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# CHURCH HISTORY MONTHLY

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## Timeline of Topics

- Early Church History
- The dating of Easter
- Reformation
- Tyndale, wordsmith and translator
- 1559: Quote from Calvin
- Global South
- Missionaries from and to countries

## Why do Christians do that?: Why does the date of Easter keep changing?

Unlike Christmas and Thanksgiving, the dating of Easter changes from year to year. But why isn't one date chosen like other holidays? This uncertainty is not new and dates back to the time of the early church. Within a hundred years of Jesus' resurrection, Christians were already at odds over when to celebrate that event. The main twist involves those who wanted to celebrate Easter on the day Jesus arose, a Sunday, and those who wanted to celebrate it on Passover, regardless of which day it fell during the week.

The earliest disagreement went by the unusual name of the Quartodeciman Controversy. The origin of the name is actually simple. The Passover always occurred on the Jewish date of Nisan (or Nissan) 14. Thus the name, Quartodeciman, was derived from the number 14 ("quartus" or 4 and "decimus" or 10). Those holding to this view believed Easter should be celebrated on the same day as the Jewish Passover.

Our solar calendar measures the time it takes the earth to rotate around the sun once. But the Jews used a lunar calendar, one month being the time it takes the moon to go around the earth once. The first day of a Jewish month was the day following a new moon (when the moon is completely dark). That way, 14 days after the new moon was always a full moon; therefore the 14th of Nisan—or of any Jewish month—was always a full moon.

So the Quartodeciman Christians—who mainly lived east of Italy in Asia Minor—wanted Easter celebrated on the same day as the Passover, no matter on which day of the week it fell. But this caused a problem because many Christians in the West—think Europe—wanted Easter celebrated only on a Sunday, the actual day on which Jesus arose.

We can date this controversy to the year 155. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, traveled to Rome in that year to discuss certain issues with Pope Anicetus; included was the differences in the dating of Easter. Polycarp (from Smyrna in Greece, east of Italy) was a Quartodeciman. He tried to persuade Anicetus to make this dating scheme standard in the European churches but Anicetus declined to enforce this. Yet Anicetus did not force the Quartodecimians to change their practice.

So Easter from early on was celebrated at different dates in different regions of the Roman Empire. A Church Council was called in 325 to deal with different issues in the early church, among them the dating of Easter. In order to standardize the date of Easter, the decision was made to establish Easter on the first Sunday after the full moon after the vernal equinox (March 21). This solution satisfied both sides, those wanting to celebrate Easter on a Sunday and those wanting to celebrate Easter on a full moon (or close to it) as when Jesus resurrected.



**No one attains to a true self-understand until they have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into themselves."**

**[Meaning, people cannot understand themselves only by looking at themselves, they have to start by learning about God, the creator, first and then move to themselves, the creation. Starting with oneself will always lead to a corrupted understanding.]**

**John Calvin, "The Institutes," 1559**

### **William Tyndale, the overlooked reformer**

Martin Luther and John Calvin may have dominated the Reformation, but William Tyndale's influence was so great that we still hear it today.

Tyndale received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Oxford and became fluent in English, French, German, Hebrew, Greek, Italian, Latin, and Spanish. Those language skills aided him in his greatest work: Tyndale dreamed of publishing the first English-language translation of the Bible. John Wycliffe and others had produced the first English Bible, but that was translated from Latin and was handwritten. Tyndale translated from Hebrew and Greek and used the printing press.

That was illegal. The king of England had to approve new translations. But Tyndale still dreamed his dream.

In 1523, he traveled to London to ask Bishop Turnstall to fund his project, but he was rejected. Tyndale pressed on.

The next year, he moved to Germany. He completed his English-language New Testament (NT) translation from Greek in 1525 and published it in Worms, Germany, in 1526. This was the first printed English NT.

Some of the English NTs were smuggled into England, but Bishop Tunstall had them seized and publicly burned.

Tyndale himself was declared a heretic in 1529.

Undaunted, Tyndale began translating the Old Testament (OT) from the Hebrew.

Unfortunately, Tyndale got involved in politics. King Henry VIII was considering a divorce, and Tyndale wrote a pamphlet disagreeing with this in 1530. (Henry did divorce his wife and marry Anne Boleyn, along with breaking with the Catholic Church and forming the Church of England.)

The king ordered Tyndale's arrest. He was captured in 1535 after translating about half of the OT into English, tried for heresy, strangled to death, and then his body burned at the stake. There are reports that he was not fully strangled and, while being burned, prayed aloud, "Lord, Open the King of England's eyes." (Myles Coverdale completed the translation of the OT.)

### **Global Christianity: How many missionaries?**

No one would be surprised to hear that the USA sends out more missionaries than any other country. But what other countries do you think make up the list of the top ten countries who send missionaries outside their countries. 5 of them are from Europe and 1 is Canada, but what do you think about the other 4? The suspense is over, here is the list:

1. USA: 127,000
2. Brazil: 34,000
3. France: 21,000
4. Spain: 21,000
5. Italy: 20,000
6. South Korea: 20,000
7. United Kingdom: 15,000
8. Germany: 14,000
9. India: 10,000
10. Canada: 8,500

But this is the crazy part. What about the ranking of the countries that receive the most missionaries from other countries? The first one will shock you.

This is the ranking:

1. USA: 32,400
2. Brazil: 20,000
3. Russia: 20,000
4. DR Congo: 15,000
5. South Africa: 12,000
6. France: 10,000
7. United Kingdom: 10,000
8. Argentina: 10,000
9. Chile: 8,5000
10. India: 8,000

You can read more here, plus see other statistics.

### **Tyndale, part 2**

But that is not the end of his contribution. We use phrases today from Tyndale's English translation of the Bible:

-lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

-knock and it shall be opened unto you

seek and you shall find

-eat, drink, and be merry

-let there be light

-my brother's keeper

-the salt of the earth

-it came to pass

-the signs of the times

-fight the good fight

We know these phrases because they are in the King James Version Bible: Over 75% of the KJV Bible comes from Tyndale's version.

Plus, he coined the word "Passover" (meaning the Jewish celebration). The Hebrew word for "Passover" is "Pesach," which is found in the Bible. Tyndale, however, did not like to use foreign words that had no meaning to an average person, and so coined the word "Passover" to be used instead of "Pesach." So, along with everything else he did, Tyndale also created the word "Passover."

Upcoming free online classes:

Apr 26: 5 weeks: Church History Overview

May 24: 3 weeks: How we got the NT

June 21: 3 weeks: Books not in the NT

July 19: 4 weeks: How we got the OT plus the books not in the OT

Questions, comments, or want to join a free class contact Mark at [marknickens@gmail.com](mailto:marknickens@gmail.com)