

Jew, Christians & the Date of Pesach

יהודים, נוצרים ותאריך הנכון שלחג הפסח

Ari Lamm



1) The Date of “Pascha”

Mark 14:12, 16 (ca. 70 CE)	Mark 15:1, 25	Mark 16:2, 4
And on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened, when they sacrificed the Passover, his disciples said to him, “Where do you want us to go out and prepare, so that you may eat the Passover?”...And the disciples went out and went into the city and found it just as he had told them and they prepared the Passover.	And immediately, early in the morning [on Friday], the chief priests, having taken counsel with the elders and the scribes and the whole Sanhedrin, bound Jesus and led him away and turned him over to Pilate...It was the third hour, and they crucified him.	And very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb after the sun had risen...And looking up, they beheld that the stone had already been rolled away (for it was very large).

2) Early Controversies over the Date of Easter

Eusebius 5:23 (ca. 4 th century CE; citing texts from ca. end of 2 nd century CE)	Eusebius 5:24
At that time no small controversy arose because all the dioceses of Asia thought it right, as though by more ancient tradition, to observe for the feast of the Savior's passover the fourteenth day of the moon, on which the Jews had been commanded to kill the lamb [i.e. Jesus]...Yet it was not the custom to celebrate in this manner in the churches thoroughout the rest of the world, for from apostolic tradition they kept the custom which still exists that it is not right to finish the fast on any day save that of the resurrection of our Savior [i.e. the following Sunday].	“...And I also, Polycrates [bishop of Asia Minor], the least of you all, live according to the tradition of my kinsmen, and some of them have I followed....and my kinsmen ever kept the day when the people put away the leaven.”

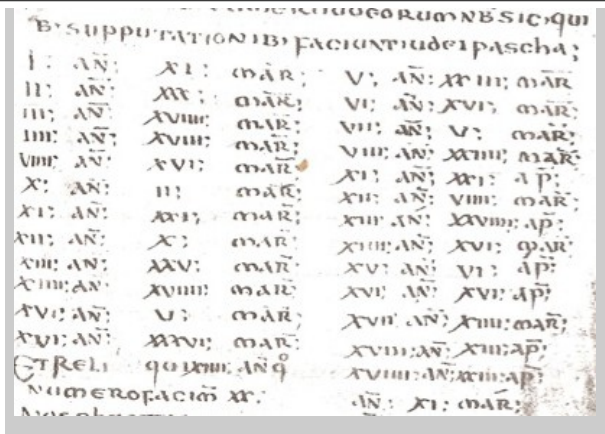
3) Easter and the Jews

Pseudo-Cyprian, <i>De Pascha Computus</i> PL 4 1025B (243 CE)
We wish . . . to show that it is possible for Christians never to stray from the way of truth and trail after the blind and stupid Jews, as if not knowing on which day Easter should occur.

4) Easter and the Equinox

Peter of Alexandria, <i>Letter to Tricentius</i> (trans. Hawkins) (ca. 4 th century CE, Alexandria)
But you ought rather to have pursued a safer and more auspicious course, and not to have written rashly and slanderously, that they [i.e. the Jews] seem from the beginning, and always, to have been in error about the Passover, which you cannot prove, whatever charge you may wish to bring against those [Jews] who, at the present time, have erred with a grievous wandering, having fallen away from the commandment of the law concerning the Passover and other things. For the ancients seem to have kept it <i>after</i> the vernal equinox, which you can discover if you read ancient books, and those especially which were written by the learned Hebrews [e.g. Philo, Josephus, etc.].

5) The Date of Pesach

Exodus 23:15 (ca. 13 th century BCE)		You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month <i>Aviv</i> – for in it you came out from Egypt; and none shall appear before Me empty.	
<p>אֶת-חַג הַמַּצּוֹת, תִּשְׁמֹר--שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מַצּוֹת כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתְךָ לְמוֹעֵד חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב, כִּי-בּוֹ יָצֵאתָ מִמִּצְרָיִם; וְלֹא-יֵרָאוּ פָנַי, רִיקִים</p>		<p>Tosefta, <i>Sanhedrin</i> 2:2 (ca. mid 2nd century CE)</p> <p>The year may be intercalated on three grounds: <i>Aviv</i> (the ripeness of the crops), (the ripeness of) fruits of trees, and the equinox. On two of these grounds it should be intercalated, but not on one of them (alone).</p>	
<p>על שלשה סימנין מעברין את השנה על האביב ועל פירות האילן ועל התקופה על שנים מעברין ועל אחד אין מעברין</p>		<p>Bavli, <i>Rosh Ha-Shanah</i> 21a (ca. 6th century CE)</p> <p>שלח ליה רב הונא בר אבין לרבא: כד חזית דמשכה תקופת טבת עד שיתסר בניסן - עברה לה היא שתא, ולא תחוש לה. דכתיב בשמור את חדש האביב - שמור אביב של תקופה שיהא בחדש ניסן</p> <p>R. Huna b. Avin sent (the following ruling) to Rava: If you see the winter season prolonging itself till the 16th of Nisan, intercalate that year and do not worry, for it is written: 'Observe the month of <i>Aviv</i> (Deut. 16: 1).</p>	
Proposal, Council of Sardica (Winter, 343 CE)			
		<p>"Quibus supputationibus faciunt Iudei pascha" The Jews make these calculations for Pesach</p>	

6) Easter and the Council of Nicaea

Eusebius, <i>Life of Constantine</i> 3:18 (ca. 4 th century CE)
Hence it is that on this point also they do not see the truth, so that, always getting most things wrong, instead of (making) the appropriate adjustment they celebrate Passover twice in the same year. Why then should we follow those who confess to being sick in grievous error? Surely we shall never consent to keep this feast a second time in the same year.

7) Judaism and Calendrical Unity

R. Tuviah b. Eli'ezer, <i>Midrash Lekach Tov</i> , Exodus 12:2 (ca. early 12 th century CE)	
<p>וכדי שלא יהו ישראל עושין ב' ימים טובים בשינוי זה מזה, האב היום, והבן מחר, ואחיו למחרת, עמדו ישראל על תקנות סוד העיבור שהיו מחשבין מאדם ועד נח, ונח מסרו לשם, ושם ליעקב אבינו, ויעקב אבינו לקהת, וקהת לעמרם, ועד היום הזה הוא מסור לחכמי ישראל לקדש בו חדשים...ולכן ראוי לסמוך על סוד העיבור ולא לעשות ישראל אגודות אגודות להיות זה מחלל שמירת יום קודש של זה...וכבר ישראל נפוצים בארצות שאין הלבנה נראית כדרך שהיתה נראית בארץ ישראל</p>	<p>And in order that Israel should not observe (the same festival) on two different days, the father today, the son tomorrow, and the brother the day after, Israel instituted the secret of intercalation, that they calculated from Adam to Noah, and Noah conveyed it to Shem, and Shem to Jacob our father, and Jacob our father to Kehat, and Kehat to 'Amram, and to this day it is conveyed to the Sages of Israel to sanctify with it the months...and therefore it is right to rely on the secret of intercalation, and not to split Israel into factions whereby one would desecrate the holy day of the other...For Israel are now dispersed in lands where the (new) moon is not visible in the same way as it is in the land of Israel.</p>