were meant to be understood.

The Messianic Feast

The issue of whether the Last Supper was a Passover or not has been hotly debated throughout history, but today for the most part it is given little thought. As a result, scripture intended to lead to true spiritual communion with God has instead been lost to man-made rituals that, for many, represent cornerstone beliefs.

Handing down information, beliefs, and customs from one generation to the next—whether by word of mouth or by example—ensures cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions. Nevertheless, grievous error results when ceremonial or sacramental traditions involve stringently enforced, human-dictated ritual that ignores God’s direction, empowerment, and revelation. Accordingly, differentiating between “traditions of men” and “commandments of God” is integral to both Jewish and Christian belief.

Religious teachings, rituals, and decrees that were based on neither the true teachings of the Messiah, nor on those of the Jewish apostles, remain in the Church even to this day.

Enter the Disconnect

The original Messianic Jews (later called Christians) understood New Covenant truth as God intended—that is, through the clarifying lens of Jewish practice and idiom. However, once Roman Emperor Constantine established Christianity as dominant within the Roman Empire, he personally convened the first ecumenical council to align doctrine and customs with Roman religious practices. Consequently, Rome commandeered what had begun as a strictly Jewish phenomenon—namely, that the Messiah had come to redeem Israel and reconcile all believers to God. This eventu-

ally caused a complete disconnect from the doctrines and understandings of the original Messianic believers.

Voiding Scripture

By rightly connecting scripture to first-century Jewish idioms and practice, it becomes clear that neither Jesus nor Paul taught the “traditions of men” that entered the Church through Rome. What original Messianic believers understood to be true—that Jesus was crucified on the 14th day, the legal time for sacrificing the Passover—was rejected by Rome. What this history shows is that the Jewish believers understood that since the Crucifixion took place the day after the Last Supper, the Messiah’s final meal was not the Passover. To the contrary, the Roman-controlled church passed down the tradition that the Last Supper was the Passover, and a certain ritual, observed to this day, has been based on this belief.

Thus, the Roman ritual has done what the Messiah warned against, and has “nicely set aside” Bible truth to keep a tradition:

^{NAS} Mark 7:8 “Neglecting the commandment of God, **you hold to the tradition of men.**”

^{NAS} Mark 7:9 “He was also saying to them, ‘**You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.**’”

In doing so the Roman-controlled church masked, and thus invalidated, Bible truth. The feast prepared by God for New Covenant believers, which was foreshadowed in Jewish communal meals and often called the “Messianic Banquet” in Jewish writings, was turned into a ritual.

^{NAS} Mark 7:13 “**Thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition** which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

We have been taught that the Last Supper was the Passover, yet many of us have never considered the conundrum that has been handed down since the time of Rome. For if the Last Supper was the Passover, how could the Messiah slay the Passover one day—at the legally acceptable day and time for the Passover sacrifice—and then be crucified the following day and still be, as Paul said, “Christ our Passover”?

In other words, how could Jesus have sacrificed and roasted the Passover one day (the day God commanded), eaten it that night with his apostles at the Last Supper, and then on the next day be slain as the fulfillment of the Passover? How can both

days be the required 14th day in which God commanded for the Passover to be slain? Wouldn't that result in the Messiah dying as our "day-late" Passover?

Is it possible that the Christian belief that Jesus ate the Passover at the Last Supper was a "tradition of men" that originated in Rome, and not what the original Jewish believers taught or understood?

Is it possible that the resulting Communion ritual based on this belief and handed down through the centuries was not really what the Messiah wanted or what the apostles taught?

Lining these questions up to the plumb line of the Messiah speaking in parables, joined with the idioms and understandings of Jerusalem in his day, yield surprising results that are sure to spiritually bless all who want more of God and His love.

This Scriptural Journey

This scriptural adventure began for me after I graduated from Bible college, when as yet I had never considered the contradiction of Christ supposedly eating the Passover at the Last Supper, and then he himself being slain as the Passover the day following.

After I was accepted into the theology master's program in 1985, we graduate students were given an assignment to study and debate the long-held controversy of whether the Last Supper was the Passover or not. For this particular study, we charted the Jewish template for the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread and tried to place the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and other time-specific events into this template (see "The Template Challenge" in Part 2). Our professor encouraged us to explore arguments on both sides of the controversy, and I remember that only one person was willing to take the side that Jesus did *not* eat the Passover at the Last Supper—a fiery Italian named Tony. The rest of the class, myself included, took the safer route and argued that it *was* the Passover. Tony focused on a few crucial points, especially the Greek double negative in which Jesus says he will *not* eat this Passover (Luke 22:15–16). But the rest of us were not buying it, for the scriptures (or more accurately the English *translations* of the Greek scriptures) seemed to make it too clear that it *was* the Passover.

At that point we were not particularly well versed in the Jewish idioms, and many in the group did not yet have a working knowledge of Greek, so some subtle but important nuances remained hidden from our view. We came away essentially agreeing that the scriptures (specifically the English translations) *seemed* to be clear that Jesus had indeed eaten the Passover at his Last Supper.

Yet enough questions remained unanswered that when the semester was over, several of us continued to meet in my home to discuss them. But even then we were unable to reconcile many seeming contradictions, and eventually we went our own ways. Over the next 17 years, every now and then—such as when I saw a new

scriptural point, or I understood a Jewish idiom I had not comprehended before—I would pull out my files, spread them all over the floor, and try to find a way to make everything fit. But then in frustration, unable to harmonize the apparent contradictions, I would always put the files back and let them sit again.

However, the things I was discovering in both the scriptures and first-century Jewish idioms were causing me to believe more and more that the Last Supper was *not* the Passover, but rather that Jesus was crucified on the legal and proper day God commanded for the Passover: the 14th of Nisan.

Up until this time, I knew that the original Greek scriptures were the inspired word of God, and that Matthew, Mark, and Luke would not contradict John (as many commentators have believed) on such a major event in their Jewish idiom. Yet I could not find a way to make all the scriptures harmonize. Nor had I ever seen it done. It was not until around 2004 when I found the key that unlocked the whole riddle: a certain nuance that Greek words can contain, called the “dative of reference.” This verified for me that the Last Supper was not the Passover, as it caused all of the controversial scriptures we had studied to fall perfectly into place. (These English translations that seem to so clearly have Jesus eating the Passover at the Last Supper will be explained in the chapter “Three Major Greek Keys That Unlock the Gospels.”)

However, this was only the beginning, for after those first few scriptural dominoes fell into place, other truths came to light—truths that were far more important and that would even shock me at first. As a believer, I had been taught for many years that Communion was an important ritual commanded by the Lord. Therefore, these truths I was finding—the ones that shed negative light on this ritual—were troubling for me to initially consider.

But after years of thorough study proved to me that the Last Supper could not be the Passover in spite of the English translations that so clearly *seem to say* that it was, I came to realize that the ritual of Communion we all kept with unleavened bread was not what the Messiah taught or wanted. Because this supper was not the Passover, Jesus was eating regular *leavened* bread, as the Greek scriptures do show. My first reaction was, “Oh my, we are keeping the ritual wrong,” since we used *unleavened* bread in the ritual. Almost immediately I felt a check in my spirit, a sick feeling that you get when you know you’ve been tricked; I had a real sense that the ritual had deceived us. I felt strongly that if I further investigated the scriptures that supposedly teach this rite of Communion, I would find that they actually meant something very different.

After I delved first into the Last Supper scriptures (as seen in Course 1 and 2) and then into what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11 (covered in Course 5), I did indeed find that the Messiah and Paul taught something very different. They were teaching important truths for the soon-coming outpouring of God’s love and show-

ing how the last-day assembly will fulfill the scriptures by making herself ready as the Lord's spiritual bride. When these scriptures are understood correctly, they point out the important pathways to follow that will lead us to this desired place and to fulfill God's plan.

I do not expect everyone to accept my conclusions outright, for long-held beliefs are often difficult to change. However, any student of God's word will certainly be encouraged to examine the scriptural facts as I have laid them out in this book. Additionally, this presents an opportunity to see the scriptures from the light of the first-century Jewish idioms that the Messiah used.

The Way Forward—the Spiritual Bride Being Made Ready

Once the parables Jesus taught at the Last Supper are seen in the proper light (with the realization that this meal was not the Passover), they open the door to understanding how we can share in the true spiritual communion that God seeks with His people. God referred to Israel as His bride, and these truths show what is needed for all of us, from all nations, to make it to that calling that God desires for all who love Him.

When one takes into account the original Jewish idioms, the scriptures show that the Jewish communal meals in the first covenant pointed to a Messianic Feast, which is called the "Messianic Banquet" in many Jewish writings. These communal meals prefigured the partaking of His love, and the subsequent giving and receiving of it among the believers. This sharing of His love is what will ultimately help perfect believers into a bride without spot or wrinkle.

As communal meals, the three annual Jewish festivals pointed to spiritual feasting in the New Covenant and to a spiritual banquet where we all partake of God's love in purity, along with the word of God. This is the Messianic Feast that God has prepared for all of His people, and His desire is that we enter in now.

The scriptures clearly state that, in these last days, God is drawing the Jewish people back into covenant relationship with Him. When I enrolled in Bible college in the late 1970s, I had never heard of a Messianic Jewish fellowship, but today many have formed in most major cities across the United States and in other nations. This shows that the prophecies are coming to pass, and God is forming His assembly into a spiritual bride, made up of all those who love Him, whether Jew, Gentile, Protestant, Catholic, and all others who are willing to move into this high calling. As God said, "my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7), and these things are now coming about in our day.

To align with His plan to bring the Jewish people into the New Covenant that was promised to them (see Course 10), I will do my part in this book by using certain words and portraying truths in a way that the Jewish people may more easily

relate to. At the same time it should be understood that these New Covenant truths apply to any person who opens up to them and receives all that God provides. They apply to all people equally; no one is excluded. Of course, my hope is that all believers see these truths as self-evident and that they are then spiritually edified by what the Messiah truly meant in his teachings.