



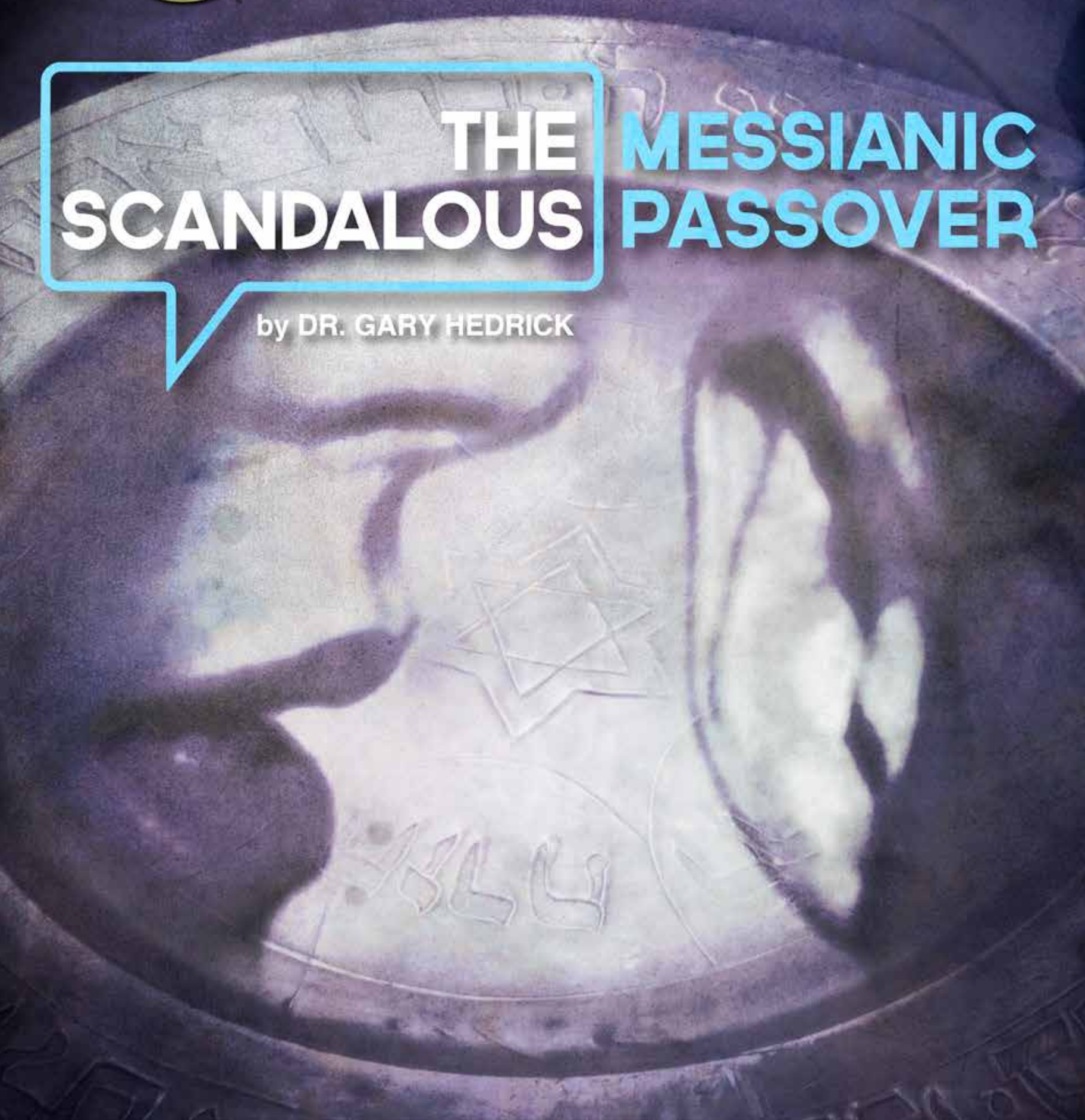
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# Messianic Perspectives<sup>®</sup>

*God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.*

## THE SCANDALOUS MESSIANIC PASSOVER

by DR. GARY HEDRICK





A Messianic congregation in Central Florida conducted a public Passover celebration at a local, upscale hotel last year. At their congregational Seder,<sup>1</sup> these Jewish and non-Jewish believers enjoyed the same traditional food, singing, storytelling, and blessings that accompany the Passover observance in Jewish homes all over the world.

However, there was one distinctive difference: the focus was on Yeshua (Jesus).

Messianic believers see Yeshua as the ultimate fulfillment of the Passover. They believe that many elements of the Passover, and even the ancient Exodus narrative itself, point clearly and unmistakably to the Son of God.

And this is precisely what set off *The Huffington Post* columnist Mark Pinsky. In a 2012 column, he called Messianic Passover demonstrations “bait and switch services” and said they have “emerged over the past 15 years.”<sup>2</sup>

“Bait and switch” is a phrase that implies attendees might have gotten something other than what they were expecting. It’s like when a local dealership advertises a car at a very low price. Then when you try to buy one, they tell you they don’t have any more of that particular model and try to sell you one that’s much more expensive. (Don’t you just hate it when something like that happens?)

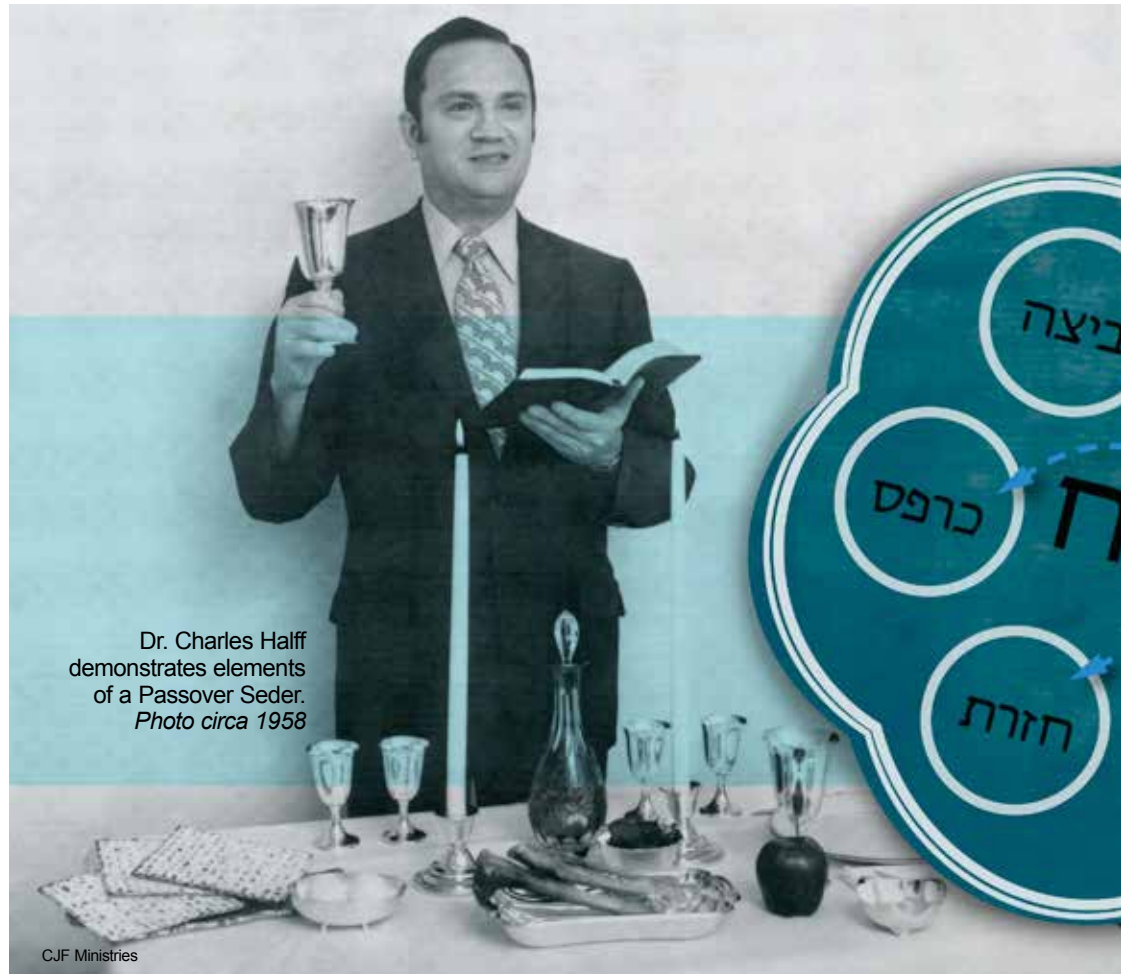
## Why So Scandalous?

Now, let’s think about this together. It’s possible that some Messianic groups are less than forthcoming in their advertising—although no specific instances come to mind at the moment. The congregations I know that conduct Messianic Seders make no attempt to deceive anyone. If anything, they go out of their way to let everyone know they’re Messianic. But policing the entire movement is above my pay grade—so maybe there is shady advertising that I don’t know about.

As for the observation that Messianic Seders “held at evangelical churches” are a recent phenomenon, Pinsky should be more diligent in his research. My predecessor, Charles Halff, was doing “Passover demonstrations” in churches as far back as the 1950s. And even then, he wasn’t the only Jewish believer doing it! Our office manager in Canada is Nancy Gall. Her father was the late Alfred Weiner, a Jewish believer who had a Jewish outreach ministry in Canada for many years. She tells me that her dad was doing Passover demonstrations as early as 1943! Granted, these events weren’t as common then as they are today; nonetheless, they are definitely not a recent phenomenon.

The critics still level some pretty serious charges against us. They say, for instance, that Messianics have hijacked the Jewish Passover and turned it into something other than what was originally intended. But maybe, just maybe, it’s actually the other way around. That is, traditional Judaism has taken an observance that was intended to be essentially Messianic and turned it into something else!

Please don’t misunderstand what we’re saying here. The annual Passover ritual has elements of historical retrospection that are powerful. It provides a wonderful lesson about how the Lord can deliver people from bondage and make them free. Here are some of the key Seder components and their traditional meaning:



Dr. Charles Halff demonstrates elements of a Passover Seder. Photo circa 1958

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- *Matzah* (מצה), the “bread of affliction” (Deut. 16:3), reminds the Jewish people of how their ancestors were driven in haste out of Egypt.<sup>3</sup>
- *Zeroa* (זרוע), the shankbone of a roasted lamb (ideally, with a little meat still left on it), represents the OT *kurban Pesach* (Passover sacrifice). No lamb is sacrificed today because the sacrificial system was discontinued when the Temple was destroyed in AD 70.<sup>4</sup>
- *Maror* (מרור), a mixture of bitter herbs (today, usually ground horse radish), symbolizes the bitterness of the Hebrews’ life in Egypt.

## Messianic Perspectives®

Dr. Gary Hedrick, *Editor in Chief*  
Rachel Zanardi, *Editor*  
Erastos Leiloglou, *Designer*



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- *Beitzah* (ביצה), a roasted egg, is said to represent the *korban chagigah*, a sacrifice offered during the three Pilgrim Festivals:<sup>5</sup> *Pesach* (Passover), *Shavu'ot* (Weeks), and *Sukkot* (Tabernacles).<sup>6</sup>
- *Charoset* (חרוסת) is a sweet concoction of apples and nuts, often mixed with red wine and cinnamon. Its composition and texture recalls the mud that the Israelite slaves mixed with straw, and then baked in the sun, to make bricks for Egyptian construction projects. It was also used as mortar.
- *Karpas* (כרפס) is usually parsley. During the Seder, it's dipped in salt water to represent the tears the Hebrews shed while in slavery.



These historical elements are important. So much so, in fact, that God told the Israelites never to forget them:

“And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.’” So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did (Ex. 12:24-28).

Nonetheless, there’s also a prospective (looking ahead, or prophetic) aspect of the Passover. It anticipates a future Messianic Age when God will liberate not only the Children of Israel, but also the whole world (Isa. 61:1).

## Passover Points to Messiah

For believers, the most obvious Messianic element in the Passover observance is one that disappeared from traditional Judaism with the destruction of the Second Temple: namely, the paschal lamb. The central feature of the Passover ceremony in Egypt was the family meal where they killed a lamb, cooked it, and dined on the meat (Ex. 12:21). But once Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were forced into exile, the sacrifices ceased—including that of the Passover lamb.

Believers recognize that the Passover lamb pointed prospectively to the coming Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth. The blood on the doorposts in Egypt (Ex. 12:7-23) pointed to His sacrificial blood that would atone for the sins of the world.<sup>7</sup>

When the angel of God’s judgment (the “Destroyer”) went throughout Egypt, leaving death and misery in his wake, he “passed over” the homes where the blood of the lambs had been applied (Ex. 12:23).

## Elijah: Preparing the Way

As I said earlier, though, Passover isn’t only about looking back on what happened in Egypt 3,500 years ago—it also looks to the future. One traditional Jewish scholar says, in reference to the eve of Passover:

This is the night which is celebrated in watchfulness on account of the coming king . . . , who before he descends will give this sign: there shall suddenly fall from heaven a sword, that the righteous may know that the leader of the sacred warfare is about to descend; and he shall descend with a company of angels to the middle of the earth and there shall go before him an unquenchable fire, and the power of angels shall deliver into the hands of the just that multitude which has surrounded the mountain, and they shall be slain from the third hour until the evening, and blood shall flow like a torrent; and all his forces being destroyed, the wicked one shall alone escape, and his power shall perish from him.<sup>8</sup>

Isn’t that remarkable? That passage comes from a first-century Jewish apocalyptic document, yet it reads like a passage from the NT Book of Revelation! And the context of this discussion of the end times is the celebration of Passover.

Every year, in fact, Jewish families around the world set a place for Elijah at their Passover table, where they place a cup of wine known as Elijah’s cup. It signifies the fact that they are waiting for the arrival of Elijah the Prophet (*Eliyahu haNavi*). Why Elijah? Because God’s Word says Elijah will return someday to announce the arrival of the Messiah: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5).

Jewish scholar Raphael Patai explains one traditional understanding of Elijah’s role in Messiah’s coming:

When the time for Redemption arrives, it is Elijah who introduces the Messiah to the people—evidently because he is well known to them while the Messiah is unknown. Elijah forces Israel to repent, which is a prerequisite of Redemption. Like Moses and the Messiah, Elijah too appears, then hides, then appears again in the Future to Come.<sup>9</sup>

Elijah’s Cup usually has its own place at the Passover table. It highlights the Prophet’s role, according to Jewish tradition, as the harbinger of Messiah’s coming. During the Seder, the leader of the ceremony may send a child to open the home’s front door and gaze out—ostensibly to see if Elijah is approaching.



## Afikoman: He's Coming!

Another Messianic element of the traditional Passover ritual is the *afikoman*,<sup>10</sup> a piece of *matzah*<sup>11</sup> that's broken off at the beginning of the Seder and then eaten by the participants before the Seder ends. Surprisingly, the word *afikoman* is Greek, not Hebrew. It means "he who comes."<sup>12</sup>

An intriguing aspect about this part of the ceremony is the *matzah tosh*—a small linen bag with three pockets. It's known as a "unity" (Heb., *echad*), a three-in-one arrangement (i.e., one bag with three pockets). A sheet of *matzah* is placed in each of the three pockets. The one in the middle pocket is removed during the Seder and broken in half. The smaller piece is returned to the table.



The larger piece, known as the *afikoman*, is wrapped in a linen napkin (or placed in some other container) and hidden away or "lost" (usually under the leader's chair), out of sight. Then the Seder continues. Later, near the end of the meal, the *afikoman* is retrieved or "found." The Seder cannot conclude until everyone at the table has eaten a small piece of the *afikoman*.

Traditional Judaism denies, of course, that any of this points to Yeshua.<sup>13</sup> If it doesn't, though, what we have here is an incredible coincidence—an unprecedented convergence of Messianic symbols. If it happened by accident, the odds must be something like winning the lottery or being struck by lightning. The parallels between the *Yachatz* (the

breaking of the *matzah*) and Messiah Yeshua are nothing short of amazing. If Yeshua and His followers had purposefully designed it 2,000 years ago, the parallels couldn't be any more striking.

For instance, if the three pockets were to represent the triune Godhead (*Abba, Ben, and Ruach Hakodesh*),<sup>14</sup> the middle compartment would portray Yeshua. Breaking the middle piece of *matzah* would point to His death. Paul describes the time when the Messiah celebrated the Passover with His disciples: "When He had given thanks, He broke the *matzah* and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me'" (1 Cor. 11:24).<sup>15</sup>

Notice that the Lord told His disciples to eat the broken *matzah* (the *afikoman*)—the same piece that represents the sacrifice of His body on Calvary.

After Yeshua's Crucifixion, His body was wrapped in linen, like the *afikoman*, and hidden away in a tomb: "When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed" (Matt. 27:59-60).

No wonder the Apostle Paul declared, "For indeed Messiah Yeshua, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

One commentator observes:

[The *afikoman*] represents the portion of the meal that the Messiah will eat when he returns to celebrate with Israel. Jesus has broken off a piece of bread, signifying the *afikoman*, and then distributes it to his disciples. As he does so, he declares, "this is my body," or . . . "this represents me." Jesus has identified himself as the *afikoman*, that is, as "he who comes," the Messiah. In accepting and eating the *afikoman*, thus identified, the disciples demonstrate their faith in Jesus as the Messiah.<sup>16</sup>

Yeshua himself said that He would not partake of the Passover cup again until He drinks it anew with us in the Father's Kingdom (Matt. 26:29; Luke 22:18).

There's nothing far-fetched, then, about concluding that Yeshua was pointing out the Messianic "high points" as He led His disciples through that Seder in the Upper Room 2,000 years ago!

And today, when Messianic believers observe their own version of the Seder, it's certainly in keeping with this ancient precedent—whether our friends at *The Huffington Post* like it or not.

## Was the Last Supper A Passover Seder?

Aside from the obvious fact that Yeshua told His disciples to prepare "the Passover" (Matt. 26:19), are there other indications that the Last Supper (vv. 20-30) was a Seder? Seder elements found in the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper include:

- The first of four cups, or the Cup of Blessing (Luke 22:17);
- The breaking of the *matzah* (v. 19);
- The Third Cup, the Cup of Redemption (v. 20);
- Participants reclining (v. 14);
- The practice of "dipping" and then eating either the *charoset* or the *maror* (Matt. 26:23); and
- The singing of the *Hallel* at the conclusion (v. 30).

The early Church was predominantly Jewish, so it was perfectly natural for them to give special emphasis to certain Messianic elements of the Seder each year in their homes—especially the *matzah* and the Cup of Redemption. Yeshua himself set the precedent in the first Messianic Seder:

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:19-20).



## Just How Sure Are We?

Are we prepared to acknowledge that some of this is conjecture? Of course we are.<sup>17</sup> We must be honest about these things. Apart from what we find in the NT, no one has ever unearthed an ancient Messianic guide to the Passover Seder with explanatory notes. So yes, at times, we deal in inferences. We take pieces of the puzzle from the Bible (both the OT and the NT), and from traditional Jewish sources (like the Talmud or the Targums), and we try to put it all together in a way that makes sense.

Remember, however, that because something is based on conjecture doesn't mean it isn't true. It means it hasn't yet been *demonstrated* to be true. For instance, a branch of quantum physics is famously based on a series of conjectures.<sup>18</sup> Even the existence of sub-atomic particles (e.g., protons, electrons, quarks) is a matter of scientific conjecture because no one has ever seen them. All we can see is *where they have been*. That doesn't make any of it unscientific or untrue!

Isn't that what faith is all about anyway? It's the ability (or perhaps the willingness) to believe something is true before you can actually see it. Noah, for example, believed that the Flood would come just as God said—decades ahead of time. When there was no empirical evidence for a flood, and no precedent for one, he believed it anyway: "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household" (Heb. 11:7).

Please forgive my candor, and I don't mean this in a mean-spirited way, but traditional Judaism wrote the book on conjecture. The Oral Torah<sup>19</sup> is full of guesswork and speculation. Calling it "Torah" may lend an air of authority, but it's full of debates, disagreements, and digressions among the rabbis. "Rabbi so-and-so said this, but Rabbi such-and-such said that." It's interesting at times, but it can also get awfully tedious.

Much of the time, the ancient rabbis were trying to fill in certain informational gaps in the biblical narrative. On what date did the Creation occur? What was the name of Noah's wife? What was the occupation of Terah (Abraham's father)? They have the answers! Some of the information could be true<sup>20</sup>—but oftentimes it's based on rabbinic musings and speculation that simply cannot be independently (or biblically) verified.

Another thing that makes these types of issues "hot potatoes" is that traditional Judaism has had a tense relationship with institutional Christendom during the past two millennia. This tension has evoked reactionary responses from both sides. Particularly in medieval times, Catholics and Jews spent a lot of time talking past each other. Each side took pains not to provide fodder for the opposition.<sup>21</sup>

So again, let me ask: has traditional Judaism taken an ancient observance that was originally intended to be essentially Messianic and turned it into a cultural observance with little in the way of prophetic significance for most of the participants?

## Why Didn't This Happen?

It was a beautiful spring day in Jerusalem in AD 30. The streets were bustling with activity and shop owners were tidying things up after a busy Passover season.

The talk of the town was a Man from Galilee named Yeshua. Many people in Jerusalem had become convinced that He was the Messiah. The religious council had collaborated with the Romans to crucify Him. They thought that would mean their troubles were over, but were they ever wrong!

Not long after Yeshua's execution, reports began to circulate that He had come back from the dead! It was incredible, almost unbelievable, but many people had been to the tomb and reported that His body was gone. So, the whole city was abuzz with speculation about what had happened.

Among those who considered themselves His followers, there was an air of excitement as they thought about what would happen when He restored the Kingdom to Israel and began the process of renewing the world. At long last, everything would be the way God had originally intended!

Excited believers scattered all over town, preaching about Yeshua. People were coming to faith by the thousands and being immersed in water to identify with the new movement.

On this particular day, not far from the Temple Mount, crowds began to gather around a man named Peter, who said he had been one of Yeshua's disciples. He was preaching about the events of the recent Passover.

"You crucified Yeshua," he cried out, "but God has raised Him from the dead! Those things that God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Messiah would suffer, Yeshua has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord!"

There was a loud outburst of joyful "amens" and "*baruch haShems*" as the teeming crowds pushed in closer so they could hear this bold fisherman from Galilee.

But before he could utter another word, an even louder voice was heard above the rumble of the multitude: "Hold on there!"

Everyone turned to see who was interrupting the sermon. They saw one of the high priest's officers approaching, escorted by three Roman soldiers. "Hold on," he repeated loudly.

A lone voice arose from the crowd, crying out, "Why can't you people just leave us alone? Everyone knows the Sanhedrin never liked Yeshua anyway!"

Of course, this scenario never materialized. Why not? Very simply, it didn't happen because the Lord's enemies didn't have His body. This is the quandary every Resurrection-denying skeptic must confront. If His enemies had the body, they could have produced it and put an end to the entire first-century Messianic movement—something they were committed to accomplishing by hook or by crook. But instead, His lifeless body was placed in a rock-hewn tomb under an around-the-clock Roman guard. On the third day, He was raised by the power of God. Forty days later, Yeshua of Nazareth ascended to the right hand of the Father. And someday, perhaps very soon, He will return to this sin-ravaged planet in power and glory as King of kings and Lord of lords!

Another onlooker piped up, "Yeah, that's right. And now you're just mad because He came back from the dead!"

Someone else yelled, "He was dead, and now He's alive! How do you explain that?"

The smug-faced officer strolled slowly through the crowd until he was standing next to Peter. Then he turned and faced the people. After a dramatic pause, he looked up and said, "Did I hear someone say something about this so-called Messiah of yours coming back from the dead?"

The throng erupted in euphoric cries of affirmation until they were shouting, in unison, "He is risen . . . He is risen . . . He is risen!"

Finally, the officer raised his hand and the crowd quieted down enough for him to glance at the soldiers and say, "Gentlemen, if you please."

At that signal, the three Romans came forward bearing something wrapped in a shroud. The crowd parted before them as they slowly made their way to the front. Then there was a sudden, eerie silence as the people began to realize that they were carrying a body.

Once the soldiers were standing before the crowd, the Jewish officer raised both hands in the air as a gesture of defiance and said, "Show them!"

The soldiers dropped their cargo with a thud on the dirty street. Then they slowly began unwrapping it. Sure enough, it was a body. When the cadaver was fully uncovered, the three men stepped back so that everyone could see.

There was a collective gasp of horror and disbelief as the people realized that it was the naked, bruised, and lifeless body of Yeshua. Enough of them had seen Him when He was alive, so there was no mistake. It was the Son of Miriam and Yosef from Nazareth, all right. Scarcely a week earlier, He had stood before the Sanhedrin and been condemned to death for the sin of blasphemy.

Suddenly, Peter's head was spinning. He fell to his knees and bent over the body, weeping. The officer of the court gazed around triumphantly, a look of utter contempt on his face.

He pointed and yelled, "Behold, your Messiah!"

Then he turned and walked away. Little by little, the crowd disbursed. As they left, people glanced back and shook their heads sadly. Finally, only Peter and a few of the faithful were left. They gently cradled the body in their arms while they wept bitter tears.

Where would they go from here? What would they do?

Their Lord was dead.

It was over.

## Who Influenced Whom?

Is it reasonable to suggest that the early Jerusalem Church may have had a more profound effect on Second Temple Judaism than most people fully appreciate today?

The post-Resurrection Messianic community in Jerusalem was evidently quite large. The Apostles were conducting huge, open-air meetings in Jerusalem and thousands of people were coming to faith. After Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 people were added to the family of God and immersed in water<sup>22</sup> (Acts 2:41). Later, even in the face of persecution, we read, "*However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand*" (4:4).

And little wonder! The Apostles were preaching a powerful message about the crucified and resurrected Messiah—a message of victory that was validated by the empty tomb! Anyone in Jerusalem who had a question about what these *Meshichim* were saying, could easily take an afternoon stroll and check out the tomb for themselves.

Everyone agreed that the tomb was empty after the third day following the Crucifixion. The question was: *what happened to the body?* If it had been stolen by His disciples (who, by the way, would have had to somehow get past the Roman guard), then how do you explain the fact that most of those same disciples were later martyred? Would they have died for something they knew was an elaborate hoax?

And if the Lord's enemies removed the body, why didn't they produce the cadaver for everyone to see—and thereby prove that He hadn't been resurrected after all? That would have stopped the exploding movement of Yeshua-followers dead in its tracks, and you wouldn't be reading this right now. Instead, what we have is the eyewitness testimony of people who said they spent time with Him during a 40-day span after the Resurrection (e.g., Luke 24:36-43). This is the dilemma that confronts the cynics.<sup>23</sup>

Archaeological discoveries all over Israel are illuminating the history of the early Church. They're showing just how accurate the NT is,<sup>24</sup> and how widespread the Messianic community was in ancient Israel.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, it may not be as far-fetched as some people think to suggest that Messianic believers actually influenced the way some elements of the Passover were interpreted (like the afikoman) in the first century.

## Those Politically Correct, Ecumenical Seders

*The Huffington Post* article has words of praise for inter-faith Passover services where "mainline" (read that "liberal") churches invite local "traditional" (non-Messianic) rabbis to come and explain the symbolism of the Seder. The rabbis often bring members of their congregations. Pinsky's column says Messianic Seders "are much different from the more venerable, ecumenical 'model Seders' held at mainline churches a week or two before the actual holiday."<sup>26</sup>

The reason Jewish people aren't offended by these so-called "model Seders," of course, is that nobody at these events mentions Yeshua. Just think: even in some "Christian" circles, Yeshua is an "unmentionable." Marcia and I attended a prayer breakfast for Israel in Nashville several years ago where a dozen or so rabbis and Christian preachers sat on the same stage. We sat through more than two hours of speeches before someone finally mentioned Jesus near the end of the program (and even that was in passing). When I said, "Amen!" people turned and looked at me like I had committed some sort of awkward faux pas.

Please understand that we are completely in favor of treating members of other faith traditions with honor and respect. Yeshua himself did so.<sup>27</sup> Abstract hatred and intolerance were foreign to His teachings. At the same time, however, if we don't reach out to Jewish people and others with the love of Yeshua, and if we're afraid even to mention His Name, we are surrendering a big part of our identity as evangelical believers.

## Love Without Compromise

When I was a young preacher, pastoring a small church in Illinois, I was especially blessed by the ministry of W.A. Criswell—longtime pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. I read his articles and listened to his messages on tape—and I was amazed at the depth of his exposition and his understanding of prophetic truth. I never met Dr. Criswell, but we corresponded a few times and he was always very kind to me. His column in the church newsletter (which he sent me freely) always ended the same way: "See you Sunday with a Bible in my hand and a message from God in my heart!"

It was no accident that during Dr. Criswell's years as the pastor, First Baptist Church in Dallas (which at one time during his pastorate was the largest Baptist church in the world) had a significant outreach to the city's Jewish community. There were numerous Jewish believers in the church during those days—many of whom had come to faith in Yeshua through the church's Jewish outreaches.

Those outreaches were so successful, in fact, that they got the attention of the Dallas Jewish community. A group of rabbis got together and wrote Dr. Criswell, asking him to put the brakes on the church's efforts to win Jewish people to faith in the Messiah. This godly, wise preacher wrote back and gently explained that he loved them—but he couldn't stop telling them or their people about Jesus because it's part of our identity as Christian believers. If we stop telling people about Him, we are no longer authentically Christian!

Even after that brief confrontation, Dr. Criswell always had good relations with the Jewish community in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. I have been shown awards that were bestowed on Dr. Criswell because of his faithful support of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. He even met David Ben-Gurion, the founder of the Jewish State, on at least one occasion. And when Dr. Criswell died in 2002, there was an outpouring of sadness and affection by the Jewish community. In spite of their differences, they knew that he loved them.

## Why Not Call It a "Christian Passover"?

Still, *The Huffington Post* column says that Messianic Passover events are deceptive. In the spirit of "truth in advertising," should such events be called a "Christian Seder" or a "Christian interpretation" of Passover?

That would be fine if the word "Christian" meant the same thing to everyone, but it doesn't. Many Jewish people today think a Christian is a Catholic. They don't understand the difference. Many years ago, a Jewish friend stubbornly resisted my repeated attempts to convince him that Jesus wasn't the first pope!

And therein lies the problem. Today, there's no such thing as a Catholic (or Eastern Orthodox, or any other sort of institutionalized "Christian") Passover. In the centuries following the apostolic age, in fact, early "Churchianity"<sup>28</sup> went to great pains to disassociate itself from anything Jewish. There were times when it was against the law for a Christian to celebrate Passover!



## The Paschal Controversies

The Jewish early Church—which began in Jerusalem—celebrated the Messiah’s Resurrection during the Jewish observance of Passover.<sup>29</sup> It made perfect sense because that’s when the Lord arose—during Passover week, three days after the Passover sacrifice.<sup>30</sup>

But later, anti-Semitic sentiment began to infect the institutionalized Church<sup>31</sup> as its composition shifted from predominantly Jewish to predominantly gentile. It wasn’t long before “Christian” religious leaders didn’t want anything to do with Jewish observances like Passover.

Our longtime friend Arlie Francis takes us on this little stroll down memory lane:

How did this [divorce of the Christian Resurrection celebration from Passover] happen? In 314 AD at Arles (southern France), it was decreed that the date of the “Christian Passover” would be affixed by bishops in Rome in the future. All of those bishops were gentiles. Because their decree was not universally obeyed, the Council of Nicea, in 325, attempted to settle the matter once and for all. Two letters emanating from the Nicene enclave provide evidence of their discussions and decision.

Consider the circular letter sent by Emperor Constantine to church officials throughout his realm. By decree the celebration of Jesus’ resurrection was required to be celebrated everywhere on a Sunday, and never on the day of the Jewish Passover. The primary motive was based on opposition to Jews, blaming the crucifixion of Jesus at Passover on them.

Constantine penned the following: “We would have nothing in common with that most hostile people, the Jews; for we have received from the Redeemer another way of honoring God [i.e., the order of the days of the week], and

harmoniously adopting this method, we would withdraw ourselves from the evil fellowship of the Jews. For what they pompously assert, is really utterly absurd: that we cannot keep this feast at all without their instruction. It is our duty to have nothing in common with the murderers of our Lord.” This is but one highlight of the complete letter.<sup>32</sup>

Is the Messianic Passover celebration really a scandal? No more so than Yeshua himself. People who don’t believe in Him stumble over Him. It’s been that way for more than 2,000 years. They take offense at Him and His message of repentance and Redemption: “As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame’” (Rom. 9:33).

Passover pointed to the crucified Lamb of God, a message that traditional Judaism found offensive and the Greeks considered foolish (1 Cor. 1:23).

It also alludes to His return—and that of His forerunner, Elijah. When “He who comes” arrives, we will celebrate the Passover with Him in Jerusalem!

As our Jewish friends say at the close of the Seder, “*L’shanah haba b’Yerushalayim!*” or “Next Year in Jerusalem!”

Dr. Gary Hedrick  
is president of  
CJF Ministries.



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Seder is the Hebrew word for “order.” It refers to the order of service followed in Jewish homes on the first day of Passover. The leader (usually the father) typically uses a step-by-step guide called a *Haggadah* (“the telling” in Hebrew) as he guides participants through the Passover service.

<sup>29</sup>Ersatz Passover Seders: Jesus on the Menu” by religion writer Mark Pinsky (*The Huffington Post*, April 2, 2012). Accessed at [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com).

<sup>30</sup>The ancient Israelites knew they needed bread for their journey. However, it would have to be unleavened (i.e., no yeast) because there was no time to allow leavened bread to rise before baking it. The Israelites were in a hurry because they knew that their window of opportunity might be small (that is, before Pharaoh changed his mind). As it turned out, they were right (Ex. 14:5-8).

<sup>31</sup>The lamb that contributes the shankbone is not considered a Passover sacrifice.

<sup>32</sup>There were three “pilgrim festivals” in ancient Israel when heads of families were required to travel to Jerusalem and present an offering in the Temple.

<sup>6</sup>On Passover, the *korban chagigah* was offered in addition to the *korban Pesach* (the ‘Paschal lamb’). On the Seder plate, the *zeroa* (shankbone) represents the *korban Pesach*, while the roasted egg represents the *korban chagigah* (“House Gift: the Obligation to Offer the Holiday Offering on the Three Festivals” by Rabbi Jack Abramowitz, accessed on the Orthodox Union website at [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)).

<sup>7</sup>When John the Baptizer saw Yeshua, he declared, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

<sup>8</sup>*Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* by David Flusser (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1988), 406. In this passage, Dr. Flusser quotes an ancient Jewish apocalyptic book entitled *The Oracles of Hylaspes* that dates from before the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Its similarity to the Book of Revelation is quite striking—so much so, in fact, that some scholars have alleged that John used it as source material when he wrote Revelation!

<sup>9</sup>*The Messiah Texts: Jewish Legends of Three Thousand Years* by Raphael Patai (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 131-32.

<sup>10</sup>An alternate spelling is “*afikomen*.”

<sup>11</sup>Matzah (also spelled “*matzoh*”) is thin, crispy, unleavened flatbread. It’s been prepared with essentially the same ingredients for 3,500 years.

<sup>12</sup>Although it can be written phonetically in Hebrew (מַצֹּת), *afikomen* is actually Greek (ἀφικόμενος). Its meaning has often been disputed, especially by scholars who reject its Messianic significance. However, Dr. Craig A. Evans, whose scholarly concentration is on first-century Christianity, says *afikomen* comes “from Greek [and means] ‘he who comes’; on the confusion of the derivation of this word, cf. *Encyclopedia Judaica* 2:39;

the Greek derivation proposed in Jastrow 1:104 [ . . . ‘to go reveling’ i.e., ‘to the after-meal entertainment’] is among several false derivations and etymologies” (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 34b, Metzger, Hubbard, and Barker, eds. [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001], 391).

<sup>13</sup>Traditional rabbis often say the tradition of hiding the afikoman arose in medieval times as a way of keeping children interested in the proceedings.

<sup>14</sup>In Hebrew, *Abba* is “Father” (or “Papa”), *Ben* is “Son,” and *Ruach Hakodesh* is “the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>15</sup>Scholars who say the Last Supper was not a Seder sometimes point to the difference in the words for “bread.” In Greek, unleavened bread is *azumos*. But the Greek NT says when Yeshua broke bread with His disciples in the Upper Room, He used *artos* (the normal Greek word for bread). Since they were using *artos* rather than *azumos*, the skeptics say, it must not have been a Seder. What they’re overlooking, though, is that *artos* is simply a more general term for bread. *Azumos* is more specific and would be a subset of *artos*. Dorot project manager Stephen A. Reed explains, “While there is a special term for unleavened bread (*azumos*), *artos* by itself can be used for both leavened and unleavened bread. The bread eaten at the Last Supper (Mark 14:22) and on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:30) probably was unleavened since these meals took place during the Passover week (Jeremias 1966:66)” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, Ed. [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 779).

<sup>16</sup>Evans, *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>17</sup>However, the conjecture gets out of hand sometimes—like when some Messianic teachers claim that the tiny holes in the matzah signify the fact that Messiah was pierced (crucified) for our sins when He died on Calvary. In reality, the purpose of the holes is to allow heat to flow through the dough and create the matzah’s crispy texture. Even saltine crackers that we buy at the grocery store have these holes in them. They have nothing to do with the Lord’s Crucifixion.

<sup>18</sup>For examples, see “Six Conjectures in Quantum Physics and Computational Neuroscience” by Wen-Ran Zhang in *Quantum, Nano and Micro Technologies* (Statesboro, Georgia: College of Informational Technologies, Department of Computer Science, Georgia Southern University, 2009), 67-72.

<sup>19</sup>In Orthodox Judaism, the Oral Torah is the Oral Law as reflected in the Talmud (Mishnah and Gemara). Tradition says it was transmitted orally to Moses on Mt. Sinai along with the written Torah. However, Jewish scholars today recognize that the bulk of its material originated much later. It was finally committed to writing and redacted around AD 200 by Rabbi Judah haNasi, and eventually took its current form by AD 500 or so.

continued on page 12



This article is adapted from a paper Dr. Jim Sibley delivered at a conference several years ago at Criswell College, and it appears here by his kind permission. It is about his long-time pastor, W.A. Criswell (1909-2002), of First Baptist Church in Dallas—and specifically about “Dr. C’s” love for Israel and the Jewish people. We think you will enjoy reading about this godly Baptist preacher who earned the respect of the Jewish community in Dallas without compromising the integrity of his witness as an evangelical believer in Jesus.

### Friendships within the Israeli Jewish Community

Dr. Criswell described his initial meeting with Israel’s first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, who served in that position for thirteen years, with the following statement:

I was in Jerusalem and in the King David Hotel. And walking through the hotel, one of the men said, “David Ben-Gurion and his wife are seated over there in the dining room. I would like to introduce you to them.” I said, “I would be delighted.” He was then prime minister of Israel, the first prime minister of the Jewish state. When I went over there—his wife was from Brooklyn, he had married a Brooklyn girl—she was delighted to see me, to talk to me about America. And I was introduced to him as the pastor of the largest Baptist church in America, and that intrigued the Prime Minister. So he invited me to sit down with them at the table and we conversed.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Criswell met with Ben-Gurion several times<sup>2</sup> and considered him a friend.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Ben-Gurion was not the only one of Israel’s Prime Ministers with whom Dr. Criswell made acquaintance. He received a congratulatory telegram from Menachem Begin, and he also knew Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin. In fact, he extended an invitation to Yitzhak Rabin to speak at the annual Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>4</sup> He also had opportunity to visit with the chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Nathan.<sup>5</sup>

Due to his friendship with the Jewish people and his support for Israel, Dr. Criswell was the recipient of a number of honors and awards. In 1979, Dr. Criswell was named by Prime Minister Menachem Begin to receive the Israeli Humanitarian Award. In accepting it, Criswell became the only Christian clergyman ever to receive this award.<sup>6</sup> In 1988, he received the Tree of Life Award from the Jewish National Fund. This last award was granted at a dinner to which greetings were extended to him by the Mayor of Dallas, the Governor of Texas, and the Israeli Consul General. On this occasion, he also received letters and telegrams, not only from the governor, but also from President Ronald Reagan, Dr. Billy Graham, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Shamir. There were other awards and citations, but these two stand out.

### The Love of Zion in His Ministry

Throughout his ministry at First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dr. Criswell had a warm place in his heart for Jewish believers. Let me introduce you to just a few.

Lilly Wolff was a Holocaust survivor who had been a famous fashion designer in Germany before World War II, but afterward, she arrived

penniless in New York. Accepting a job offer in Dallas, she moved to Texas and, hearing Dr. Criswell over the radio, she became convinced of the truth of the Gospel and came under conviction of her sin. She walked to a church near her home, the Gaston Avenue Baptist Church, where the minister of education led her to faith in her Messiah. Shortly afterward, she joined First Baptist Church and was involved in Jewish ministry for many years. She designed dresses for the Miss America Pageant, and she even designed Mabel Ann Criswell’s wedding dress. Her designs are featured today at the Texas Fashion Collection at the University of North Texas. She was also an early supporter of Criswell College.

Ed Hecht is a Jewish believer and member of First Baptist who was led to the Lord by Dr. Criswell in 1949. He and his wife joined the church and became friends with a number of other Jewish believers who were already members. Later, Ed would bring his mother, Anita, who had also trusted the Lord, to join the church. Once, when Ed was to lead in prayer during a worship service, Dr. Criswell introduced him, saying that the salvation of one Jewish person was worth the salvation of 500 Gentiles. That may be disputed as Criswellian hyperbole, but few have contributed as significantly to the work of the church as Ed Hecht.<sup>7</sup>

Ed and Pat Borofsky were somewhat high profile, because almost every Sunday they were escorting someone down the aisle whom they had led to the Lord that week. They had an enthusiasm for the Lord and for the church, and they loved Dr. Criswell. Monk Harris, Zola Levitt, and an estimated forty or fifty other Jewish believers were members of the church. Eventually, Shalom Chapel was formed, and it evolved into Adat Sha-lom, a messianic congregation that has been a mission of First Baptist throughout the years.

On a personal note, growing up in the church, Dr. Criswell knew of my early calling to missions in Israel. When he visited Israel in 1969, he brought a Hebrew Bible back from Israel as a gift to me, and when the Foreign Mission Board appointed us as missionaries to Israel, he held a special time of commissioning for my family and me during a worship service at the church.

The local missionary of the American Board of Missions to the Jews [now Chosen People Ministries] was also a member of the church. At first, this was Bill Ennis and his family,<sup>8</sup> but when he was transferred to Houston, he was succeeded by Dr. Tom McCall, who had been led into Jewish missions through the ministry of Dr. Criswell.<sup>9</sup> In a partnership between Dr. Criswell, the American Board of Missions to the Jews, and Al and Dorothy Pasche (for whom the Pasche Institute of Jewish Studies is named), an effective ministry was opened to the Jewish community of Dallas. Dr. McCall writes:



For many years we had an annual banquet at First Baptist Church for our Jewish friends. Often it was what we called a “Jewish and Christian Passover Banquet.” Dr. Criswell was excited about inviting the Jewish people of Dallas to the church. He asked us to gather a list of all the Jewish people we could and he sent a personally signed invitation for them to share a Passover experience with their Christian friends.

When the people received the invitations, many asked their rabbi what they should do. Some said it was OK to go, but others strenuously objected. It was a matter of considerable discussion in the synagogues for several weeks leading up to the banquet each year.

One of these occasions was particularly memorable. Dr. Charles Feinberg, Dean of Talbot Theological Seminary in California, and an outstanding Jewish believer in Christ, led the Passover Seder. Dr. Criswell welcomed the guests warmly, and there were some 300 Jewish friends present in the Church gymnasium, with 400 Christian hosts, including about 40 Jewish believers in Christ.

A remarkable thing happened at the banquet. At first, the Jewish guests became the “hosts” at each table, explaining everything about the Passover to the Gentile Christians. Then, as Dr. Feinberg explained the way Jesus fulfilled the Passover as the Messiah, this was something they had never heard before. We spent the rest of the year visiting these families, and over the years several hundred Jewish people came to faith in Christ directly and indirectly through the impact of the annual banquet at First Baptist Church of Dallas.<sup>10</sup>

In connection with these dinners, each year for a number of years, the leadership of the Jewish community in Dallas sent an appeal to the deacons of First Baptist encouraging them not to evangelize the Jewish people. As the business and financial leaders of the city, their collective appeal was somewhat intimidating. Dr. Criswell read their appeal to the deacons, followed by his response, in which he expressed the following sentiment:

What you are asking of us is something we would never think of asking of you. You are asking us to stop being Christians, and we would not think of asking you to cease being Jews. It is the very essence of our obedience to God to express our faith in Jesus. As Christians, we will always defend your right to disagree and to reject what we share with you, but we have an obligation to keep on telling the greatest story ever told. It is our hope and our prayer that you would consider the message we share.<sup>11</sup>

*Jim Sibley and his wife Kathy are valued colleagues and longtime friends of CJF Ministries. Gary Hedrick serves on his advisory board at Criswell College’s Pasche Institute, where Jim serves as director. He’s also the editor of the popular Messianic theological journal Mishkan (for subscription information, email mishkan@pascheinstitute.org). Jim was awarded his PhD from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth this past December—and we extend hearty congratulations to him for that milestone in his ministry!*



In addition to the annual Jewish Christian Fellowship Dinners, the church also sponsored an annual conference on “Prophecy and the Jew.” These continued until the mid-1980s.<sup>12</sup>

### His Love for Israel: The Land and the People

His love for the people and Land of Israel originated with his theology, and was strengthened through his personal friendships with Jewish people. Dr. Criswell first visited Israel in 1948, when, as he tells in one of his sermons, he watched the salvage operation that raised the Patria and the Exodus from the bottom of Haifa Bay.<sup>13</sup> He was to visit many more times over the years, and he made his last trip to Israel in 1995, with O. S. Hawkins, Gary Frazier, and Jack Pogue.

Dr. Hawkins tells of an incident on that trip that took place in Jerusalem, and Jack Pogue substantiates his account. They paid a visit to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. This was about thirty days before Rabin would be assassinated. Rabin entered the room tired, with a frown and an unpleasant disposition. He was perhaps impatient with the social obligations of his office. As he took his seat, Dr. Criswell immediately took Rabin’s large, rough hand in his and said, “Now, sweet boy, here’s why we are here.” Dr. Criswell then expressed that they had simply come to tell him of their love for Israel and for the Jewish people. By all accounts, Rabin simply melted, and they had a very intimate visit.<sup>14</sup>

On that same visit to Israel, they were walking down Jaffa Road in west Jerusalem, when they realized that Dr. Criswell was no longer with them. They went back, retracing their steps until they found him. He had stopped to listen to a sidewalk musician playing Ha-Tiqvah, the Israeli national anthem, on a violin. Dr. Criswell was transfixed as he listened to the music with tears streaming down his cheeks.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Criswell loved Israel, the Land and the people, for he loved the things the Lord loves. In Zechariah 2:8, the prophet says of Zion, “He who touches you, touches the apple of [God’s] eye.” In Psalm 137:5–6, David says, “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.” In the New Testament, Paul expresses his deep love for the Jewish people when he says, in Romans 9:1-3, that he would be willing, if it were possible, to forfeit his salvation and spend an eternity in Hell, if it would result in the salvation of the Jewish people. Dr. Criswell had the heart of Paul; he had the heart of David; he had the heart of Zechariah; and he had the heart of God for Israel and the Jewish people.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>W. A. Criswell, “State of the Church,” January 2, 1977, W. A. Criswell Sermon Library, <http://www.wacriswell.com/PrintTranscript.cfm/SID/1443.cfm> (accessed January 20, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>“I have [met] David Ben-Gurion and talked with him” (W. A. Criswell, “Redemption: The Age in Which We Live,” December 2, 1956, W. A. Criswell Sermon Library, <http://www.wacriswell.com/PrintTranscript.cfm/SID/2774.cfm> [accessed January 20, 2010]). “Several times, I visited with David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of the modern nation of Israel” (W. A. Criswell, “The Beginning and the End of Israel,” February 23, 1986, W. A. Criswell Sermon Library, <http://www.wacriswell.com/PrintTranscript.cfm/SID/172.cfm> [accessed January 20, 2010]).

<sup>3</sup>“David Ben-Gurion, my friend whom I visited with several times” (W. A. Criswell, “The War of Armageddon,” August 4, 1985, W. A. Criswell Sermon Library, <http://www.wacriswell.com/PrintTranscript.cfm/SID/740.cfm> [accessed January 20, 2010]).

<sup>4</sup>“Criswell: Jews Protect Christians,” Texas Jewish Post, November 30, 1978.

<sup>5</sup>W. A. Criswell, “The Pope, the Rabbi, and the Pastor,” July 18, 1971, W. A. Criswell Sermon Library, <http://www.wacriswell.com/PrintTranscript.cfm/SID/2886.cfm> (accessed January 20, 2010).

<sup>6</sup>“Israel Award Honours Criswell,” The Australian Baptist, January 10, 1979.

<sup>7</sup>Ed Hecht, interview by author, Dallas, TX, January 20, 2010.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Harold A. Sevener, A Rabbi’s Vision: A Century of Proclaiming Messiah, A History of Chosen People Ministries, Inc. (Charlotte, NC: Chosen People Ministries, 1994), 314–16.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 326–27.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas McCall, e-mail message to author, December 13, 2009.

<sup>11</sup>We were unable to find a printed copy of Dr. Criswell’s response, so I have recreated it here, to the best of my ability, from information provided by deacons and others who were present at the meeting. We’re not claiming that the quote is verbatim, but it most assuredly is the essence of what the pastor said that day.

<sup>12</sup>Sevener, 327.

<sup>13</sup>W. A. Criswell, “The Jew and Palestine,” September 11, 1955, W. A. Criswell Sermon Library, <http://www.wacriswell.com/PrintTranscript.cfm/SID/823.cfm> (accessed January 20, 2010).

<sup>14</sup>Hawkins; Jack Pogue, interview by author, Dallas, TX, November 25, 2009.

<sup>15</sup>Hawkins.

# Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

## Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at [garyh@cjfm.org](mailto:garyh@cjfm.org), or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

**QUESTION:** Does the fact that the Gospel of John repeatedly blames “the Jews” for persecuting Yeshua (and ultimately for being complicit in His trial and execution) mean that John was anti-Semitic?

**ANSWER:** Absolutely not. This is a mischaracterization not only of the Gospel narrative, but also of John himself. The idea that John (who himself was Jewish) was an anti-Semite is ludicrous. Sadly, however, it’s a deeply rooted notion in much of traditional Christendom. For example, Thayer’s lexicon remarks, “The apostle John . . . looked upon the Jews as a body of men hostile to Christianity, with whom he had come to see that both he and all true Christians had nothing in common as respects religious matters” (Thayer, J.H. 1889. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

“Nothing in common”? Seriously? Anyone who believes such nonsense needs to read Romans 9:4-5:

Who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, [Messiah] came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

We have *much* in common with the Jewish people; in fact, our faith rests on the foundation of the ancient faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—along with its Messiah, covenants, promises, and numerous other blessings (see also 1 Corinthians 3:11-12).

Thayer’s ill-advised statement reflects an anti-Judaic sentiment that was prevalent in much of 19th-century Christendom—and survives even today in some Reformed (amillennial) circles.

However, his statement does not reflect reality. The early, first-century Church was closely aligned with Judaism. During the first year or two after the Messiah’s resurrection and ascension, the NT tells us that multitudes of Jewish people came to faith—including many of the priests (*cohanim*) who worked in the Jerusalem Temple. “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

Did these priests quit their job in the Temple? The NT says nothing of the sort. Every indication is that they continued in their priestly roles (see also Acts 21:20). Also, many of the early believers worshiped in Jewish synagogues (e.g., Acts 13:14-15; 18:4-8).

The great schism between Judaism and the early believers in Yeshua didn’t come until much later—around AD 70, in fact. Most Messianic believers escaped the destruction of Jerusalem because they remembered the warning of Yeshua: “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her” (Luke 21:20-21). Believers started leaving the

city around AD 66, according to some traditions. Since they didn’t stay and fight, they were seen by some as traitors or cowards.<sup>1</sup>

Before that time, however, Jewish Christians lived and worshiped within Judaism rather than outside of it. According to Jewish historians, believers in Yeshua weren’t placed outside the fold of Judaism until Yavneh, sometime after AD 90.<sup>2</sup>


What the Apostle John was against was the anti-Yeshua Judean religious establishment—not Jewish people in general. As we’ve noted many times, the meaning of any Greek or Hebrew term is determined by the way it’s used in the biblical text. This is why Hebrew and Greek lexicons are essentially extended lists of passages where the terms appear (because, again, usage dictates meaning).

In the Gospel of John, the term “the Jews” (Greek *hoi Ioudaioi* or οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) occurs in 63 verses—and in every instance, the context has to do with Jewish people who lived in or around Jerusalem in Judea (i.e., the southern part of the country). Sometimes “the Jews” were enemies of Yeshua (e.g., John 5:16), and in other instances they were His friends (11:45; 12:11).

After the time of Solomon, there were two kingdoms—Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Later, in the first century, Galilee was in the north and Judea was in the south. The two regions had different cultures. The Galileans even pronounced their Hebrew a bit differently.<sup>3</sup>

The term “the Jews,” then, was simply John’s way of distinguishing the Judeans (residents of Jerusalem and Judea) from the people in Yeshua’s home region of Galilee.

So when John made a comment like, “The Jews took up stones again to stone Him” (10:31), he wasn’t categorically implicating all Jewish people or implying that all Jewish people were opposed to Yeshua. Some Judeans (especially those in the religious establishment) were against Him. Others were not.

In the very next chapter, in fact, we find this statement: “Then many of the Jews [Judeans] who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him” (11:45). 

### (Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> C. Koester, “The Origin and Significance of the Flight to Pella Tradition,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51 (1989): 90-106.

<sup>2</sup> In the Talmud and other ancient Jewish sources, Jewish Christians (among others) were known as *minim* (“sectarians”). The Sanhedrin relocated to the town of Yavneh (south of present-day Tel Aviv) following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. That’s where Rabban Gamaliel II, sometime after AD 90, declared Jewish Christians to be heretics, effectively placing them outside the fold of rabbinic Judaism (see Chapter 13, “Jewish Christians: the Parting of the Ways” in *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age* by Gedaliah Alon [Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1984], 288-307).

<sup>3</sup> In fact, Peter’s Galilean accent is what betrayed his identity as one of Yeshua’s followers in the hours prior to the Crucifixion (Mark 14:68-70).



# Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



## From Sorrow to Salvation

**Richard Hill, CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua (Las Vegas)**, writes: “Funerals are perhaps the best time in life to share the Gospel message. It is a time when people are grieving and looking for answers—a time when people are forced to think about the inevitable. Pastors and preachers have the privilege of giving them the answers they need to hear.”

Richard, once again, had the privilege of doing just that. Richard Cooper has faithfully volunteered with CJF Ministries and worked alongside Pastor Hill for the past 12 years. Cooper asked Pastor Hill to preside over his sister Diane’s funeral service. Like her brother, Diane was a Jewish believer in Yeshua—the only ones in their family thus far. Forty people attended the service, and Richard Cooper chanted his favorite Jewish prayers for his family and friends. Diane’s two young granddaughters poured out their hearts in a touching eulogy to their grandmother.

This paved the way for Pastor Hill to share the Gospel message. He ended with a call to salvation, and five people raised their hands in confirmation that they had prayed to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Richard Hill adds: “What a great privilege and a pleasure it is to share the Gospel in a Jewish way, so that both Jewish and Gentile people can understand it and have an opportunity to receive our wonderful Messiah!”

## Tooth Extractions and a Seed Planted

**Peter Parkas, CJFM Northeast representative (New Jersey)**, recently experienced problems with his teeth. They required dental treatments, mainly extractions, so he was referred to Jewish dentist, Dr. “Al.” During the course of his visits, Peter and Dr. Al engaged in discussions concerning spiritual matters. These conversations continued for seven months.

Dr. Al was initially impacted by Peter’s testimony—how God saved a drug addict living on the streets—and the biblical promises Peter shared with him. This opened the door for Dr. Al to share that an Orthodox rabbi had told him that he wasn’t Jewish because he did not keep kosher or observe the Sabbath. Peter assured him that, “If you are a physical descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then you are Jewish! You are no longer required to keep the Law, as God gave us a *New Covenant* that *Yeshua haMashiach* inaugurated when He shed His blood. This is different from the Older Covenant.”

Dr. Al confessed that the story of Adam and Eve is too fantastic for him to believe. Peter answered, “The real issue is whether Yeshua is the promised Messiah or not. Does He save you?” Dr. Al aligns himself with the Reformed branch of Judaism, but it was obvious he was looking for more substantive answers.

Peter gave him the book, *Betrayed*, by Stan Telchin, which Dr. Al promised to read. Three months later, Dr. Al called Peter to tell him that he finished the book and would like to meet with him.

Peter asks, “Please pray for Dr. Al’s salvation and for all the Jewish people who know that they should be a light to the nations but don’t have the Light themselves.”

## An Everlasting Love

**Michael Campo, CJFM Area Director (Chicago)**, shares that the impetus for his teaching is “what the Bible teaches us—there are only two things that live on eternally, the souls of men and the imperishable Word of God.” When giving the message at a church recently, Michael concluded by reminding those listening that God’s love is an everlasting love for those who believe. He then quoted John 3:16 while giving an invitation to receive Jesus. Three adults and a 12-year-old girl came forward.

The young girl whispered in Michael’s ear, “I want Jesus to forgive me for my sins so I can go to Heaven and be with Him.”

Michael asks: “Isn’t that the beauty of the trumpet we long to hear? The dead in Christ will rise first, and those who are alive will be caught up in the air. Paul says we shall forever be with the Lord.”

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<sup>20</sup>We cannot discount the possibility that the Talmud contains ancient strains of truth that were passed down from generation to generation—possibly as far back as the Mosaic era, or even earlier. However, it's difficult to filter out the more recent and more speculative information.

<sup>21</sup>For example, when the much-revered Maimonides wrote in his *Mishneh Torah* about the indivisibility of God, his comments were clearly overstated and intended to counter the Christian teaching of a triune Godhead. Much has been said about Maimonides' substitution of *yachid* for *echad* in his Hebrew writings; however, Messianic apologist Michael Brown says we shouldn't push the distinction between those two words too far—although it's mostly valid. He writes, "There is no doubt that this reaction [that is, the Rambam switching words] was due to exaggerated, unbiblical, 'Christian' beliefs that gave Jews the impression Christians worshiped three gods. Unfortunately, the view of Maimonides is reactionary and [like supposed 'Christian' tritheism] also goes beyond what is stated in the Scriptures. In fact, *there is not a single verse anywhere in the Bible that clearly or directly states that God is an absolute unity*" (*Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Vol. 2: Theological Objections* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000; electronic ed.], 4).

<sup>22</sup>The Messianic practice of immersion in water (baptism) is based on the precedent of the ancient Jewish *mikvah* (ritual immersion). Skeptics once expressed misgivings about NT reports that thousands of people in Jerusalem were baptized in a single day. They were skeptical because prior to the Seven Day War in 1967, it was commonly thought that there were only a few first-century baptismal sites (*mikvot*) in what is now the Old City. In order to immerse 3,000 new believers, they would need to start at 9 a.m. and baptize four people per minute until 9 p.m.—12 solid hours! Such a feat would require a whole battery of *mikvot*, and an army of believers to do the honors. How was that possible? Beginning in 1968, however, archaeologists like Benjamin Mazar began excavating around the southern edge of the Temple Mount and uncovered an entire network of *mikvot*—dozens of them, in fact, and some were large enough to accommodate more than one person at a time! Worshipers went there to undergo ritual cleansing before proceeding up the Southern Stairs to the Temple precincts. So we now know the facilities were in place for thousands of people to be immersed in a relatively short period of time. This is one reason the NT baptismal reports are no longer considered logistically suspect.

<sup>23</sup>No wonder, when someone asked one former skeptic (maybe C.S. Lewis?) if he ever had doubts about the Gospel, his reply went something like this: "Yes, but not nearly as many as I had when I was an atheist."

<sup>24</sup>The NT Gospel of John, for instance, mentions a large "pool" where people who wanted to be healed of various maladies would gather, hoping and praying for a miracle. On one

occasion, Yeshua healed a sick man there (5:1-9). Archaeologists unearthed this pool over a century ago—and more recently, some of them have concluded that it was a *mikvah* (a ritual pool or baptistry). See "The Bethesda Pool: Site of One of Jesus' Miracles: Where Jesus Heals the Paralytic" by the staff of the Biblical Archaeology Society in *Bible History Daily* (Sept. 30, 2011 edition; accessed online at [www.biblicalarchaeology.org](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org)).

<sup>25</sup>The 2005 discovery of an ancient Messianic worship center (predating the era of Constantine by several decades) in Megiddo, Israel, is a notable example. The mosaic floor has a Greek inscription that reads, "The God-loving Aketous has offered this table to the God Jesus Christ, as a memorial." Since church buildings didn't come into use until later, this may have been the floor of a large residence that was used for meetings of believers. The NT itself indicates that Yeshua was generally held in high regard in the Galilee—much more so than in the country's religious center in Jerusalem. See "Israeli Prisoners Dig Their Way to Early Christianity" by Greg Myre (*New York Times*, Nov. 7, 2005 edition; accessed online at [travel.nytimes.com](http://travel.nytimes.com)).

<sup>26</sup>Pinskey, *Ibid*.

<sup>27</sup>The Romans, for example, were polytheists who worshiped in pagan temples, yet the Lord never belittled them or attacked their beliefs (e.g., Matt. 8:5-13). He won them over by showing them love and compassion rather than condemning them.

<sup>28</sup>According to the online Wiktionary, the term "Churchianity" denotes "any practices of Christianity that are viewed as placing a larger emphasis on the habits of church life or the institutional traditions of the church than on theology and spiritual teachings" ([en.wiktionary.org](http://en.wiktionary.org)).

<sup>29</sup>See "The Paschal Controversies" in Vol. 2, Chapter 5 of *History of the Christian Church* by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, electronic ed.).

<sup>30</sup>By the first century, the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread (which Exodus 12:1-20 indicates were originally to be observed consecutively) had been combined into an eight-day observance known as "Passover." The NT alludes to the holiday's evolution in Luke 22:1: "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover." In the Book of Acts, however, Luke maintains the biblical distinction by referring to "Days of Unleavened Bread" (12:3; 20:6) rather than "Passover."

<sup>31</sup>We distinguish between the "institutionalized church," which is associated with organized religion and its buildings, hierarchies, and other earthly accouterments, and the *Body of Messiah*, which is a universal, "called-out assembly" (Gk., *ekklesia*) of born-again believers, irrespective of denomination or earthly affiliation.

<sup>32</sup>"Passover Wars—the Origins of Easter" by Arlie Francis in his *Disciple Daily* blog (April 18, 2011, online edition; accessed at [www.discipledaily.org](http://www.discipledaily.org)).