

## **Passover and Pentecost: Optional or Obligatory?**

*H. Ross Cole*

### **A Critique of Samuele Bacchiocchi's God's Festivals in Scripture and History, Part 1, The Spring Festivals**

This book represents the first of a two-volume project dealing with the annual Biblical Feasts and their relevance for Christians today. The general objective of the two volumes is to trace the meaning and observance of the Feasts in Scripture and early Christian history. The more specific objective is to determine the continuity or discontinuity of the Feasts in the Christian church. . . .

This first volume deals with the Spring Festivals, focusing especially on Passover and Pentecost. The second volume . . . will examine the Fall Festivals.[1]

Bacchiocchi rightly notes that there is "considerable interest in the relevance of Israel's Feasts for Christians, not only among Messianic Jews who wish to retain their Jewish religious heritage, but also among those Christians who wish to rediscover their Jewish roots." [2] However, he not only argues that Christians might benefit from the continued observance of the annual holy days of Leviticus 23. He also argues that observing them is a duty incumbent upon them:

How can Christians experience the existential reality of salvation represented by Passover, when its actual observance, which forms the basis of such an experience, is renounced (p. 84)?

The New Testament recognizes that Christ's coming brought about a certain discontinuity by fulfilling Old Testament typological institutions, but this discontinuity is never interpreted in terms of abrogation of the Mosaic law, in general, or of Holy Days, in particular (p. 85).

Gradually, they [the early Christians] perceived that certain aspects of the law, such as those relating to the Levitical ministry and sacrifices, had become obsolete by the coming of Christ. No indication exists, however, that this perception led Christians to doubt or to negate the value and validity of holy days (p. 87).

Bacchiocchi also argues that the exemption from circumcision granted to the Gentiles was not an exemption from the observance of holy days (p. 86), and specifically rejects the notion "that Paul taught that Christians are under no obligation to observe the Old Testament law, in general, and Holy Days in particular" (p. 89).

Bacchiocchi does not explain why he does not consider the question of the perpetuity of other Biblical sacred times, such as the New Moon, Purim, Hanukkah, the Sabbatical Year, and the Jubilee.

*The Spring Festivals* consists of four chapters about Passover and four chapters about Pentecost. These two sets of chapters each follow the same pattern: the Old Testament evidence is examined first (chaps. 1, 5), then the New Testament evidence (chaps. 2, 6), and the evidence from the early church (chaps. 3, 7). Finally, concrete ways are proposed in which each feast may be celebrated today (chaps. 4, 8). The purpose of this review is to evaluate Bacchiocchi's arguments for the perpetuity of the Spring Festivals in terms of the four steps that he himself uses.

## **Evidence From the Old Testament**

Elsewhere I have argued that Passover is of limited applicability today because the Old Testament specifically defines it in sacrificial terms (Num 9:6, 7) and because it restricts its observance to Israelites and to circumcised strangers (Exod 12:43-49).[3] Bacchiocchi acknowledges these facts (pp. 44, 49), but maintains that Passover survives the demise of the sacrificial system and must now be observed by all Christians. His position clearly presupposes that it is futile to look for internal indicators in the Old Testament texts to determine the extent of the applicability of Israel's feasts to Christians today. . . . Ultimately, it is the New Testament witness that determines the applicability to Christians of. . . any Old Testament institution (p. 50).

The ultimate authority of the New Testament for Christians can hardly be denied. However, Bacchiocchi here overlooks the extent to which the New Testament itself appeals to the Old Testament as its final court of appeal. As he himself notes, in Acts 15:21 the decree of the Jerusalem council calls upon Moses himself as the ultimate court of appeal for determining the extent of the applicability of the Mosaic law to Gentiles. "How could the Council have rejected the authority of Moses when its decree that the Gentiles must observe four rituals laws (Acts 15:20, 29) is based upon the Mosaic legislation regarding the stranger living with the Israelites (Lev 17-18)" (pp. 86, 87)? However, on the subject of the Passover, it is Bacchiocchi who rejects the authority of Moses, not the New Testament.

For Bacchiocchi, the problem with my reasoning is that it assumes that the indicators found, for example, in the various Old Testament Passover accounts determine the extent of the applicability of the feast for the rest of redemptive history. This is the literalistic method of interpretation used by Dispensationalists today. They read the Old Testament as if Christ had never come and as if the New Testament had never been written. For example, they interpret God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit "all the land of

Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Gen 17:8; cf. 12:7; 13:15) as an indicator of the limitation of God's territorial promise to Jews. . . .

Such a literalistic interpretation of the Old Testament ignores the witness of the New Testament where territorial promises made to Abraham are fulfilled, not through a repossession of Palestine by the Jews, but through the inheritance of the whole renewed earth by believers of all nations (Rom 4:13; Matt 5:5; Rev 21:18). The land of Canaan becomes the world and the offspring of Abraham become all the believers who live by faith like Abraham (Gal 3:17, 28-29) (p. 49).

In fact, Bacchiocchi is the literalist when he insists that the spiritual offspring of Abraham adhere to the literal observance of practices originally limited to those who have been circumcised. This literalism is especially clear in the rhetorical questions cited above, "How can Passover be celebrated spiritually as a memorial of our deliverance from the bondage of sin through Christ, our Paschal Lamb, while its literal observance is rejected" (p. 112)? However, the New Testament clearly repudiates such literalism when it spiritualizes the state of circumcision for uncircumcised Gentiles (Rom 2:28, 29).

Bacchiocchi correctly argues that the Old Testament is primarily the story of God's dealing with His Chosen People. This means that all the institutions of the Old Testament relate primarily to the life and history of the Israelites (p. 50).

However, the Old Testament sometimes still requires the stranger to observe certain requirements of the law,[4] while at other times it merely permits his participation,[5] and in the case of Passover it excludes him altogether, unless he is circumcised (Exod 12:43-49).

These variations must be taken into account in any consideration of the extent of the applicability of Old Testament laws today.

Bacchiocchi notes that in the Old Testament the Sabbath is inextricably linked with the

socioeconomic-religious of the Israelites, as evidenced by the references in various Sabbath texts to the manservant, maidservant, cattle, sojourner, plowing time, harvest time, covenant, and sacrifices (Ex 20:10; 23:12; 34:21; 31:13-14; Num 28:9-10 [sic; should be 28:9, 10]).

Critics have used these internal indicators to argue that the Sabbath is a Jewish institution and is not applicable to Christians. I have dealt with their arguments in my Sabbath books (p.50).

Bacchiocchi is correct in arguing that a timeless law may be formulated in time bound categories, for the biblical "text was given primarily for the common people," and therefore its "message was relayed on a level where they would find it easiest to grasp. Had the truth been conveyed in abstract and theoretical axioms, the prerogative would have been confined to the elite and the scholarly." [6] However, despite the agricultural language of some Sabbath commands, Ezek 20:10-24 presents the Sabbath as applying to the Israelites all throughout the wilderness period. On the other hand, Bacchiocchi himself concedes that for most of this time Passover was not observed, [7] and as a harvest feast, Pentecost would not have been observed at all before Israel's entry into the land (see Lev 23:9-22). Certainly, he should take into account the priority implicitly expressed in Amos 5:21-25 of those laws which applied throughout the wilderness period over those laws which did not.

Bacchiocchi is also correct to point out that in Num 28:9, 10, sacrifices are linked to the Sabbath, without implying that it is only of temporary duration. However, a distinction should be drawn between the Sabbath, whose offerings merely supplemented its observance, and the annual holy days, whose stated purpose was to facilitate the offering of sacrifice (Lev 23:37, 38). From the perspective of the Old Testament, the latter would certainly have trouble surviving the loss of both land and temple. [8]

In the past, Bacchiocchi has gone to great lengths to defend the validity of the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance, [9] emphasizing that the institution of the Sabbath at Creation "means that Sabbathkeeping is not a temporary Jewish ceremonial law, but a permanent precept

pertaining to all creatures." [10] However, he now rejects the validity of this argument, implying that the universal applicability of the Sabbath only becomes clear when "Christ. . . declares in the New Testament that 'The Sabbath was made for man' (Mark 2:27), not merely for the Jews" (p. 50). On the other hand, Mark 2:27, like Acts 15:19-21, does not present a *de novo* line of reasoning, but instead argues from the Old Testament picture of a Creation Sabbath. As Bacchiocchi himself has commented:

Our Lord's choice of words is significant. The verb "made"-*ginomai*-alludes to the original making of the Sabbath and the word "man"-*anthropos*- suggests its human function. Thus to establish the human and universal value of the Sabbath Christ reverts to its very origin, right after the creation of man." [11]

Bacchiocchi's repudiation of his former position leaves the Sabbath without any special status vis-à-vis the annual holy days, whose origin he clearly places at the time of the Exodus (pp. 46, 47). Certainly, an Old Testament command is not rendered obsolete, simply because of its institution after the Fall (p. 51). However, when a festival is *specifically* instituted to commemorate Israel's history, as with Passover, a *prima facie* case exists that it is not universally applicable, at least as far as its mandatory aspect is concerned.

In summary, on Bacchiocchi's own admission, Acts 15:21 makes the Old Testament the final court of appeal for determining what elements of Old Testament law are applicable to Christians. Accordingly, he should give more careful attention to the Old Testament evidence concerning the annual holy days and the extent of their applicability. In particular, he needs to consider the place of the uncircumcised stranger in observing them, the significance of the nonobservance of certain holy days during the wilderness period, the question of whether they presuppose the continued operation of the sacrificial system, and the relevance of the contexts in which they are instituted.

## Evidence From the New Testament

Bacchiocchi's major argument in favor of the perpetuity of the annual holy days revolves around the scope of their typology. If the Feasts had typified *only* the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's first Advent, then obviously their function would have terminated at the Cross. But, if the Feasts foreshadow *also* the consummation of redemption to be accomplished by Christ at His second Advent, then their function continues in the Christian church, though with a new meaning and manner of observance (p. 13).

There is no doubt that the New Testament presents a future dimension to the fulfillment of both Passover[12] and Pentecost.[13] However, Bacchiocchi's argument proves too much. He accepts that the New Testament exempts Gentiles from the law of circumcision (p. 86), and "that certain aspects of the law, such as those relating to the Levitical ministry and sacrifices, . . . [have] become obsolete by the coming of Christ" (p. 87). However, these laws also have a typological scope which reaches beyond the cross. In Col 2:11, circumcision points to the "removal of the body of the flesh," an event which receives its ultimate realization at the time of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:35-37). Revelation 6:9 uses the language of the sacrificial altar to speak of the martyred believers and their cry for vindication. Revelation 15:7-16:17 uses the language of sacrificial bowls filled with blood to depict the seven last plagues.

According to Luke 22:16, Christ claims that He will not eat of the Passover "until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Comments Bacchiocchi, "The Passover that Christ expects to eat again consists of the emblems of His sacrifice, since the following verse [sic] says, 'I shall not drink again of the fruit of the wine until the kingdom of God comes' (Luke 22:18)" (p. 59). However, a strong case exists that the expression "to eat the Passover" does not mean "'to celebrate the feast or rite of Passover' but 'to eat the Passover lamb.'"[14] Bacchiocchi himself has noted that "the adverb 'until'(*achri*) in itself does not suggest a change to a

previous situation,"[15] and this assertion applies with equal force to the temporal use of the adverb "until" (*hes*), such as in Luke 22:16.[16] Furthermore, vs. 18 is unduly redundant, unless the cup is to some extent set in contrast with the Passover.[17] Accordingly, vs. 16 "does not mean that Jesus Christ will eat the paschal lamb once his Kingdom is established, but simply that this was the last time he will celebrate the Jewish. Passover.[18] The relationship between Passover and Communion is thus better defined in terms of Ellen White's model of abrogation and replacement, rather than in terms of Bacchiocchi's model of continuity and transformation.[19]

Bacchiocchi sees "an indirect indication of the *Christian* observance of Passover. . . [in] John's frequent use of the phrase 'The Passover *of the Jews* was at hand' (2:13; 6:4; 11:55)" (p. 72). However, this phrase has also been read as evidence that the church had ceased observing Passover altogether.[20] Accordingly, too much weight should not be put upon the evidence of these verses.

According to Bacchiocchi, "Luke offers another example of the observance of 'old feasts' when he reports that Paul and his travelling companions 'sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread' (Acts 20:6)" (p. 73). However, the text does not actually state that Paul stays in Philippi to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Accordingly, Gareth L. Reese argues that Luke seems to use this expression as a chronological note of time, since it was about this time in the spring that the Mediterranean was opened again to shipping. . . . Some have supposed that Paul was observing the feast of Passover as a Jew away from Palestine would have (it was in the realm of liberty, it is asserted), and that is why he delayed at Philippi. This cannot be categorically denied (though it seems very doubtful); instead we think of Paul as remaining there until he could find a means of sailing to Troas.[21]

Even if it is assumed that Paul does stay in Philippi to observe the feast, it must be remembered that "the [Jerusalem] council . . . decided that the converts from the Jewish

church might observe the ordinances of the Mosaic law if they chose, while those ordinances should not be made obligatory upon converts from the Gentiles." [22] Thus, Paul undergoes a purification rite, in order to squelch rumors that he is urging the Jews of the diaspora to turn away from Moses (Acts 21:17-26). However, Bacchiocchi does not use Acts 21:17-26 as evidence for the permanence of the sacrificial system (p. 87). Likewise, he should not use Acts 20:6 as evidence for the permanence of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Bacchiocchi argues that "indirect support for the Christian observance of Passover is provided by Paul's exhortation to 'celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (1 Cor 5:8)" (p. 73). However, 1 Cor 5:7 does not refer to the *emblems* of Christ's sacrifice as "our Passover." Instead, it designates Christ *Himself* as the Christians' passover. Furthermore, Bacchiocchi himself concedes that "as Christians, we are not bound to observe the ritual of the Jewish ceremonial removal of the leaven" (p. 148). Instead, we are obliged to remove sin from our lives (pp. 73, 74). Given the symbolic setting of the exhortation to "celebrate the festival," it is inconsistent to insist that a literal observance of Passover is in view in vs. 8.[23] Bacchiocchi contends that the incidental reference to Christ as the Passover sacrifice [in 1 Cor 5:7] is remarkable because the church in Corinth was heavily Gentile. This suggests that the existential meaning of Passover was well known and accepted even among the Gentiles, presumably because they observed the feast (p. 76). .

However, according to Acts 15:21, Jewish customs were well known throughout the Gentile world long before the advent of Christianity, and according to Acts 18:11, Paul had spent a year and a half in Corinth teaching "the word of God."

Although Bacchiocchi suggests that "Christians . . . are not bound to observe the ritual of the Jewish ceremonial removal of the leaven" (p. 148), he insists that the "ethical implications" drawn from Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in 1 Cor 5:6-8

presuppose their "actual observance" (p. 124). However, his argument is no more valid than would be the suggestion that circumcision should be observed because of the ethical implications drawn from it in Col 2:11-23.

Bacchiocchi concedes that "for Paul the memorial of Christ's death is to be observed not only once a year but 'as often as' the Lord's Supper is celebrated (1 Cor 11:26)" (p. 75). However, its validity is thus divorced from its observance at a particular time. Accordingly, the onus is on Bacchiocchi to provide clear New Testament evidence of this memorial having a special significance during Passover which it does not have at any other time.

As for Pentecost, Acts 2:1 depicts the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as occurring "when the Day of Pentecost was fully come," or more literally, "when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled" (p. 185). Bacchiocchi rightly suggests that Luke emphasizes this chronological link, partly because he sees the outpouring of the Spirit as "the messianic fulfillment of the events typified by the Jewish Pentecost" (p. 197). However, there is no clear evidence to his additional assertion that "Luke seems to view Pentecost as an important anniversary of the birthday of the Christian church" (p. 197). Certainly, Bacchiocchi is mistaken to single Acts 2:1 out on the basis of the argument that "time references in Acts are few and far between" (p. 185). On the contrary, "the author realizes the importance of fixed dates and connects the events given in the book of Acts with the history of the world in this time."<sup>[24]</sup> Indeed, "statements of years, months, days, feasts and indefinite events . . . make a considerable list [in Acts],"<sup>></sup><sup>[25]</sup> and a reasonable chronology of Acts can now be constructed from the correlation of internal evidence with historical and archaeological sources.<sup>[26]</sup> Luke's interest in historical details clearly goes beyond what is strictly necessary for a purely theological purpose.<sup>[27]</sup>

According to Acts 20:16, Paul sailed directly from Assos to Miletus, bypassing Ephesus, because of his hurry "to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost" (NIV). Bacchiocchi argues that whether he wanted to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost

to show to his Jewish brethren his respect for Jewish festivals, or because he viewed the feast as an appropriate occasion to present the gifts which had been contributed by the Gentiles, or because he expected to meet a large number of brethren that would be attending the feast, the fact remains that all these reasons presuppose that Pentecost was significant for Paul (p. 200).

Thus "if the Feast of Pentecost was important for Paul, known for his indifference to observances as such (Rom 14:5), we have reason to believe that it also must have been important for Christians at large" (p. 200). However, the fact is that none of the explanations Bacchiocchi mentions presupposes that Pentecost would have been of particular importance outside Jewish-Christian circles.[28] Bacchiocchi also overlooks an explanation advanced for Paul's haste which focuses on the practicality of his travel plans rather than on any spiritual significance in Pentecost per se. As Reese notes, He [Paul] was contemplating a journey from Judea to Rome after his visit to Jerusalem, and that would hardly have been feasible had he waited until later in the year than Pentecost to go to Jerusalem. There were only a few months of navigation on the Mediterranean [sic] after Pentecost, until it was closed for the winter season.[29]

In 1 Cor 16:8, Paul's hope is expressed that he might "stay in Ephesus until Pentecost."

Comments Bacchiocchi:

This is a surprising time reference, since both the Ephesian and Corinthian churches were predominantly Gentile. . . . If I were to tell my parents, who live in Rome, Italy, that I plan to visit them for Thanksgiving, they would not know what I am talking about, because in Italy we do not have such a feast (p. 198).

However, as in his comments on the reference to Passover in 1 Cor 5:7 (p. 76), Bacchiocchi here overlooks two facts: first, that according to Acts 15:21, Jewish customs were well known throughout the Gentile world long before the advent of Christianity; and

second, that according to Acts 18:11, Paul had spent a year and a half in Corinth teaching "the word of God."

Bacchiocchi rightly interprets the throne scenes of Rev 4-5 as "a celebration of Pentecost in heaven, which results in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on earth" (p. 191), then argues that this interpretation "suggests that at the time of John's writing (about A.D. 90-100), the feast played a significant role in the liturgical life of the church" (p. 191). Certainly, Revelation seems to be organized into segments that would readily lend themselves to an ordered use throughout the Jewish liturgical year.[30] However, this aspect of Revelation's structure may have been designed to address the particular concerns of Jewish-Christians, rather than the general needs of the Christian Church as a whole.[31]

Commenting further on Rev 4-5, Bacchiocchi argues that "John could hardly have described the celebration of Pentecost in heaven if the feast had no significance on earth" (p. 198). However, Rev 4:8 pictures the Pentecostal worship of heaven as continuing both "day and night," and Rev 5:13 seems to envisage the time when all the powers of evil have been defeated. Accordingly, this Pentecost has an existential reality extending far beyond the time framework of any earthly feast. It thus may be that the heavenly Pentecost is here used to nullify rather than to confirm the earthly shadow, just as the heavenly sanctuary is used in Hebrews.

In summary, Bacchiocchi's main argument for the permanence of the spring festivals is the broad scope of their typology. However, this argument is unconvincing, since logically it also suggests the permanence of circumcision and the sacrificial system, which he himself concedes are abrogated in the New Testament. Under close scrutiny, the incidental New Testament references to Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost also do not suggest that they are permanent or universally applicable institutions.

## Evidence From Early Church History

Bacchiocchi argues that a study of the observance of the spring festivals in the primitive church validates his conclusions concerning their continued applicability in the New Testament (p. 82). However, it actually validates the conclusions of this critique concerning their abrogation in the New Testament.

Bacchiocchi concedes that "the earliest account of the Christian Passover is in the Ethiopic version of the apocryphal *Epistle of the Apostles*, probably written in Asia Minor around A.D. 150" (p. 96), and that the document "reflects the author's awareness of a dispute over the necessity for Christians to observe Passover. Presumably, some Christians felt no need to observe Passover because they viewed it as a Jewish feast" (97). He likewise interprets the confrontation between Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna and Bishop Anicetus of Rome over Passover about A.D. 154 as a dispute over *whether* rather than *when* Passover should be observed (pp. 99, 100). Accordingly, a very different reconstruction of the place of Passover in the early church is possible than that advanced by Bacchiocchi. As Donna and Mal Broadhurst suggest:

Apparently some all-Gentile groups at first had no annual observance whatsoever to commemorate Christ's death . . . ; they observed only the more-frequent Lord's Table. But Jewish believers, Gentile believers who had been proselytes to Judaism, Gentiles in fellowship with Jewish believers, and perhaps some of the all-Gentiles groups held an annual commemoration at the Passover season-the anniversary of Christ's crucifixion. This was in addition to observing the Lord's Table. Gentile churches which originally had had no annual commemoration began to adopt the custom of the others. Soon an annual commemoration was the custom of the great majority.[32]

In support of this reconstruction, the Broadhursts note that the first post-biblical reference to the bread and wine is in Justin [sic] Martyr's *First Apology*, c. 155 A.D. Justin makes no liturgical connection between Passover and Communion, and he might well have made such connection if he had seen any. Justin knew well the theology of Christ fulfilling Passover, and he expounded on that theology at great length in his writings.[33]

Bacchiocchi notes that according to Irenaeus, Polycarp of Smyrna insisted on observing Passover because he had kept it with John and other apostles (p. 100). He also notes the vigorous debate in the late second century A.D. over whether Christians should observe Passover on the traditional Jewish date of Nisan 14 (the date defended by Polycrates of Smyrna) or on Easter Sunday, the first Sunday after Nisan 14 (the date defended by Victor of Rome) (pp. 98, 99). Finally, he observes that Polycrates (Polycarp's protégé) saw the issue in terms of obeying to God rather than man (p. 99). Christian Passover observance might thus seem to be a matter of apostolic ordinance.

Unfortunately, Bacchiocchi overlooks Irenaeus's contention that besides the dispute over when Passover should be observed, many views existed about how long the fast preceding Passover should be observed, all of long standing and presumably dating back to the Apostolic Era itself.[34] The historical evidence thus suggests that in the New Testament era itself, questions of if, when, and how Passover should be observed were considered to be matters of indifference. Clearly Irenaeus was arguing that they must remain so. He thus did not condemn Easter observance per se, but rather Victor's attempts to foist the views of Rome on the church at large. Presumably he would have been equally resistant to any attempt by Polycrates to foist his views on the church at large, if the position had been reversed.

Bacchiocchi observes that from the first account to the Christian observance of Passover in the *Epistle of the Apostles* onward, Christians are not pictured as eating a

Passover Lamb, but as fasting until "the early morning of the 15th day" of Nisan, when the fast is broken by an observance of "the Lord's Supper and the love feast" (p. 96).

The reason for the extension of the fasting appears to be twofold. On the one hand, Christians chose to postpone their rejoicing until after the termination of the Passover feasting of the Jews, which ended at about midnight. On the other hand, the time prior to dawn had an eschatological meaning in relation to the expectation of the Return of Christ. While the Jews expected the coming of the Messiah on Passover night, the Christian awaited the Return of Christ before dawn (p. 96).

Bacchiocchi then approvingly cites Jerome's claim that the extension of the fast past midnight went back to the apostles themselves.

Bacchiocchi's reasoning here is ironic since he clearly implies that the apostles themselves altered certain aspects of the time and manner of Christian Passover observance, simply to separate Christians from Jews. However, one of his reasons for rejecting the replacement of Passover by Easter Sunday is the obviously anti-Judaic nature of the motivations involved (p. 135).

Admittedly, Bacchiocchi suggests that today the Paschal observance of the Lord's Supper and love feast should perhaps be transferred back from the morning or to the evening, not only because of the drowsiness induced by an all night vigil (p. 152), but also because there is no need today for Christians to distance themselves from the Passover festivities of the Jews. We can no longer blame the Jews for causing the death of Christ, because we recognize that as sinners all are ultimately responsible for His death" (pp. 150, 151). However, this argument implies that it once was legitimate to single out the Jews as the perpetrators of Christ's death, and that Christians today must abandon both Easter Sunday *and* apostolic authority, if they are to avoid giving tacit approval of the anti-Judaic motivations of their forebears. It also suggests that postapostolic changes from Sabbath to Sunday and from

Passover to Easter Sunday were merely part of a process started by the apostles themselves.

Clearly Bacchiocchi threatens the consistency of his own thesis by giving too much authority to the extra-canonical statements of early Christians concerning the Christian observance of Passover.

As for Pentecost, it is first mentioned "in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* (about A.D. 180)" (p. 205), some thirty years after the first mention of Passover in the *Epistle of the Apostles*. In contrast to the situation with Passover, there seems to be no evidence of any debate at the time about whether or not Pentecost should even be observed. However, the fact that Justin Martyr is silent about the continued observance of both Passover and Pentecost might suggest that it was not universally observed among all early Gentile Christians. The period of Pentecost begins with the offering of the wavesheaf, which Bacchiocchi includes as part of the observance of Passover (p. 23). Accordingly, those Christians who questioned the need to observe Passover would have been unlikely to see any need to observe Pentecost. On the other hand, the acceptance of the importance of observing Passover would have almost automatically entailed a correlating acceptance of the importance of observing Pentecost.

Bacchiocchi adduces widespread evidence that the early Christian observance of Pentecost focused not only on the day of Pentecost itself, but also on the whole fifty-day period leading up to it, beginning with the offering of the wavesheaf (pp. 205-207). He notes that this was a period "of joy and triumph during which Christians were to refrain from kneeling and fasting," and approvingly cites Irenaeus's contention that the practice of not kneeling during Pentecost derives from apostolic times (p. 213). Presumably he would be less enthusiastic to endorse Irenaeus's simultaneous dating of the commencement of Lord's day observance to the same era. Ironically Bacchiocchi endorses the observance of the Pentecost period as a season of joy, without taking into account the anti-Judaic motivations which may have been the basis of this custom.[35]

In summary, there is both explicit and implicit evidence that the postapostolic church

debated whether Christians even needed to observe Passover before it debated the question of when it should be observed. There is no explicit evidence of an early debate over whether Pentecost should be observed, although presumably this issue was implicit in the debate over Passover. Bacchiocchi should be more cautious in using evidence from the second century A.D. to reconstruct the first-century A.D. situation, in case he sanctions customs based on the same anti-Judaic motivations he himself rightly decries.

### **The Observance of the Spring Festivals Today**

Bacchiocchi displays considerable confusion in his proposals about when Passover and Pentecost should be celebrated.

The early advocates of Easter Sunday simply observed Passover on the first Sunday after the Jewish Passover celebration on Nisan 14. This practice was no doubt at least partially an attempt to mark out church and synagogue as separate entities (p. 132), but still kept Christians dependent upon the calculations of the rabbinic authorities:

At first, Gentile Christians depended on the Jewish date of the Passover to determine their own Easter-Sunday date, because apart from that Jewish date they could not know which was the first month. Thus, they waited for the Jews to determinate [sic] the date of the Passover; then they fixed their date for the Sunday following the Jewish date (p. 132).

Bacchiocchi then points to a further step in the process by which Christians differentiated themselves from the Jews:

In time, such a dependence on the Jews was considered humiliating, especially when Gentile Christians were trying to differentiate themselves from the Jews. Thus, the bishops of Rome and Alexandria developed their own computations for the date of Easter based on the Spring

equinox and the day of the full moon. Easter, therefore, was to be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the Spring Equinox (after March 21) (p. 132).

Bacchiocchi here seems to support the rabbinic calendar. However, elsewhere he explicitly rejects it as the arbitrary determination of poor astronomers (p. 130), and ultimately follows the bishops of Rome and Alexandria in their dependence on the spring equinox and the day of the full moon. "To respect the Biblical date, typology, and meaning of Passover, one must observe the feast in accordance with the Biblical date of Nisan 14, which corresponds to the first full moon after the Spring equinox" (p. 136).

With respect to Pentecost, Bacchiocchi argues that "the method we use today to determine the date of Pentecost may not be as critical as for other feasts," mainly "because Pentecost began in the Old Testament as a harvest festival whose date was determined by the ripeness of the wheat crop" (p. 234).[36] However, this argument applies with equal force to the whole festal calendar.

There is no doubt that Pentecost occurred at the-time of the wheat harvest (Exod 34:22). However, its date was actually determined by the ripeness of the barley crop, since it was with the offering of the wavesheaf and the start of the grain harvest that the seven-week countdown to Pentecost began (Lev 23:15; Deut 16:9). Furthermore, since Bacchiocchi accepts that the wavesheaf was offered during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, he himself is forced to concede that Passover was also subject to seasonal happenstance:

Passover could not be celebrated until at least some of the barley was ready to be harvested and waved before the Lord. If because of weather conditions or a failure to make the necessary intercalation at the end of the lunar year, no barley was ripe, the rabbinical authorities would inform the Jews that Passover would be observed a month later.

Furthermore, this alteration ultimately came to affect the whole festal calendar. "When Passover was moved up one month, all the other Feasts were moved accordingly, because Passover marked the beginning of the religious calendar" (p. 23).

Bacchiocchi no doubt wants some latitude in the method for determining the date of Pentecost because of the use of two different methods of computation used among contemporary feast-keepers. It is clearly stated that Pentecost should come seven weeks after the offering of the wavesheaf, "on the day after the Sabbath" (Lev 23:15). However, dispute exists about what the word "Sabbath" here means. The Pharisees identified this Sabbath with the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so that for them the countdown to Pentecost always began on Nisan 16 (p. 168). On the other hand, the Sadducees and early Christians identified this Sabbath with "the first Sabbath which fell during the week of Unleavened Bread. . . . Consequently, Pentecost for them always fell on the same day of the week, namely, Sunday" (p. 169).

It is at this point that Bacchiocchi's wish for latitude becomes internally inconsistent, since he argues that the Pharisaic tradition is undoubtedly correct (p. 169; cf. p. 173), but then unapologetically states his preference for "the reckoning of the fifty days of Pentecost from the first Sunday after Passover" (p. 233), partly because of the consistent witness of the early Church that observed Pentecost from the Sunday after Passover to the Sunday occurring fifty days later. The fact that this dating of Pentecost was widely accepted without signs of opposition suggests that the early Christians viewed it as Biblically sound (p. 234).

Bacchiocchi's support for the Sunday Pentecost is ironic since he unequivocally states that neither Paul nor any other apostle ever suggests that Christ's resurrection should be celebrated liturgically on a weekly Sunday or annual Easter-Sunday. In the New Testament, Christ's resurrection is celebrated, not liturgically by a special day of worship, but existentially by living victoriously through the power of the risen Christ (Rom 6:1-5) (p. 135).

However, he elsewhere argues that Christ's resurrection fulfils the typology of the offering of the wavesheaf (pp. 172, 172), and that Christians should celebrate the resurrection from the time of this offering until the day of Pentecost itself (pp. 235, 236). What he has apparently forgotten is that with a Sunday Pentecost, the date for offering the wavesheaf inevitably comes on the first Sunday after the Jewish Passover: the very day initially chosen for the observance of Easter Sunday (p. 132). Once again, Bacchiocchi's overuse of second-century A.D. documents to reconstruct the first-century A.D. situation has led him to a position contradicting his own emphases.

In summary, Bacchiocchi insists on a contemporary method of calculating the date of Passover which was apparently unknown among any early Christian group. He claims that "the method we use today to determine the date of Pentecost may not be as critical as for other feasts" (234), although his major supporting argument applies to the whole festive calendar. He is also confused over whether the fifty days of the Pentecost season should begin on Nisan 16 or on the first Sunday after Passover.

## **Conclusions**

Bacchiocchi adduces a wide range of arguments to support his position that Christians still need to observe Passover and Pentecost. However, his case remains unconvincing. For example, he too readily dismisses the usefulness of the Old Testament in determining the extent of the applicability of the feasts to Christians today. His main argument for the permanence of the Spring Festivals is the broad scope of their typology. However, this argument is unconvincing, since it would logically also entail the permanence of circumcision and the sacrificial system. The incidental New Testament references to Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost do not show that they are permanent or universally applicable institutions. As for early church history, there is explicit and implicit evidence that the postapostolic church debated whether Christians even needed to observe Passover before

it debated the question of when it should be observed, and implicit evidence for the same situation with Pentecost. Bacchiocchi's overuse of evidence from the second century A.D. to reconstruct the first-century A.D. situation leads him to sanction customs based on the same anti-Judaic motivations he himself rightly decries. As for the question of the observance of the Spring festivals today, he displays considerable confusion in his proposals about when Passover and Pentecost should be celebrated. Internal contradictions characterize his whole approach.

Bacchiocchi explicitly states that he has no desire "to resurrect a legalistic observance of the annual Feasts" (p. 15), and the christocentric focus of his concrete proposals for celebrating Passover and Pentecost today confirms the sincerity of his statement (see pp. 145-155, 242-250). Nevertheless, he has declared these feasts to be permanent when Scripture demonstrates that they are temporary, and in so doing he has crossed a critical line where legalism is logically inevitable. Certainly, Bacchiocchi confounds body and shadow together when he asks, "How can Christians experience the existential reality of salvation represented by Passover, when its actual observance, which forms the basis of such an experience, is renounced?" (p. 84), for the basis of the experience of salvation is Christ Himself, rather than the observance of any day. To deny this primacy to Christ would be a clear sign of enslavement to the "weak and worthless elemental things" of the past (Gal 4:9) and of a return to the heresy of Galatianism, however vigorous one's protests to the contrary.

Bacchiocchi states that the many requests he has received for an early release of his study have motivated the division of his project into two volumes (p. 11). The pressure of time may explain volume one's internal contradictions and its apparent adoption of Galatianism. However, whatever the explanation, it is to be hoped that when the second volume is published, more attention will be given to the issue of internal consistency and to providing a more careful analysis of the relevant evidence than in the first volume. In particular, it is to be hoped that scepter of legalism will be laid to rest. Bacchiocchi's past

record of scholarship and his previous testimonies to divine grace both suggest the possibility that these hopes may not be in vain.

- 
- [1]. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God's Festivals in Scripture and History*, Part 1, *The Spring Festivals*, Biblical Perspectives, no. 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1995), 11. All ellipses are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Bacchiocchi includes "the Feast of Unleavened Bread" in the designation "Passover" and the offering of the "wavesheaf" at the start of the grain harvest in the designation "Pentecost." See pp. 41, 42, 167.
- [2]. Ibid., 11, 12, citing the Lutheran educator, Martha Zimmerman, *Celebrate the Feasts of the Old Testament in Your Own Church* (Minneapolis, 1981).
- [3]. H. Ross Cole, "The Sacred Times Prescribed in the Pentateuch: Old Testament Indicators of the Extent of their Applicability" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1996).
- [4]. E.g., Sabbathkeeping in Exod 20:10, 23:12; Deut 5:14.
- [5]. E.g., the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles in Deut 16:11, 14, compared with vs. 16.
- [6]. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "How Can Christians Derive Principles from the Specific Commands of the Law?" in *Theory and Method: Readings in Christian Ethics*, vol. 1, ed. David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 192.
- [7]. "Numbers 9: 1-5 records the first anniversary Passover that was kept in the wilderness of Sinai. . . . This appears to be the only Passover observed in the Wilderness. . . . The next mention of Passover is in the book of Joshua after the Israelites had crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land. The lapse probably was due to the problem of circumcision. Joshua 5:5 suggests that circumcision was suspended during the wilderness journeys, presumably because of the danger of infection in the difficult conditions" (pp. 40, 41). Bacchiocchi's basic understanding is basically correct, although a more probable explanation for the suspension of circumcision is that "in the rebellion at Kadesh they [the Israelites] had rejected God, and God had for the time rejected them. Since they had proved unfaithful to His covenant, they were not to receive the sign of the covenant, the rite of circumcision." Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1958), 406.
- [8]. Accordingly, Hos 9:3-5 implies that nothing would remain of Israel's feast once she was exiled from her land. Note how Ellen G. White argues that during the exile, "not a few lost their lives because of their refusal to disregard the Sabbath and to observe the heathen festivals." Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1940) 28. On the other hand, of Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, she states that "during the captivity of the Jews, they could not be observed; but when the people were restored to their own land, the observance of these memorials was once more begun." Ibid., 447.
- [9]. E.g., see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1980), 1957.
- [10]. Ibid., 57.
- [11]. Ibid., 41.
- [12]. E.g., in Luke 22:16; 1 Cor 11:26; Rev 19:9, as cited in *The Spring Festivals*, 70, 71.
- [13]. E.g., in 1 Cor 15:20, 23; Rev 14:4, as cited in *The Spring Festivals*, 195, 196.
- [14]. C. K. Barrett, "Luke xxii. 15: To eat the Passover," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 9 (1958): 305-307.
- [15]. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness: A Theological Study of the Meaning of the Second Advent for Today*, Biblical Perspectives, no. 6 (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1986), 240, commenting on Luke 21:24. }te continues, for example, in the admonition "Hold fast what you have, until I come" (Rev 2:25), the adverb 'until' does not convey the idea of a change from a present condition of faithfulness to a

previous condition of unfaithfulness (cf. Rev 2:10; I Cor. 15:25). Ibid.

[16]. E.g., see Matt 13:13; Luke 13:21; John 5:17; 1 Cor 1:8; 4:13; 8:7; 15:6; 2 Cor 3:15, as listed by W. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. W. F. Amst and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

[17]. Barrett, 305.

[18]. José María Casciaro et al., eds., *The Navarre Bible: Saint Luke's Gospel*, trans. Brian McCarthy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1987), 266.

[19]. "Christ was standing at the point of transition between two economies and their *two* great festivals. . . . As He ate the Passover with His disciples, He instituted *in its place* the service that was to be the memorial of His great sacrifice. The national festival of the Jews was *to pass away forever*. The service which Christ established was to be observed by His followers in all lands and through all ages." White, *The Desire of Ages*, 652. All emphasis is mine unless otherwise indicated. "When the Saviour yielded up His life on Calvary, *the significance of the Passover ceased*, and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted as a memorial of the same event of which the Passover had been a type." Idem, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 539. "Christ ate the passover supper with His disciples just before the crucifixion, and *the same night* instituted the ordinance of the Lord's supper, to be observed in commemoration of his death. Up to this time the passover had been observed to commemorate the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. *But in its place* he now left an ordinance to commemorate the events of his crucifixion." Idem, "The Passover," *The Signs of the Times*, 25 March 1880, 9.

[20]. E.g., see George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 39.

[21]. Gareth L. Reese, *New Testament History: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1976), 732.

[22]. "Ellen G. White Comments on Galatians," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assoc., 1980), 6:1111.

[23]. "These last three verses [1 Cor 5:6-8] are full of the imagery of. . . the Passover. Paul's marked use of this imagery at this time has led to the generally accepted conclusion that he wrote this letter shortly before the Jewish Passover season, so that his mind was naturally filled with this imagery. . . . But it would be unsafe to conclude either that the old Jewish festivals were still celebrated in the newly formed Christian congregations, or that the corresponding Christian festivals were already celebrated at this early date." R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1946), 224. Instead, it seems that "Paul's thought in . . . [this] passage is that Christian life in its entirety is a festival" W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 3d ed. (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 250.

[24]. Reese, XXX.

[25]. A. T. Robertson, *Luke the Historian in the Light of Research* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 178.

[26]. E.g., see Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 13-20.

[27]. For example, whatever theological significance may be attached to the record of Paul's staying in Philippi during the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Acts 20:6a, it is difficult to imagine that any particular theological consideration motivates Luke's assertion that the trip to Troas took five days, and that their subsequent stay there was for seven days (vs. 6b). Nevertheless, he does make the assertion.

[28]. Compare the comments made on the particular concerns of Jewish-Christian in the discussion above on Acts 20:6.

[29]. Reese, 742.

[30]. E.g., note the case presented by M.D. Goulder, "The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 342-367.

[31]. *Ibid.*, 355.

[32]. Donna and Mal Broadhurst, *Passover: Before Messiah and After* (Carol Stream, IL: Shofar Publications, 1987), 122.

[33]. *Ibid.*, 121.

[34]. Eusebius, *Church History* 5.24.12,13 (The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2d. series, 1:243).

[35]. As van Goudoever notes, the Christian opposition to mourning during the Pentecost season may have been specifically "directed against the Jews who kept these fifty days as a period of restriction," perhaps as a commemoration of the wilderness wanderings. J. van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars*, 2d rev. ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 183.

[36]. However, the fact is that the date of Pentecost is actually determined by reference to Passover. However, Bacchiocchi is no doubt correct since the time when the barley harvest ripened would have inevitably been a safe guide to the time when the wheat harvest would be ready.