

Introduction

Only eternity will reveal how many people have fallen away from the truth through the influence of pagan traditions. The warning that the Lord gave to Israel was very clear: “After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I *am* the LORD your God” (Leviticus 18:3-4). Israel was to walk in the ways of the Lord, not after the pattern of the Egyptians, nor after the manner of the people whom they would supplant in the land of Canaan. Through Jeremiah, the Lord declared: “Learn not the way of the heathen ...” (Jeremiah 10:2); yet what is largely accepted as commonplace among Evangelicals today too often finds its roots within the pagan traditions of many fallen cultures. Although we might rightly ascribe the responsibility to the Roman Catholic Church for making many of these traditions part of our culture, we cannot blame them for our decision to accept them as appropriate for the child of God. Growing up with error only serves to make it more difficult to identify, but it does not make it right. We might perceive the customs of our youth to be acceptable, without a second thought – but do they stand the test of Scripture?

When my wife and I left Evangelicalism behind, it soon became evident that there were many things that we had accepted as being right that needed to be re-evaluated in light of our new commitment to the truth of Scripture. This study was another that I undertook to ensure that our practice was in keeping with the teachings of God’s Word; that was now our greatest concern, and so our accepted traditions came under the revealing light of the Scriptures. Perhaps one of the greatest shortcomings of Evangelical teaching is that there is no encouragement to personally study the Scriptures since that is what God requires of us; in fact, even the preachers and teachers seem content to accept traditions as having God’s stamp of approval without ever checking to ensure that they do. I will never forget the response that I received from an elderly, fundamental-Baptist preacher when I asked him to review the exaggerated case that one of his *missionaries* had made for a Biblical basis for church membership; his response was simply: “I am a Baptist by conviction. I believe our faith and practice is absolutely inline with what the Word of God teaches.”¹ In other words, he believed that his Baptist traditions had been ordained of God, he was not prepared to test his beliefs to ensure that they were in keeping with God’s Word (contrary to 2 Corinthians 13:5), and if you have a problem with his Baptist *traditions*, then clearly you’re not a Baptist, and that’s okay. His attitude simply encouraged me to continue to measure all things against the Word of God, and to change how we live so that we are obedient to the commands of Scripture. We have changed many things since leaving the Evangelical community, and it has cost us family and friends, but we are committed to continually seeking to know the Truth of God more fully – indeed, the one who is seeking is finding (Matthew 7:8).

As we consider the subject of *Easter* together, may it be with a desire to know what God has to say on the matter. Within most churches, there are deeply entrenched traditions when it comes to how this weekend is celebrated, but, if you’re like I was, you may have never taken the time to ask any questions about why things are done – perhaps this will be your maiden voyage into discovering the truths of Scripture as never before. It was for my wife and me; God bless you as you read on.

¹ Personal correspondence from Wilbert Unger, June 12, 2008.

Easter - What’s in a Name?

There is perhaps no greater example of how we have submitted to tradition and failed to exercise our minds in spiritual matters than in the consideration of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and the annual event that we commonly call *Easter*. Although the word *Easter* does appear in Acts 12:4 in the King James Version (KJV), it is an incorrect translation of the Greek word *pascha*, or the Passover; interestingly enough, the other 28 times that *pascha* appears in the Greek text, it was always correctly translated as *Passover*, nor has it been translated as *Easter* in most modern translations.² The translators of the KJV were instructed by King James to follow the pattern of the Bishop’s Bible in carrying out their work, and brought this term over from that Bible;³ the Bishop’s Bible was an earlier English translation that was hastily produced by a number of Anglican bishops in an effort to furnish an acceptable Bible as an alternative to the Geneva Bible, which was perceived as being largely Calvinistic.⁴ Even though the translators of the Bishop’s Bible (1568, and significantly revised in 1572) translated the Greek word *pascha* elsewhere as Passover, in Acts 12:4 and John 11:55) they chose to use the word *Easter*, and the KJV translators perpetuated the error.⁵ Wycliffe’s translation of 1395 correctly translates the Greek as *Passover*, however, the subsequent translations done by William Tyndale (1525) and Miles Coverdale (1535) both used the term *Easter*. Why Tyndale would have done so is somewhat mystifying, as it is said that he translated directly from the original languages.⁶ Coverdale, on the other hand, depended largely on Tyndale’s work, as he did not have the same grasp of the languages.

The etymology of the word *Easter* shows its origin in the “O.E. [Old English] *Eastre* (Northumbrian *Eostre*), from P.Gmc. [Proto Germanic] *Austron*, a goddess of fertility and sunrise whose feast was celebrated at the spring equinox.”⁷ The Roman Catholics, however, do not accept



Eastre or Eostre

this history for the word, and declare: “The English term [*Easter*], according to the Ven. Bede [the Venerable Bede, one of their Doctors of the Church, c672-735] ... relates to *Estre*, a Teutonic [northern European] goddess of the rising light of day and spring, **which deity ... is otherwise unknown** ... The Greek term for Easter, *pascha* ... is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew *pesach* (*transitus*, passover)” (bold emphasis added).⁸ Despite the fact that one of their own (Bede), whom they consider to be a founding father, exposes the pagan connection, Roman Catholic theologians have chosen to dismiss this association, and prescribe *Easter* as being the correct translation for the Greek word, *pascha*. However, even though they distance themselves from the pagan relationship, and seek to uphold a false translation of the Greek word *pascha*, their own English Bible translations do not use the term *Easter* for *pascha* in either John 11:55 or Acts 12:4.⁹

² Strong’s Online, <https://onlinebible.net/>; A check through thirty other translations, including the *New King James Version* and the notoriously loose *The Message*, turned up no instances of the use of *Easter* in Acts 12:4.

³ <https://www.studydrive.org/bible/eng/bis/acts/12.html>

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishops%27_Bible.

⁵ Interestingly, even though the Bishop’s Bible uses the word *Easter* in John 11:55 as well, the KJV translators chose to use the word *Passover* in both instances within that verse.

⁶ <https://biblemanuscriptsociety.com/Bible-resources/English-Bible-History/Tyndale-Bible>

⁷ Online Etymology Dictionary, “Easter,” <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=e>

⁸ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05224d.htm> “Easter.”

⁹ Checked: Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition, Jerusalem Bible and New American Bible.

Even the oldest Catholic translation of the Bible into English (the Douay-Rheims translation; NT published in 1582) translates the word as *pasch*, not *Easter*.¹⁰ There appears to be some inconsistency among Catholic scholars as to the correct translation of *pascha*, or perhaps they are seeking to justify their general use of *Easter*.

However, the Roman Catholics are not the only ones who choose to turn a blind eye to the relationship between the word *Easter* and the pagan goddess of fertility. Gretchen Passantino, co-founder of Answers in Action and a frequent contributor to the *Christian Research Journal*, states: “**Easter** is an English corruption from the proto-Germanic root word meaning ‘to rise’” (bold in original).¹¹ She goes on: “It refers not only to Christ rising from the dead, but also to his ascension to heaven and to our future rising with him at his Second Coming for final judgment. It is not true that it derives from the pagan Germanic goddess Oestar or from the Babylonian goddess Ishtar ...”¹² Here is an attempt made by a fairly well-known Evangelical apologist to rationalize the “English corruption” *Easter* sufficiently so as to make it completely acceptable, even while denying the pagan connection. Regardless of the spiritual significance that she attempts to assign to the word *Easter*, the position that she puts forward, supposedly debunking the pagan association, is based entirely upon her own authority. She flatly denies that *Easter* derives from the names given to pagan goddesses going back to Babylon, yet she does not provide any support for her assured declaration. On the other hand, the evidence against her in this matter seems to be quite significant. We have already seen the opinion of one etymology dictionary that is in opposition to her position. Shipley, in his *Dictionary of Word Origins*, says that the word is “from the AS [Anglo-Saxon] *Eostre*, a pagan goddess,” and then goes on to state: “The Christian festival of the resurrection of Christ has in most European languages taken the name of the Jewish *Passover* ... in Eng. [English] the pagan word has remained ...”¹³ He not only identifies *Easter* as being of pagan origin, but goes on to expose the English language as being quite unique in retaining the pagan term. The Columbia Encyclopedia (Sixth Edition) states: “A.S. [Anglo-Saxon] *Eastre*, name of a spring goddess ...”¹⁴ Passantino’s opinion on the matter stands alone against some very significant authorities; as nice as it might be for her to think that the word *Easter* sprang directly from reference to the resurrection of the Lord, at its best it is clearly only a delusion on her part.

It is commonly held among professing pagans that *Eastre* is the Anglo-Saxon goddess of fertility, and *Ostara* is the spring festival that celebrates the “renewal and rebirth of Nature ...”¹⁵ It seems that all of the ancient civilizations had their version of the goddess of fertility: the Anglo-Saxons had their *Eastre*, Egypt had *Isis*, Phoenicia - *Astarte*, Greece - *Aphrodite*, Rome - *Venus*, Babylon - *Ishtar*, and the inhabitants of Canaan had *Ashtoreth* (1 Kings 11:33). Like many other traditions that are a part of our culture today, the roots of *Easter* can be traced to the Babylonian civilization that was formed out of rebellion against the Lord.

From the descendants of Noah, we find a great-grandson, Nimrod, whose name means “we will revolt.”¹⁶ He became “a mighty one in the earth” (Genesis 10:8), which speaks of his greatness

¹⁰ <https://www.catholicspiritualdirection.org/douayrheimsbible.pdf>.

¹¹ Gretchen Passantino, “Ash Wednesday, Lent, and Easter,” <http://www.answers.org/issues/easter.html>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Joseph T. Shipley, *Dictionary of Word Origins*, “Easter.”

¹⁴ <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ea/Easter.html>

¹⁵ <http://thunder.prohosting.com/~cbarstow/ostara.html>

¹⁶ Keil & Delitzsch Commentary, *ESword*.

as a leader among the people, and a “mighty hunter before [or, against] the Lord (10:9)” that exposes his rebellion against the God of creation.¹⁷ If we recognize that it is not possible to be a rebel without first knowing something about what or whom you are rebelling against, then the truth of Romans 1:21 becomes much more striking – “...when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” Nimrod led a rebellion against God, which simply means that he knew enough about what God required to be fully aware that his actions were in opposition to God. That rebellion found its ultimate expression in the city and tower that he set out to build in defiance of Jehovah (Genesis 11:4), a city called Babel (Genesis 10:10; 11:9).

Within the Chaldean, or Babylonian, culture, “Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven”¹⁸ As we have seen, the Catholics and even some Evangelicals will dispute the pagan connection to *Easter* (most will simply ignore the fact); it is interesting to note that modern-day pagans readily accept this connection: “Easter has deep roots in the mythic past. Long before it was imported into the Christian tradition, the Spring festival honored the goddess Eostre or Eastre.”¹⁹

As we consider the use of the term *Easter* within the context of our cultural celebrations, if we’re honest, we will acknowledge that not everyone has in mind Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. Nevertheless, it is also evident that, as it is applied to the events surrounding the culmination of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the word rolls off the tongue of virtually everyone today – Christian and pagan alike; however, that does not make it correct. We would do well to take to heart the words of Jehovah through Jeremiah: “Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them” (Jeremiah 10:2). This was a warning to Israel that they were to be a separate people, and, likewise, it is a warning to us to guard against being taken in by the world’s ways.

This warning is reminiscent of the Lord’s instructions to Moses before the Israelites entered the Promised Land: “After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I *am* the LORD your God” (Leviticus 18:3-4). What is so obvious in the Lord’s instructions to Israel (at least it should be to us, for we see it repeated many times) is that they were not to take on the pagan customs of the people of their new land, nor were they to take with them the practices of the people whom they had left behind. God desired a holy people: “... if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6); yet as we ponder Israel’s history, we must realize that God’s desire never happened. We find a similar expression made by Peter declared: “...ye *are* a chosen generation [select race], a royal priesthood, an holy nation [people], a peculiar people [an acquired possession]; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).²⁰ Yet, what do we find today among those who claim to be God’s people? When they

¹⁷ K&D.

¹⁸ Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 101.

¹⁹ <http://www.witchology.com/contents/march/ostara.php> .

²⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

speak of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection, they refer to it by the name of a pagan goddess of fertility whom pagans celebrated at the time of the spring equinox. Surely Satan must laugh at the gullibility of today’s professing Christians; he has managed, while working through a corrupt branch of church history, to get Christians everywhere to refer to the highest demonstration of God’s love for mankind by the name of a pagan goddess. How could we? How dare we profane God’s righteous act of sacrifice to secure our redemption! Although we may be proud that we are not following “after the doings of the land of Canaan” (we are not following the pagan rituals of our society), we may well be guilty of bearing “the doings of the land of Egypt” (perpetuating the error of past days – pagan traditions that were “sanitized” by the Roman Catholic Church).



Constantine I

How did we fall into this trap of perversion? Once again, we need look no further than the budding Roman Catholic Church of the fourth century. In an effort to settle what had become a rather lively dispute as to when the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord should be remembered, the determination of when *Easter* was to be celebrated was made by the Council of Nicea in the year AD 325. “These Paschal controversies ... ended with the victory of the Roman and Alexandrian practice of keeping Easter ... on a Sunday, as the day of the resurrection of our Lord.”²¹ Although the specifics of the determination do not come out in any of the canons of the Council, they did appear in a circular from the Council and Emperor Constantine to the bishops of the various churches: “The feast of the resurrection was thenceforth required to be celebrated everywhere on a Sunday, and never on the day of the Jewish passover, but always after the fourteenth of Nisan, on the Sunday after the first vernal full moon.”²² What is interesting to note about the consensus of this Council and Constantine on this matter, is that it was to *never* fall on the day of the Jewish Passover, but they had no problem aligning it with the common godless (and goddess) celebrations. At the time of Constantine, there was a growing undercurrent of anti-Semitism that was often reflected in the decisions that were made – they could practice anything except that which gave the appearance of being remotely Jewish. Beyond comprehension, they shunned anything Jewish but had no difficulty embracing what was totally pagan – one more time, Satan could laugh at the spiritual efforts of self-righteous men. Unfortunately, this became the pattern that the Roman Catholic Church followed in a twisted effort to make “Christian” celebrations the practice of the majority of the common people – something that drew the favor of Emperor Constantine; the people were familiar with their pagan festivities, so the Roman Church leaders simply changed some of the names involved, and applied a thin veneer of “Christian” whitewash (God warned Israel against this very thing; Deuteronomy 12:29-31). With the passage of time, even sincere Evangelicals and Fundamentalists have retained the name, and faithfully trained the next generation to perpetuate it – an error that must be particularly loathsome to our holy God.

When Joshua reached the end of his life, he spoke words of encouragement and challenge to the leaders of Israel: “Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses ... that ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you;

²¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume III, p. 346.

²² Schaff, *History*, Vol. III, p.346. This still holds true today: for 2009, the Vernal Equinox was March 21, full moon on April 9 and *Easter Sunday*, April 12; the Jewish Passover, on the other hand, was on April 8.

neither make mention²³ **of the name of their gods** ... But cleave unto the LORD your God ...” (Joshua 23:6-8). In this he echoed Jehovah’s words through Moses: “...in all *things* that I have said unto you be circumspect [take heed, guard]: and make no mention²⁴ of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth” (Exodus 23:13). The Psalmist, likewise, understood the Lord’s requirement in this regard: “Their sorrows shall be multiplied *that* hasten *after* another *god*: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, **nor take up their names into my lips**” (Psalm 16:4). Is it a small thing that the name of the goddess of fertility slips unnoticed from the tongues of Christians today as they refer to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of the world? Paul asked this question: “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14) – the required answer is still, “None!”

The text of Scripture declares: “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). This is the Biblically-prescribed method for remembering the Lord.

Today there are elaborate dramatic presentations of the “passion play” all around the world (depicting the events surrounding Christ’s crucifixion), and many churches are sure to include a dramatic production of some aspect of the Lord’s suffering during the spring season. Perhaps the most well-known, large-scale production is Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*, which not only went to great lengths to dramatize the gore of the crucifixion, but also very closely followed the Roman Catholic tradition of the Stations of the Cross. The dramatic plays have become a tool used by Satan to draw everyone together in Ecumenical unity and cooperation; our local ministerial association has not been exempt from such doings – but why would they be? This is the whole point of coming together. The passion play concept became a part of the early church rituals in their “Good Friday” celebrations (again, this is something with a long-standing history). With the passage of time, the productions became increasingly worldly and corrupt, until they were banned entirely by the Roman Catholic Church leadership. Then, in the 19th century, there began a rejuvenation of the historic plays, and they have continued to grow in popularity.²⁵ However, this is not how the Lord arranged for us to commemorate His death; He has laid out very clearly how we are to remember Him, and it includes no dramatic recreations of what we think might have taken place at Calvary, or anywhere else; beyond that, one thing is absolutely certain – there is undeniably no call to celebrate Christ’s suffering under the name of a heathen goddess.

Good Friday & Easter Sunday vs. Truth

²³ The Hebrew word used is *zakar*, a different form of the word used in Exodus 20:8 correctly translated as “remember;” the implication is that we are not to cause to remember, or to recall, so as to mention the name of the false gods, BDB.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Wikipedia, “passion play.”

As we consider *Good Friday* (commonly thought, by Evangelicals, Fundamentalists and Liberals alike, to be the day of Christ's crucifixion), it is important that we base our understanding of the timing of events surrounding Jesus' death, burial and resurrection on reality, and not on what has been passed down to us. Today's calendar shows a day called *Good Friday* followed by a regular Saturday, and then *Easter Sunday*. Typically, the understanding is that Jesus died on Friday, and was raised to life on Sunday; this fits nicely with our calendar and the way that *Easter* is celebrated today (using the term with the full understanding of its pagan origins). To quote from Hank Hanegraaff, director of the Christian Research Institute and host of the *Bible Answer Man* radio program, "In Matthew 12:40 Jesus prophesies that He would be dead 'three days and three nights.' The fact of the matter is he was dead for only two nights and one full day."²⁶ He justifies this blatant contradiction of Jesus' own words by saying that the Jews counted any portion of a day as a whole day. However, Jesus' words to the Pharisees that Hanegraaff so casually dismisses, seem very clear: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). Why would Jesus, the eternal Word Who framed the first evening and morning (Genesis 1:5), say "three **days** and three **nights**" if He meant only one day and two nights? Specifically stating "three days and three nights" would rule out Jesus counting a portion of a day as the whole day; He is very specific about the number of days and nights that would be involved. Counting from Friday to Sunday will never permit the fulfillment of these words of Jesus, yet this is rationalized away, and the average Evangelical today, including the so-called "Bible Answer Man," carries on without giving the matter another thought. Even more surprising, it seems that even the very vocal Fundamentalists, who are critical of Evangelicals, have joined the mindless in "going along" with the crowd rather than seeking the truth, and then doing their part to make that truth known. It is way too late to stem the slide, but it's never too late to stand for the truth.

**Hank Hanegraaff**

In light of the terrible desecration of calling our Lord's death, burial and resurrection by the name of a pagan goddess, it is incumbent on us to give careful consideration to the timing of the events of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection so that we do not add thoughtless heresy to blasphemy. We have already seen Hanegraaff's careless acceptance of the Catholic tradition (for that's exactly what the "Good Friday-Easter Sunday" combination is), and we must be cautious that we do not fall into the same simplistic, non-thinking pattern. To begin our consideration, it is important that we hold in our minds that the Jewish method of keeping time is not the same as what we practice in our culture today. The Jewish day begins at about six o'clock in the evening, and is in keeping with the Genesis account of creation where God declared the "evening and the morning" to be the day (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). We need to keep this firmly in mind when viewing the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection, lest we arrive at conclusions that are based on an incorrect premise.

Leviticus 23:5 tells us that "in the fourteenth *day* of the first month at even *is* the Lord's passover." The first month in the Jewish calendar is called Abib or Nisan (the latter was primarily

²⁶ Hanegraaf, Hank, "Three Days and Three Nights," Statement CP1402.

http://www.equip.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=muI1LaMNJrE&b=4126497&content_id=%7B10478DBB-A024-42B1-9CAC-741D7B50DCB9%7D¬oc=1

used after the Babylonian captivity, and seems to be rooted in the Assyrian word *nisannu*, meaning “beginning”²⁷). This is in the spring of the year, and is the month in which the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt. For ease of looking at the details of the days surrounding the Passover as they unfolded at the time of Jesus’ death and resurrection, it is of value to plot them into a chart format so that they can be observed clearly and chronologically.²⁸

THE TIMING OF EVENTS SURROUNDING JESUS’ DEATH AND RESURRECTION		
Jewish Calendar	Event	Modern Day of Week
13 th Nisan	Peter and John prepared the room for the Passover meal (Luke 22:8). This is traditionally the time when the dwelling is searched to ensure that all leaven has been removed. ²⁹	Tuesday before 6:00PM
14 th Nisan	Jesus and His disciples ate the “Last Supper,” which was not the Passover meal. He desired to eat the Passover with His disciples, because He knew what lay ahead, but openly declared that He would absolutely not eat (a Greek construct that forms the strongest negative – <i>ou</i> and <i>me</i> with a subjunctive verb) of the Passover “until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:14-16; ³⁰ John 18:28)	Tuesday after 6:00PM
14 th Nisan (1 st Hour) ³¹	Matthew 27:1-2 indicates that the Jewish leaders delivered Jesus to Pilate “when morning was come,” which would have been the beginning of the business day, or about 6:00AM.	Wednesday 6:00AM

²⁷ Easton’s Revised Bible Dictionary, “Nisan,” Online Bible edition.

²⁸ This chart has been created through personal research, and later affirmed by the findings of Albert James Dager in “Facts and Fallacies of the Resurrection.” <http://www.mediaspotlight.org/>

²⁹ <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=528&letter=E&search=evening> “Eve of Holidays.”

³⁰ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-negation.htm.

³¹ The Jews at the time of the Lord’s ministry, used the Roman method of counting the hours of the day. The Romans would mark the passage of time by ringing a bell in the forum or public square: the first ringing was at the first hour (our 6:00 AM), and marked the beginning of the business day; the bell was rung again at our 9:00 AM to mark the third hour, at noon to mark the sixth hour and announce the lunch break; at 3:00 PM it was rung

14 th Nisan (3 rd to 6 th Hour)	Jesus is crucified. (Mark 15:25, John 19:14 ³²)	Wednesday 9:00AM – 12:00PM
14 th Nisan (6 th to 9 th Hour)	Darkness came over the land until the 9 th hour. (Matthew 27:45 ³³)	Wednesday 12:00 – 3:00PM
14 th Nisan (9 th Hour)	Jesus died as the fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice, at the prescribed time of the killing of the Passover lamb. ³⁴ (Matthew 27:46, 50)	Wednesday 3:00PM
14 th Nisan (11 th Hour or so)	Jesus was buried before the end of 14 th Nisan; sunset was the beginning of 15 th Nisan, a holy day, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Leviticus 23:5-7) ³⁵	Wednesday before 6:00PM
15 th Nisan Sunset to Sunrise – this is a holy day, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a day kept like unto the Sabbath	Jesus in the tomb – 1 st night	Wednesday 6:00PM to Thursday 6:00AM
15 th Nisan Sunrise to Sunset – still a holy day, like unto the Sabbath	Jesus in the tomb – 1 st day	Thursday 6:00AM to Thursday 6:00PM
16 th Nisan, Sunset to Sunrise, this was a day like unto any other day	Jesus in the tomb – 2 nd night	Thursday 6:00PM to Friday 6:00AM

to mark the ninth hour and the return to business, and then at 6:00 PM to mark the close of business.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canonical_Hours

³² John says it was “about the sixth hour” when Jesus was crucified, which indicates an approximation – literally, “nearly” (Strong’s Online). Crucifixion was not a quick process, and tracking time was not a precise science. With the Roman practice of ringing the bell to announce the beginning of each period of three hours, Mark (“it was the third hour”) could well have tied his reference to the beginning of the crucifixion, after the second-watch bell had rung (the third hour had been announced), and John more toward the end of the process, nearer to the noon bell.

³³ This period of darkness is referred to by the secular writers of the day. Phlegon, whose writings have disappeared, is quoted by other historians as stating: “...during the reign of Tiberius Caesar there was a **complete solar eclipse at full moon** from the sixth to the ninth hour; it is clear that this is the one. But what have eclipses to do with an earthquake, rocks breaking apart, resurrection of the dead, and a universal disturbance of this nature” (emphasis added) (http://www.textexcavation.com/phlegon_testimonium.html). Note: it is impossible to have a solar eclipse at full moon, nor does a solar eclipse last for three hours, which simply confirms that this darkness was a supernatural act of God as Jesus bore the sins of the world.

³⁴ The Passover lamb was slain after the evening sacrifice was performed, typically 3:00 in the afternoon ([Jewish Encyclopedia](#) “Passover Sacrifice,” http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view_page.jsp?artid=99&letter=P&pid=0). Josephus marks the time of the killing of the lambs as being from the ninth to the eleventh hour, *The War of the Jews*, 6.9.3 <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/josephus/war-6.htm>

³⁵ Here is the error that plagues modern calculations (which are really a capitulation to the Roman Catholic tradition). The day following Jesus’ crucifixion was a holy day, but not the seventh-day Sabbath.

16 th Nisan, Sunrise to Sunset. ³⁶	Jesus in the tomb – 2 nd day.	Friday 6:00AM to Friday 6:00PM
17 th Nisan, Sunset to Sunrise – this is a holy day, the regular Sabbath	Jesus in the tomb – 3 rd night	Friday 6:00PM to Saturday 6:00AM
17 th Nisan, Sunrise to Sunset – the regular Sabbath	Jesus in the tomb – 3 rd day	Saturday 6:00AM to Saturday 6:00PM
18 th Nisan Sunset – after the end of the Sabbath day	Jesus rose from the dead “early the first <i>day</i> of the week” (Mark 16:9 ³⁷)	Saturday after 6:00PM
18 th Nisan Sunrise	Women go to the tomb on the first <i>day</i> of the week (Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1).	Sunday 6:00AM
18 th Nisan	Jesus appears to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (7½ miles from Jerusalem) (Luke 24:13,29-33)	Sunday 3:00PM or so
18 th Nisan evening (toward sunset – the end of the day)	Jesus appears to the disciples locked away behind closed doors (Luke 24:36; John 20:19). Thomas was not with them (John 20:24).	Sunday 3:00 – 6:00PM
26 th Nisan, probably toward evening again.	Jesus appears again to the disciples locked away behind closed doors, this time Thomas was with them (John 20:26). ³⁸	Monday 3:00 – 6:00PM

Incredibly, by taking the time to read the Scriptures carefully, it is not difficult to determine that Jesus fulfilled His statement to the Scribes and Pharisees that He would be in the earth three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40). It is not necessary to rationalize Jesus’ words away, or to

³⁶ This is likely the day when the women purchased spices for the final burial processes (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55-56), since they arrived at the tomb to apply the spices at the rising of the sun on the first of the week (Mark 16:2), which would have been the time businesses were just opening up.

³⁷ Notice the difference between Mark 16:2 – the women arrived early “at the rising of the sun,” and Mark 16:9 where Jesus rose “early the first *day* of the week.” In the former case the *early* is qualified to indicate a specific application of the term; in the latter case it simply marks the beginning of the first day, which starts at 6:00 PM Saturday, within our time context.

³⁸ It is important to note the timing of this appearance by the Lord, and it is very interesting that the Spirit of God has included this detail that so many today seem to miss, or do not have eyes to see. Those who would seek to shift the Sabbath from the seventh day to Sunday (or call Sunday the “Christian Sabbath,” or whatever similar argument may be propounded), like to use the fact that, after His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples on Sunday (John 20:19), but what they will always choose to ignore is the fact that Jesus did exactly the same thing on a Monday (“eight days later”). This reveals their flawed argument and undermines one of their primary defenses for seeking to justify the change (and their total disregard for the seventh-day Sabbath).

manipulate the text, in order to see that His words were fulfilled with great precision. For the purposes of our study, it is important to recognize two truths that have failed to hit the radar of Evangelicals and Fundamentalists alike: 1) the Lord Jesus Christ did not die on “Good Friday,” but rather on Wednesday, the 14th of Nisan, as our Passover Sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7), and 2) He did not rise on “Easter Sunday,” but rather at the end of the Sabbath, our Saturday evening. What we have seen in the Scriptures is a clear discrediting of the modern concept of “Good Friday” and “Easter Sunday” – products of the zealous Roman Catholic leadership to “Christianize” the pagan celebrations already in common practice. Once again, we must remind ourselves: “Learn not the way of the heathen ...” (Jeremiah 10:2), and “... what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14); the former being a “thus saith the Lord” to which we would do well to give heed and the latter being a rhetorical question to which the answer is: “None!!”

Carnival or Mardi Gras

We might not typically relate what has become a time of wild partying as having any relationship at all with Jesus’ death and resurrection, and we would be Biblically correct. As I grew up, a carnival was always considered to be a travelling amusement show that would include rides, clowns, and cotton candy. However, historically, *Carnival* has referred to the general time before Lent, which is a season of fasting and self-denial leading up to *Easter*; today it is primarily the three days prior to Ash Wednesday (which signals the beginning of Lent), although there are still some regions that begin the celebrations as early as November. However, indications are that the celebration of life (*Carnival*) originally began December 26, and built to a climax just before Lent;³⁹ the common element to all forms of this celebration is that it ends on the day before Ash Wednesday. The term *Carnival* “comes from a Latin phrase meaning ‘farewell to the flesh,’”⁴⁰ (anticipating the dietary and fleshly denials of the Lent season). *Mardi Gras*, as it has come to be known in many regions, is from the French for “fat Tuesday,”⁴¹ and would give some indication of the excesses that take place prior to the fasting period of Lent that begins the next day, on Ash Wednesday.

The Carnival celebrations date back to the ancient Greek spring festivities in honor of Dionysius, the god of wine.⁴² The Romans adopted the celebration and merged it with their Bacchanalia (a spring festival in honor of Bacchus, their god of wine and revelry) and Saturnalia (their celebrations around the winter solstice). The Roman Catholic Church then adapted the pagan festival to lead up to their season of Lent, with the primary celebrations taking place just before Lent. In essence, it became a time of excess before a time of restraint. “It quickly evolved into a massive celebration of indulgences - one last gasp of music, food, alcohol, and sex before Lent – before the 40 days of personal reflection, abstinence, and fasting 40 days of purging sins, preceded by a week [or more] filled with virtually every known sin.”⁴³ Mardi Gras is not something we typically associate with the Roman Catholic Church, which may reflect the Church’s desire to distance itself from the debauchery that came out of this celebration. Nevertheless, the association

³⁹ http://www.venetia.it/s_carn_eng.htm

⁴⁰ <http://www.afropop.org/multi/feature/ID/33/>

⁴¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mardi_Gras

⁴² <http://www.afropop.org/multi/feature/ID/33/>

⁴³ Ibid.

with paganism is very evident, and the culmination of this festival lands on the doorstep of Lent, which we all relate to the Roman Catholic Church.

Ash Wednesday and Lent

Ash Wednesday is the first day of the season of Lent, a forty-day period of abstinence and reflection leading up to *Easter* (I freely use the term inasmuch as these all bear pagan roots). *Ash Wednesday* derives from the ancient practice of applying ashes to the head or forehead of an individual as a sign of humility before God. “Ash Wednesday is a somber day of reflection on



what needs to change in our lives if we are to be fully Christian.”⁴⁴ Within the Catholic tradition, it is a time to ponder those things that we need to do differently in order to be “fully Christian”; it is another aspect of the works-oriented salvation that characterizes Roman Catholicism.

What is interesting to notice is that this practice, which has traditionally been associated with the Roman Catholic Church, has been quickly moving into Evangelicalism. Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, an Evangelical university with Baptist roots, in 2009 held an Ash Wednesday service led by a local Catholic bishop.⁴⁵ In 2010, the service was co-officiated by Belmont’s own Vice-President of Spiritual Development; the Catholic Bishop of Nashville gave the message “followed by the marking of the ashes.”⁴⁶ There is a movement among Evangelicals toward the liturgical – we see this very specifically evident within the Emergent church, where there is a very pronounced shift back to ancient practices (where they originate is not a matter of concern to them), and the Catholic Church is a primary source for most of these traditions.

As for the keeping of the days of Lent, it seems to be cloaked in a shroud of mystery; claims are made that it was kept from the days of the Apostles but that is speculative – it was officially formalized with the Council of Nicaea (AD 325).⁴⁷ Within the culture of ancient Egypt, Osiris (god of the dead and resurrection to eternal life, because he was killed and restored to life)⁴⁸ was “supposed to be dead or absent forty days in each year” and during this time the people would mourn his loss;⁴⁹ such rites were common among the ancient nations during the times when the land was unproductive, and this period of mourning was followed by a joyous celebration at the vernal equinox – the beginning of springtime.⁵⁰ Although such pagan connections are generally not acknowledged by the Catholics (or Evangelicals, for that matter) the reality is that there is no Biblical record establishing this tradition, but we find many warnings against adopting pagan practices. Tammuz (the Osiris equivalent within the Babylonian tradition) was also mourned by

⁴⁴ <http://www.cresourcei.org/cylent.html#Ash>

⁴⁵ <http://www.tennessean.com/article/20090226/NEWS06/902260342> or <http://christian-apologetics-society.blogspot.com/2009/02/ash-wednesday-rituals.html>

⁴⁶ *Circle Magazine* (official publication of Belmont U.), Spring 2010, p. 29; http://issuu.com/office.communications/docs/circle_spring_2010/31

⁴⁷ <https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/193181.pdf>

⁴⁸ http://www.ctio.noao.edu/instruments/ir_instruments/osiris/osbio.html

⁴⁹ R.P. Knight, *An Inquiry into the Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology*, p. 93.

⁵⁰ John Landseer, *Sabaeen Researches*, p. 114.

his followers during that time of agricultural decline (winter), and mourning for him was an abomination to the Lord (Ezekiel 8:14-15). The Roman Catholic Church will from time-to-time, admit that there is a pagan connection to many of its special days: “The reasons for celebrating our major feasts when we do are many and varied. In general, however, it is true that many of them have at least an indirect connection with the pre-Christian [pagan] feasts celebrated about the same time of year — feasts centering around the harvest, the rebirth of the sun at the winter solstice (now Dec. 21, but Dec. 25 in the old Julian calendar), the renewal of nature in spring, and so on.”⁵¹ The calendar of the Catholic Church is filled with festivities and commemorations that have grown out of their practice of “sanitizing” pagan celebrations. “They [the Egyptians] claimed the merit of being the first who had consecrated each month and day to a particular deity; —a method of forming the calendar which has been imitated, and preserved to the present day; the Egyptian gods having yielded their places to those of another Pantheon [Roman paganism], which have in turn been supplanted by the saints of a Christian [Catholic] era”⁵² Very little has changed; paganism willingly changes its appearance to find acceptance in every era – Satan loves religion and so changing names for pagan deities is not a problem.

Within the Catholic tradition, the forty days of Lent are seen as a time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving in preparation for the celebration of the *Easter* season. This would be a time for the nominal Catholics to renew their fervency by going to confession and doing the prescribed penance – sacramental acts that bear soul-saving properties (within their tradition).

However, as already noted, Lent is no longer just for pagans and Roman Catholics; Evangelicals are not about to be left behind in anything that will promote Ecumenical unity. Hank Hanegraaff, director of the Christian Research Institute, considers Lent as “the 40 days during which we remember our sinfulness and which [*sic*] we repent of our sins and recognize afresh God's grace and forgiveness.”⁵³ It seems that we have conveniently forgotten the words of the Lord: “Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people *are* vain ...” (Jeremiah 10:2-3); it is impossible to take a pagan festival and convert it into a Christian celebration without showing total disregard for God's Word. “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3).

Although it might not be surprising for Hanegraaff to embrace Lent, since he will not speak against the errors of the Roman Catholic Church and has since converted to Eastern Orthodoxy, even within the broader Evangelical community he finds support. It is becoming increasingly popular among those who call themselves Evangelicals to incorporate some recognition of the pagan/Catholic Lent traditions. “Celebrating Easter wouldn't be the same without observing Lent first ... ‘Everything we do during Holy Week [Maundy (*washing of the feet*) Thursday and Good Friday services] has taken on a much deeper dimension because we've just gone through Lent. Then when Easter comes, it seems even more significant since we've prepared for it. We've spent lots of time thinking about what our faith really means” (square brackets included in the original;

⁵¹ <http://www.everlastingkingdom.info/article/87/>; from the book *The New Question Box – Catholic Life for the Nineties*, by Catholic priest John J. Dietzen.

⁵² Samuel Birch, *The Ancient Egyptians*, Volume II, p. 454-455.

⁵³ http://www.equip.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=mu11LaMNJrE&b=4197151&content_id=%7BF16EEEF0-4D16-4981-9910-0ED3E3B31655%7D¬oc=1

explanation of *Maundy* added).⁵⁴ *Maundy Thursday* is also known as Holy Thursday and is the day before the traditional *Good Friday*. This quote comes from the leader of a United Methodist church, a group that has historically never included Lent in their practices. Ted Olsen, writing for *Christianity Today*, made this observation: “For many evangelicals who see the early church as a model for how the church should be today, a revival of Lent may be the next logical step.”⁵⁵ The *early church* referred to is the developing Roman Catholic Church, and the step into Lent might indeed be logical (if you’re looking at the Catholic Church), but it is definitely not Biblical.

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has reemphasized the baptismal link to the meaning of the season of Lent. It is used as a time of preparation for baptism, or a renewal of the commitments of baptism. They see Lent practices as coming from “three merging sources:”⁵⁶

The first was the ancient paschal fast that began as a two-day observance before Easter but was gradually lengthened to 40 days [here is a not-so-subtle hearkening back to ancient Egyptian and Babylonian traditions]. The second was the catechumenate [“a process of faith formation and discipling that began in the early centuries of the Christian Church”⁵⁷] as a process of preparation for Baptism, including an intense period of preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation to be celebrated at Easter. The third was the Order of Penitents, which was modeled on the catechumenate and sought a second conversion for those who had fallen back into serious sin after Baptism [in direct contradiction to Hebrews 6:4-6]. As the catechumens (candidates for Baptism) entered their final period of preparation for Baptism, the penitents and the rest of the community accompanied them on their journey and prepared to renew their baptismal vows at Easter.⁵⁸

You’ll notice that none of those “merging sources” is openly acknowledged as having an ancient heritage; they have found “spiritual” sources for their tradition to dupe their members into following their lead. Yet a very brief examination of the liturgy of the Stations of the Cross (commonly practiced during Lent, particularly as the time draws closer to *Easter*) reveals the paganism that has been included by the Catholic Church. Before each *station* the opening accepted words are: “We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You. Because, by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world”; then at the end of the full recitation, it is also customary to repeat: “Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.”⁵⁹

The cross was not *holy* (this reveals the Catholic obsession with relics of worship); it was a common Roman cross used to crucify those who had been condemned to death. As we reflect on the sacrifice that Jesus made, where does “hail Mary” come into the picture? It can only come through the Catholic adoption of pagan traditions and applying a veneer of Christianity – making Mary into someone whom she never claimed to be and in contravention of Scripture. In 1954, Pope Pius XII officially declared Mary to be the Queen of Heaven.⁶⁰ We read of a “queen of heaven” in

⁵⁴ <http://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/evangelicals-remember-lent-1187468.html?p=2>

⁵⁵ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/news/2004/lent.html>

⁵⁶ <http://www.catholic.org/clife/lent/faq.php>

⁵⁷ <http://www.catechumenate.org/main.cfm?sid=13>

⁵⁸ <http://www.catholic.org/clife/lent/faq.php>

⁵⁹ <https://mycatholic.life/catholic-prayers/stations-of-the-cross/>

⁶⁰ <http://www.aloha.net/~mikesch/sunburst.htm>

Scripture, but it has no reference at all to Mary, the mother of Jesus, nor to anything that is pleasing to the Lord. Jeremiah spoke against those of Judah who had escaped to Egypt, yet who persisted in their commitment to the *queen of heaven*, and we read of the Lord’s promise to decimate them once again (Jeremiah 44:24-28). Several of the more recent popes have been very vocal concerning their wholehearted commitment to Mary, the Queen of Heaven: “in 1942, Pope Pius XII consecrated the whole Church and the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary”;⁶¹ Pope John Paul II claimed the words of a dead Catholic as his very own: “I belong entirely to you, and all that I have is yours. I take you for my all. O Mary, give me your heart”;⁶² most recently, “Pope Francis formally entrusted the world to Mary before a congregation of more than 100,000 in St Peter’s Square on Sunday [October 13, 2013].”⁶³ There can be no denying that the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church is wholly committed to the exaltation of the queen of heaven; what is most dismaying is to see Evangelicals being hooked by the experience of liturgy, and being drawn into Catholic heresy.

As already noted, during the latter part of the Lent season, it is common for Roman Catholics to practice the Stations of the Cross, something that is said to have begun with Francis of Assisi (late twelfth or early thirteenth century).⁶⁴ The focus of this practice is a reflection upon the sufferings of Christ, specifically His last twelve hours leading up to His burial. During the Middle Ages, going through the Stations of the Cross was considered to be an indulgence – a means of realizing a partial remission of one’s sins. Like so many other works within the Roman Catholic tradition, this was seen as a means of obtaining some “saving grace.” In our day of Ecumenism, even though this practice is generally ascribed to the Roman Catholic faith, it is no longer exclusively a Catholic event. Particularly since the movie, *The Passion of the Christ* (which closely follows the Stations of the Cross, and was heavily supported by Evangelicals), hit the theatres, there has been a surge of Evangelical openness to many Catholic traditions, and the Stations of the Cross is one of them. A Mennonite friend of ours spoke of attending the Stations of the Cross, and finding them of great spiritual blessing; the barriers between the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church and professing Christians are rapidly disappearing (no, the Catholics are not becoming Christians, but the professing Christians are becoming apostate or increasingly pagan, as the case may be). There are traditionally fourteen Stations:

STATIONS OF THE CROSS	
<u>Catholic Version</u>	<u>“Sanitized” Protestant Version</u>
1. Christ condemned to death;*	1. Jesus Prays Alone
2. The cross is laid upon Him;*	2. Jesus is Arrested
3. His first fall;	3. The Sanhedrin Tries Jesus
4. He meets His Blessed Mother;	4. Pilate Tries Jesus
5. Simon of Cyrene is made to bear the cross;*	5. Pilate Condemns Jesus to Die
6. Christ's face is wiped by Veronica;	6. Jesus Wears the Crown of Thorns

⁶¹ http://www.sticna.com/consecration_to_the_Hearts_of_Jesus_and_Mary.html

⁶² http://catholicism.about.com/od/popes/ss/Pope-Benedict-Homily-At-Beatification-Of-Pope-John-Paul-II_7.htm

⁶³ <http://www.catholicerald.co.uk/news/2013/10/14/in-front-of-fatima-statue-pope-francis-entrusts-the-world-to-mary/>

⁶⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stations_of_the_Cross

7. His second fall;	7. Jesus Carries His Cross
8. He meets the women of Jerusalem;*	8. Simon Helps Carry the Cross
9. His third fall;	9. Jesus Speaks to the Women
10. He is stripped of His garments;*	10. Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross
11. His crucifixion;*	11. Criminals Speak to Jesus
12. His death on the cross;*	12. Jesus Cares for His Mother
13. His body is taken down from the cross;	13. Jesus Dies on the Cross
14. Laid in the tomb.	14. Jesus is Laid in the Tomb
*Sometimes Protestants use these seven Stations, plus “Jesus Cares for His Mother” which is inserted before His death, Station number 12. ⁶⁵	



Clearly, the Stations of the Cross are derived from Catholic traditions that are a mixture of pagan and sacred – something that Paul would describe as being *anathema* and simply pagan. The traditions of Lent and Ash Wednesday have no place within the life of anyone who desires to live faithfully for the Lord.

Easter Eggs

The ancient Babylonians regarded the egg as sacred. Their mythology includes the account of a large egg dropping from heaven into the Euphrates River, the fish then roll it to shore, and doves settle on it to hatch it. From that egg “the Goddess Astarte (*Easter*), was hatched.”⁶⁶ Astarte, or *Easter*, is the goddess of fertility, and so the egg became a symbol of the goddess and fertility. Within pagan traditions, the egg bears great significance: “the golden orb of its yolk represents the Sun God, its white shell is seen as the White Goddess, and the whole is a symbol of rebirth.”⁶⁷ The ancient Persians (Babylonians) would exchange eggs in the spring of the year, and the Romans would offer red-painted eggs to their deities at the New Year. Despite this strong pagan history, it is remarkable how the egg has fit into “Christian” traditions. One example (among many) of justification for the tradition is this:

⁶⁵ <http://www.crivoice.org/stations.html>

⁶⁶ <http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-t020.html>

⁶⁷ <http://crystalforest3.homestead.com/Ostarahistory.html>

Simon [of Cyrene] was a farmer. He had come into Jerusalem that day to sell his produce to city folk who were preparing the Passover feast to be eaten that evening. Simon had eggs to sell, something that everyone would need for the Seder table. When the soldiers forced him to carry the cross of Jesus, Simon had no choice but to leave his basket of eggs behind. Remarkably, when he returned for his basket later in the day, it was still there, and not an egg was missing. But, even more remarkably, the eggs were no longer white, but were brightly colored. Christians continue to color eggs in memory of the first man to take up the cross of Jesus.⁶⁸

This is one of many traditions that has been assigned to the colored eggs during the *Easter* season.

Within the Eastern Orthodox traditions, the eggs are typically blood-red in color, and are associated with Mary Magdalene. As noted, going back to Babylonian times, the egg was a symbol of rebirth, and for the Orthodox it came to represent Christ. Therefore, Mary is usually portrayed holding a red egg, as a symbol of Christ and His sacrifice. Again, there are stories about what brought the red egg and Mary Magdalene together. The most common is that she met the Roman emperor and greeted him with: “Christ has risen.” The emperor’s response was that Christ could no more have risen from the dead than the egg in his hand could turn red – at which point it turned red.⁶⁹ We might well be familiar with the traditional *Easter* greeting “Christ is risen,” to which the response is: “He is risen indeed.” This is an Eastern Orthodox tradition and included with this greeting/response is the custom of exchanging a red egg, called the Paschal egg.⁷⁰



Mary Magdalene

All of these traditions are extra-Biblical – they are derived outside of Scripture. All bear the marks of Catholic and Orthodox justification for incorporating paganism into their calendar of festivities – they have absolutely no support from Scripture.

A Catholic website declares: “...Christians ‘baptized’ the egg as a symbol of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection.”⁷¹ Even within Catholicism there is open acknowledgement of the pagan roots of the egg as a symbol of new life, yet they have aligned themselves with this pagan tradition in contradiction of Scripture. “Learn not the way of the heathen,” are the words of the Lord (Jeremiah 10:2), but man, once again, thinks that he has a better idea; unfortunately, Evangelicals seem oblivious to the pagan history that surrounds the *Easter egg*, and are not interested in learning of it.

At the time of this writing, on the website of Christianbook.com, you can purchase what are called “Resurrection Eggs.” For only \$12.99 (US) you get a dozen colored “eggs” in a carton, with the catchy caption: “Crack open the glorious story of Jesus’ resurrection!”⁷² What is even more disgusting than seeing such merchandise being marketed to “Christians,” is the fact that Christians will buy these for their children, and think that they are being spiritual for doing so. The question

⁶⁸ <http://fullhomelydivinity.org/eggs.htm>

⁶⁹ <http://psalterstudies.wordpress.com/category/mary-magdalene/>

⁷⁰ http://www.stjohndc.org/Russian/feasts/e_pascha_greeting07.htm

⁷¹ <http://www.cemeteries.org/aboutus0035.asp>

⁷² <http://www.christianbook.com/>, 2011 search, “Resurrection Eggs.”

remains: "...what communion hath light with darkness" (2 Corinthians 6:14)? Yet Evangelicals continue to embrace this heathenism, and will look skeptically at you if you question them about it. For example, the Coast Hills Community Church (holding tenaciously to the Mennonite Brethren confession of faith) proclaims: "Our beliefs are based solely on the Bible, which is uniquely God-inspired and is the final authority on all matters pertaining to life and faith."⁷³ As wonderful as that might sound, and as Biblical as their statement of faith might appear, on "Good Friday, March 29 [2013]" they held their "7th Annual Easter Egg Hunt & Toonie Pancake Breakfast," which included such fun activities as the announced "Easter Egg Hunt" and "Easter Egg Decorating."⁷⁴ There is no end to man's ability to embrace both paganism and the Bible, and yet fail to truly recognize what they have done.

Easter Rabbit

The rabbit has long been associated with spring as a symbol of new life, its proclivity to multiply exemplifies fertility, which pagan cultures seemed to hold in high regard. Human fertility prevented them from dying out as a people, and agricultural fertility ensured their prosperity and health. The rabbit was also the symbol for the goddess Eastre among the Anglo-Saxons,⁷⁵ and, in many respects, it became merged with the pagan tradition of the spring egg exchange. Most depictions of the pagan goddess will include both the rabbit and the egg, but most assuredly the rabbit will be present (see illustration on page 2). The story goes that the goddess turned her pet bird into a rabbit to entertain some children, and that the rabbit promptly laid some colored eggs, which the goddess then gave to the children.⁷⁶ This is a totally pagan custom that Christians today will speak of as a soft and fuzzy story for their children.

Hot Cross Buns

The tradition of Hot Cross Buns at *Easter* is not something new; like many of our cultural holiday customs, it finds its origins in paganism. The ancient Egyptians and Saxons offered specially baked buns to their various goddesses, and the Aztecs and Incas considered such to be the food of the gods.⁷⁷ The Lord spoke to Jeremiah of this: "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead *their* dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger" (Jeremiah 7:18); the children of Israel were incorporating heathen practices into their way of life, and arousing the Lord's anger against them. As Christianity (or, more specifically, Roman Catholicism) spread into the regions where these practices were observed, in typical fashion it became easier to fine-tune paganism to give it a "Christian" look than to stand against it. The cross on top of the bun, which once represented the four phases of the moon, suddenly gained the "spiritual" significance of representing the cross of Christ.



⁷³ <http://www.coasthillschurch.com/about/beliefs>

⁷⁴ <http://www.coasthillschurch.com/events/easter-egg-hunt>

⁷⁵ <http://wilstar.com/holidays/easter.htm>

⁷⁶ <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Easter:Bunny.html>

⁷⁷ http://www.dianasdesserts.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/recipes_recipeListing/filter/dianas/recipeID/252/Recipe.cfm

Within the early Catholic traditions, the buns were made from the same dough as the bread that was used at Mass, and so it came to represent the body of Jesus.⁷⁸ At one time, tradition held that these buns were the only food to be consumed on *Good Friday* (another Catholic tradition), and miraculous healings are accredited to them. The powder from hot cross buns was used to treat all kinds of illnesses, and the buns could be hung from the ceiling to provide protection throughout the coming year.⁷⁹

There is nothing inherently wrong with the recipe used to make the sweet bread, but the addition of the cross on top and the seasonal use of the recipe places it squarely within the realm of a pagan tradition. The Lord's words to Jeremiah have not changed: "Learn not the way of the heathen ..." (Jeremiah 10:2). I had one Christian lady assure me quite vigorously that she would not give up her hot cross buns; make the buns, if you like sweet bread, but don't do it after the custom of the religiously heathen.

Easter Ham

As is so often the case with traditions, there are many branches to the custom of an *Easter ham*, all of them flowing out of paganism.

One tradition reaches back to Babylonian times: Ishtar gave birth to Tammuz who, it is said, was killed by being gored by a wild boar (and later raised from the dead). On the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox, a celebration was made and a pig was the main course.⁸⁰ This poetic justice (eating the killer) took place on what we would recognize as being the day now called *Easter Sunday*.

Another source affirms that the pig was a popular source of food among the ancient peoples of Europe, and it was a staple during their spring festivals. It was felt that the consumption of ham would bring them good fortune.⁸¹ Since the Europeans mostly cured their meat to last them through the long winter season, it is claimed that their spring festival would include the consumption of all the remaining cured meat, since spring brought the availability of fresh meat once again.⁸²

If we consider the Roman Catholic pattern of absorbing pagan customs and its early anti-Semitic bent, it can be easily understood how ham has become a tradition within many households. Early on, believers held the Jews partly responsible for the death of Jesus, and since the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah, Justin Martyr (AD c. 100 - 165) began to propagate the idea that the church had replaced Israel in the eyes of God.⁸³ It wasn't long before anything Jewish was anathema, and the early roots of the Roman Catholic Church embraced this anti-Semitic attitude; therefore, the consumption of the unclean pig would be viewed as a statement against Judaism. It was not until the latter twentieth-century that the Roman Catholic Church began to abandon its anti-Semitism in favor of an Ecumenical tolerance of all religions, including Judaism.

⁷⁸ http://www.creativeyouthideas.com/blog/childrens-sermon/the_history_of_hot_cross_buns_and_good_friday.html

⁷⁹ http://www.dianasdesserts.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/recipes_recipeListing/filter/dianas/recipeID/252/Recipe.cfm

⁸⁰ <http://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/origin-of-easter-ham-faq.htm>

⁸¹ <http://www.slashfood.com/2010/04/01/history-of-easter-food/>

⁸² http://www.goddessgift.com/Pandora's_Box/Easter-history.htm

⁸³ http://www.religioustolerance.org/vat_hol11.htm

Summary

Clearly the *Easter* season is packed with pagan customs that are touted as being longstanding Christian traditions. The fact that it falls within close proximity to the Jewish Passover only serves to provide a sense of legitimacy in the minds of most Christians. A recent writer in *Christianity Today* plainly said: “Easter is the Christian Passover festival.”⁸⁴ If we are not concerned about truth and the Lord’s declaration that we are not to learn the ways of the heathen (Jeremiah 10:2), and if we are prepared to ignore Paul’s charge to the Corinthians to separate from everything pagan (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1), then we might be of a persuasion to accept *Easter*. However, if we have a desire to walk with the Lord in holiness, then we must weigh what we do, not in the light of modern-day traditions but in the light of Scripture and historical evidence. As we do this, we can only come to the conclusion that *Easter* is nothing but a sham – gross paganism cloaked with a light dusting of Christian terminology.

Jesus very clearly told us how we are to remember His death, burial and resurrection – the same way that we are to remember His entire life and ministry on earth. Paul laid out very clear instructions regarding the Lord’s Supper: “That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: **this do in remembrance of me**. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: **this do ye**, as oft as ye drink *it*, **in remembrance of me**” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). Here, in plain and simple terms, is how we are to remember the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no place for colored eggs, hot cross buns, ham or pageantry of any sort – we are to simply partake of the bread and the cup, and do so in remembrance of what Jesus accomplished for us, and we are to continue to do this until He returns. The challenge is that we are to be those who hearken to the voice of the Lord and turn away from the ways of the heathen.

⁸⁴ http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/bytopic/holidays/easter_borrowedholiday.html