

# What you Should Know About EASTER

Because of the human instinct to follow the crowd, many of us do what is wrong, often thinking that what we are doing is right. The human mind reasons that the majority must be right. Besides it is always easier to follow the crowd than to take a stand when others are in error.

Have you ever noticed how people don't want to differ from those around them? For example, would you wear clothing styles from the 1930's? Wouldn't people look at you rather strangely if you started wearing clothing that was decades out of fashion? Human nature makes us feel uneasy to be considerably different from everyone else.

But because the crowd is of a certain opinion that does not make their opinion necessarily correct. Recall that at the trial of our Savior the crowds chanted, "Kill him! Kill him!" And they sentenced to death the most righteous man on earth.

Have you ever thought that some of what you were taught from childhood could possibly be very wrong? Fantasies about Santa Claus and the Easter bunny come to be real in the minds of children because these notions are encouraged year after year. When the truth is finally revealed, it sometimes hurts. The Bible clearly says, "Thou shalt not lie." Why, then, do we lie to our children?

Let's take a close look at our present day Easter celebration in light of the Bible and history.

## Easter Customs of Western Civilization

It is the custom of most of western civilization to observe Lent, Holy Week, Good Friday and to attend church on Easter Sunday morning. Easter has been accepted without question as one of the most sacred of Christian holidays.

But where did our Easter customs originate? Just what do colored eggs, rabbits, roasted ham and hot cross buns have to do with the resurrection of our Savior? Why is this spring festival called Easter?

It is known from history that the apostles and early followers of the Messiah did not observe a holiday called Easter. The word "Easter" is nowhere found in any ancient Greek or Aramaic manuscripts of the New Testament.

The word Easter is used, however, in Acts 12:4 of some English translations of the Bible. However, Bible scholars openly admit that it is a mistranslation of the Greek word *pascha*, which comes from the Hebrew word for Passover. Greek texts and Bible concordances bear out this fact

Albert Barnes acknowledges that "Easter" is a mistranslation in the King James Version. In his well-known Bible commentary, *Barnes' Notes*, he says, "There was never a more absurd or unhappy translation than this. The original is simply 'after the Passover.' The word Easter now denotes the festival observed by many Christian churches in honor of the resurrection of the Savior. But the original has no reference to that, nor is there the slightest evidence that any such festival was observed at the time when this book was written. The translation is not only unhappy as it does not convey at all the meaning of the original, but it also may contribute to foster an opinion that such a festival was observed in the time of the apostles."

## Origin of the Word Easter

Encyclopedias and dictionaries reveal that the word Easter is of Anglo-Saxon origin. It can readily be traced to Eostre, the goddess of spring. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* verifies this in its article, "Easter": "The English word comes from the Aseastre or Estera, a Teutonic goddess of whom sacrifice was offered in April. So the name was transferred to the paschal (Passover) feast. The word does not properly occur in Scripture, although the Authorized Version has it in Acts 12:4 where it stands for Passover, as it is rightly rendered in the Revised Version. There is no trace of Easter celebration in the New Testament."

In Pfeiffer's *Old Testament History*, we find that the goddess Easter, rose to prominence in Assyria and Babylon. "During Sumerian times Anu was the supreme god, with his abode in heaven. Along with his daughter, Ishtar, he was worshipped in Uruk at the temple E-anna ("the house of Anu")."

Until Marduk of Babylon attained the primacy at the beginning of the Old Babylonian period, Anu was acknowledged as the greatest of the gods. In actual worship, however, his daughter Ishtar became more popular than her father.

"The concepts of love and warfare are both represented in Ishtar (Sumerian Inanna). At one time or another Ishtar was linked with the "great god" of almost every Mesopotamian city. Her presence was thought to guarantee fertility and, in her absence the land, humans and animals could not reproduce. Ishtar served the same function in Mesopotamia that Venus served in Greece." (pp. 344-346).

In the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, we find under "Easter": "Easter is a word of Saxon origin and imports a goddess of the Saxons, or rather, of the East, Estera, in honor of whom sacrifices being annually offered about the Passover time of the year (spring), the name became attached by association of ideas to the Christian festival of the resurrection, which happened at the time of the Passover.... So the present German word for Easter, Ostern, is referred to the same goddess, Estera or Ostera."

The *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1909 edition states: "A great many pagan customs, celebrating the return of spring, gravitated to Easter. The egg is the emblem of the germinating life of early spring.... The rabbit is a pagan symbol and has always been an emblem of fertility."

*Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, 1949 ed., vol. 1, p. 335, states: "Children roll pascha eggs in England. Everywhere they hunt the many-colored Easter eggs, brought by the Easter rabbit. This is not mere child's play, but the vestige of a fertility rite, the eggs and the rabbit both symbolizing fertility. Furthermore, the rabbit was the escort of the Germanic Goddess Ostara who gave the name to the festival by way of the German Ostern."

The *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* states under "Easter": "Originally the spring festival in honor of the Teutonic goddess of light and spring known in Anglo-Saxon as Eostre. As early as the 8th century the name was transferred by the Anglo-Saxons to the Christian festival designed to celebrate the resurrection of Messiah. In A.V. (Authorized Version) it occurs once (Acts 12:4), but is a mistranslation."

*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 8, p. 828 reads: "There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers. The sanctity of special times was an idea absent from the minds of the first [followers of

the Messiah].

The ecclesiastical historian Socrates (Hist. Eccl., v. 22) states, with perfect truth, that neither our Savior nor His apostles enjoined the keeping of this or any other festival...and he attributes the observance of Easter by the church to the perpetuation of an old usage, 'just as many other customs have been established.'"

*Barnes' Notes* also states that Easter is not of biblical origin: "The word Easter is of Saxon origin, and is supposed to be derived from Eostra, the goddess of love, or the Venus of the North in honor of whom a festival was celebrated by our pagan ancestors in the month of April. As this festival coincided with Passover of the Jews, and with the feast observed by Christians in honor of the resurrection of the Messiah, the name came to be used to denote the latter."

*Webster's New World Dictionary* states under the word "Easter": "Orig., name of pagan vernal festival almost coincident in date with paschal festival of the church; *Eastre*, dawn goddess; see EAST." Originally, Easter was the name of the spring goddess of vegetation or fertility.

Interestingly, *Webster's New World Dictionary* states under the word "East": "to shine, dawn, whence L. *aurora*, dawn." Now, the connection between the worship of this goddess of spring and the traditional Easter sunrise services emerges. *The Oxford English Dictionary* says under the heading "Easter" that this deity "was originally the dawn-goddess."

## **Bible Condemns Easter**

Easter, as we know it, has no basis in the New Testament nor even in the Bible. This spring festival came from the worship of the dawn goddess believed to be responsible for fertility. Her name in the Hebrew language was Ashtaroth. She was also called the "Queen of Heaven."

Her worship is mentioned in the Bible in Jeremiah 7:17-20. In this passage, our Heavenly Father warns, "See not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? 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. Do they provoke me to anger? says Yahweh: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces? Therefore, thus says Yahweh Elohim; behold, My anger and My fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched."

Alexander Hislop in his well-known book, *The Two Babylons*, clearly shows that the "Queen of Heaven" mentioned in the above passage from the Bible was indeed the goddess Easter. He frankly states, "Easter bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the 'queen of heaven,' whose name, as pronounced by the people of Nineveh, was evidently identical with that now in common use in this country."

## **Hot Cross Buns**

The "cakes" in the above passage from Jeremiah 7:17-20 are the hot cross buns which were used in this idolatrous worship. The word "cake" used in this passage is translated from the Hebrew word "kavvan," and literally means "bun." This word is used here and in Jeremiah 44:19, where it again is used for the hot cross buns offered to the queen of heaven.

These hot cross buns that Jeremiah spoke of are the same kind baked by those who celebrate Easter today. The cross with which they are marked is used as the symbol for woman. In hiero-

glyphics that cross means living or life. Worship of life and fertility led to including rabbits in the rite of Easter because of their fruitful reproduction. The Easter egg, similarly, represented life in the ancient mystery religions.

## Easter Ham

In Egypt, those who were too poor to offer a pig at this festival baked sacrificial cakes and ate them instead. (*The Golden Bough*, ch. 3, p. 53).

The fact that the pig was the sacrificial animal accounts for why baked ham is still eaten during this festival today.

The pig was sacred to the goddess Demeter. Demeter is just another name for Astarte or Easter. Fraser says about Demeter--or Easter--in *The Golden Bough*, "In art she was represented carrying or accompanied by a pig; and the pig was regularly sacrificed in her mysteries, the reason assigned being that the pig injures the corn and is therefore an enemy of the goddess. But after an animal has been conceived as a god or a god as an animal, it sometimes happens, as we have seen, that the god sloughs off his animal form and becomes purely anthropomorphic; and that then the animal, which at first had been slain in the character of the god, comes to be regarded as a victim offered to the god on the ground of its hostility to the deity; in short, that the god is sacrificed to himself on the ground that he is his own enemy. This happened to Dionysus, and it may have happened to Demeter also. And in fact the rites of one of her festivals, the Thesmophoria, bear out the view that originally the pig was an embodiment of the corn-goddess herself... The scholiast tells us that it was customary at the Thesmophoria to throw pigs, cakes of dough, and branches of pine trees into the chasms of Demeter and Proserpine," Fraser continues (p. 48), "...In Hessen and Meiningen the flesh of pigs is eaten on Ash Wednesday or Candlemas, and the bones are kept till sowing time, when they are put into the field sown or mixed with the seed in the bag; so, lastly, the corn from the last sheaf is kept till Christmas, made into the Yule Board, and afterwards broken and mixed with the seed-corn at sowing in spring. Thus, to put it generally, the corn-spirit is killed in animal form in autumn; part of his flesh is eaten as a sacrament by his worshipers; and part of it is kept till next sowing-time or harvest as a pledge and security for the continuance or renewal of the corn-spirit's energies."

In so doing, these worshipers used the pig as a sacrament to the corn spirit, while part was saved to renew the spirit's energies at spring planting.

What does our Heavenly Father think of this practice? "A people that provokes Me to anger continually to My face; that sacrifices in gardens, and burns incense upon altars of brick; which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels; Which day, Stand by yourself, come not near to me; for I am holier than you. These are a smoke in My nose, a fire that burns all the day," Isaiah 65:3-5.

The practice is also found in Isaiah 66:17, "They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, says the Eternal Yahweh."

## Easter Plants and Flowers

The gardens mentioned above are likely the gardens of Adonis (Hebrew Tammuz). Fraser says, "These gardens of Adonis are most naturally interpreted as representatives of Adonis or

manifestations of his power; they represented him, true to his original nature, in vegetable form," *The Golden Bough*, p. 282.

These gardens of Adonis were surprisingly carried over to our present-day Easter celebration in the form of potted Easter plants. *The Golden Bough*, pp. 295-296, states, "The last example of the gardens of Adonis which I shall cite is the following. At the approach of Easter, Sicilian women sow wheat, lentils and canary-seed in plates, which are kept in the dark and watered every two days. The plants soon shoot up; the stalks are tied together with red ribbons, and the plates containing them are placed on the sepulchres which, with effigies of the dead Christ, are made up in Roman Catholic and Greek churches on Good Friday, just as the gardens of Adonis were placed on the grave of the dead Adonis. The whole custom--sepulchres as well as plates of sprouting grain--is probably nothing but a continuation, under a different name, of the Adonis worship."

In this country at Easter, stores stock up for a big rush on potted plants. King Solomon was correct when he said, "There is nothing new under the sun." The worship of Adonis and Astarte continues, even by way of their very names. Interestingly, the word Adonis literally means the "lord" in English. This fact is documented in *The Golden Bough*, "The worship of Adonis was practised by the Semitic peoples of Syria, from whom it was borrowed by the Greeks as early at least as the fifth century B.C.E. The name Adonis is the Phoenician Adon, 'lord.' He was said to have been a fair youth, beloved by Aphrodite (the Semitic Astarte), but was killed by a boar in his youthful prime. His death was annually lamented with a bitter wailing, chiefly by women; images of him, dressed to resemble corpses were carried out as to burial.... His revival was celebrated on the following day.... At Alexandria images of Adonis and Aphrodite were displayed on two couches; beside them were set ripe fruits of all kinds, cakes, plants growing in flower pots, and green bowers twined with anise.... At Byblus the death of Adonis was annually mourned with weeping, wailing, and beating of the breast; but next day he was believed to come to life again and ascend up to heaven in the presence of his worshipers. This celebration appears to have taken place in spring...."

Interestingly, a Catholic historian writing of the Easter celebrations in Rome wrote a strikingly similar account of these processions.

"With Holy Thursday our miseries began. On this disastrous day we went before nine to the Sistine chapel...and beheld a procession led by the inferior orders of clergy, followed up by the Cardinals, in superb dresses, bearing long wax tapers in their hands, and ending with the pope himself, who walked beneath a crimson canopy, with his head uncovered, bearing the Host in a box; and this being, as you know, the real flesh and blood of Christ, was carried from the Sistine chapel through the intermediate hall to the Paullina chapel, where it was deposited in the sepulchre prepared to receive it beneath the altar.... It remains there till...He is supposed to rise from the grave amidst the firing of cannon, and blowing of trumpets, and jingling of bells." *Rome in the 19th Century*, vol. III, pp. 144-145.

As you can see from the above quotes, the annual Easter parades are nothing but a carryover from the ancient processions of the worship of Adonis. Sadly, this pagan custom has invaded the worship of the New Testament faith, as have other Easter customs.

## **Easter Sunrise Services**

Throughout history man has been highly fascinated with the heavenly bodies, especially the sun. Our Creator, however, has strictly forbidden the worship of them in His Word. Modern Christianity wishes to ignore those warnings. Each Easter, before the rising of the sun, groups

of worshipers gather on hilltops to hold what is called Easter sunrise services. We find Ezekiel 8:16 calling this practice an abomination.

"And He brought me into the inner court of Yahweh's house, and behold, at the door of the temple of Yahweh, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of Yahweh, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east. Then He said unto me, 'Have you seen this, O son of Man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the *abominations* which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke Me to anger: lo, they put the branch [phallic symbol, Companion Bible] to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in Mine ears with a, loud voice yet will I not hear them.'"

This worship is as much an abomination to the Eternal Yahweh today as it was then. For our Heavenly Father said, "I am Yahweh the Eternal, I change not," Malachi 3:6. It is evident that our Heavenly Father's views haven't changed since the time the prophet Ezekiel first wrote of this degenerate form of worship.

These passages illustrate how pagan customs infiltrated the worship of our Heavenly Father, going so far as to influence man's mind, Ezekiel 8:12.

The very ministry of Yahweh was engaged in these pagan rites, for the 25 men standing between the porch and the altar were ministering priests (Joel 1:13 and 2:17). This Scripture should be a warning for those today who would participate in Easter sunrise services, for these services are simply a modern carryover of what was being practiced in ancient Israel.

The Bible openly condemns the Easter sunrise service. But not a word of condemnation ever is spoken by those who observe it, though they profess to believe in the Bible. Why do so many people blindly continue to follow the crowd down the road of perdition? It is not our Heavenly Father's will that anyone should perish, but that all should have everlasting life through His Son. However, He has given us all free choice, as He did Adam and Eve. We can either choose to obey, and forsake the worship of these foreign deities, or we can continue to serve them and reap the consequences of our stubborn disobedience. Your choice makes all the difference between life or death--between being saved or lost.

## **Eggs and Rabbits Fertility Symbols**

The coloring of eggs on Easter is another custom associated with this ancient fertility worship. In the *Encyclopedia Americana* we find the following: "According to the Venerable Bede, English historian of the early eighth century, the word Easter is derived from the Norman Ostara or Eostre, meaning the festival of spring at the vernal equinox, March 21, when nature is in resurrection after winter. Hence, the rabbits notable for their fecundity, and the eggs, colored like rays of the returning sun and the northern lights or aurora borealis. The Greek myth Demeter and Persephone, with its Latin counterpart Ceres and Persephone, conveys the idea of a goddess returning seasonally from the nether regions to the light of day."

Colored eggs and rabbits of the Easter holiday are a carryover of the ancient fertility rites of the pagan goddess of love and fertility. This is further shown in the book, *The Two Babylons*, by Alexander Hislop. According to historical accounts, "The ancient Druids bore an egg, as the sacred emblem of their order. In the Dionysaca, or mysteries of Bacchus, as celebrated in Athens, one part of the nocturnal ceremony consisted in the consecration of an egg. The Hindu fable celebrate their mundane egg as of a golden colour. The people of Japan make their sacred

egg to have a brazen colour. In China, at this hour, dyed or painted eggs are used in sacred festivals, even as in this country. In ancient times eggs were used in the religious rites of the Egyptians and the Greeks, and were hung up for mystic purposes in their temples."

Hislop continues his narrative with the origin of the Easter egg, "An egg of wondrous size is said to have fallen from heaven into the river Euphrates. The fishes rolled it to the bank, where the doves having settled upon it, and hatched it, out came Venus, who afterwards was called the Syrian goddess, that is, Astarte. Hence the egg became one of the symbols of Astarte or Easter."

## **Lent Preceded Tammuz Celebration**

In the Church of Rome, a fast of 40 days precedes the Easter observance. Adherents deny themselves their most favorite luxury or food over these 40 days, which is known as Lent.

Lent is nowhere mentioned in the Bible. The historian, Cassianus, writing in the 5th century, said, "It ought to be known that the observance of the forty days (Lent) had no existence, so long as the perfection of that primitive congregation remained inviolate."

Our Savior, the apostles, and early believers did not observe Lent. If this observance did not have its roots in the Bible, then where did it originate?

We find the history of Lent in *The Two Babylons*, "Among the pagans, Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz [Adonis], which was celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing, being observed in Palestine and Assyria in June, therefore called, 'the month of Tammuz' in Egypt in the middle of May, and in Britain sometime in April." Hislop continues, "The forty days' abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshipers of the Babylonian goddess. Such a Lent of forty days, 'in the spring of the year,' is still observed by the Yezidis or Pagan Devil-worshipers of Koordistan, who have inherited it from their early masters, the Babylonians." Such a Lent of forty days was held in spring by the Pagan Mexicans, for thus we read in Humboldt, where he gives account of Mexican observances: "Three days after the vernal equinox...began a solemn fast of *forty days* in honour of the sun." Such a Lent of forty days was observed in Egypt, as may be seen on consulting Wilkinson's *Egyptians*. This "Egyptian Lent of forty days...was held expressly in commemoration of Adonis or Osiris, the great mediatorial god."

How did this unscriptural custom get into the beliefs of the New Testament converts? "To conciliate the Pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated, and, by a complicated but skillful adjustment of the calendar, it was found no difficult matter, in general, to get Paganism and Christianity--now far sunk in idolatry--in this as in so many other things, to shake hands.... This change of the calendar in regard to Easter was attended with momentous consequences. It brought into the Church the grossest corruption and the rankest superstition in connection with the abstinence of Lent.

"Let anyone only read the atrocities that were commemorated during the 'sacred fast' or Pagan Lent, as described by Arnobius and Clemens Alexandrinus, and surely he must blush for the Christianity of those who, with the full knowledge of all these abominations, 'went down to Egypt for help' to stir up the languid devotion of the degenerate Church, and who could find no more excellent way to 'revive' it, than by borrowing from so polluted a source; the absurdities and abominations connected with which the early Christian writers had held up to scorn.

"That followers of the Messiah should ever think of introducing the Pagan abstinence of Lent was a sign of evil; it inevitably led to sunk, and it was also a cause of evil; it inevitably led to deeper degradation...But at last, when the worship of Astarte (Easter) was rising into the ascendant, steps were taken to get the whole Chaldean Lent of six weeks, or forty days, made imperative on all within the Roman empire of the West. The way was prepared for this by a Council held at Aurelia in the time of Hormisdas, Bishop of Rome, about the year 519, which decreed that Lent should be solemnly kept before Easter." (*The Two Babylons*, pp. 105-107)

The observance of Lent as we can see from the above historical account, was the 40-day period of weeping for Tammuz, or Adonis. This weeping for Tammuz is mentioned in Ezekiel 8:13-14. "He said also unto me, Turn yet again, and you shall see greater abominations that they do. Then He brought me to the door of the gate of the Eternal Yahweh's house which was turned toward the north; and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz."

It is clearly obvious from the above account that our Heavenly Father totally disapproves of Lent. He calls this practice "an abomination." Yet millions of people observe this holiday, thinking that what they are doing is pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

## **How Easter Entered our Worship**

We have seen from historical accounts the origin of our present-day Easter holiday. Clearly it did not come from the Bible. The Bible itself condemns this custom. We know that our Savior did not start it and the apostles did not engage in it. We have seen from the Bible that this holiday is very displeasing to our Heavenly Father. He calls it an abomination. Perhaps our Creator's disapproval of this holiday will offend some. Many no doubt will use clever human arguments to continue in their annual observance of Easter. However, human argument and reason do not change the facts. Easter remains one of the most abominable observances condemned by our Heavenly Father.

It was prophesied by the apostles that there would be a great falling away (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Even while the apostles were still alive the "mysteries of iniquity" were already at work (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

These mysteries of iniquity were well at work in some of the Galatian assemblies; some were returning to pagan holidays.

The Apostle Paul openly chastised them for returning to these observances. Paul said, "Howbeit then, when you knew not Yahweh, you did service unto them which by nature were not the Almighty. But now, after that you have known the Eternal Yahweh, or rather are known of the Eternal, how then turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days, and months, and times, and years," (Galatians 4:8-10).

It is apparent that they were trying to drag these Babylonian Mysteries into the faith. They were going back to observing "days, months, and times" as forbidden in Leviticus 19:26. Paul tells them, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain."

Following the death of Paul and the other apostles, the converts of Gentile decent began to return to the observance of these holidays again. They began to reject Passover, which was commanded to be observed forever, in favor of Easter, one of the Chaldean Mysteries.

*The Encyclopedia of World Religions*, p. 90, tells how the corruption of the New Testament faith came about:

"The expansion of Christianity and the Church's involvement in society brought changes and corruptions. A religion cannot expand without adapting itself to the language and customs of its converts, and while this process may win converts it may at the same time pervert the religion. The pacifism of early Christianity disappeared completely in the Middle Ages, with many kingdoms, all professing Christianity, fighting between themselves...

"Wealth was corrupting. A monk described the history of western monasticism in this sequence: piety produces industry, industry creates wealth, wealth destroys piety, piety in its fall dissipates wealth... The papacy, too, experienced...decay."

It was our Savior and the apostles who instructed the New Testament assembly to continue to observe the Passover on the 14th of Abib, Leviticus 23:5; Luke 22:16-20. (Write for our free booklet, or read online, [Passover--A Day to Remember.](#))

Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, was one of those who remained faithful to the apostles' instructions regarding Passover. He continued to observe Passover on Abib 25. Abib was the first month of the sacred calendar.

It was Anicetus, the Bishop of Rome and his successors, who "neither observed it [Passover] nor did they permit those after them to do so." (*Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 247). They rejected the biblical commandment to keep the Passover on Abib 14, in favor of their former pagan religious traditions. They allowed themselves to be influenced by the prevailing customs of the religious world around them and instituted Easter Sunday in place of Passover.

The history of this change from Passover to Easter Sunday is confirmed in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (11th ed., vol. VIII, pp. 828-829):

"There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers...[the New Testament assembly] continued to observe the Jewish festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed. Thus the Passover, with a new conception added to it, of the Messiah as the true Paschal Lamb and the first fruits from the dead, continued to be observed.

"Although the observance of Easter was at a very early period in the practice of the Christian Church, a serious difference as to the day for its observance soon arose between the Christians of Jewish and those of Gentile descent, which led to a long and bitter controversy. With the Jewish believers...the fast ended...on the 14th day of the moon at evening...without regard to the day of the week. The Gentile Christians on the other hand identified the first day of the week with the resurrection, and kept the preceding Friday as the commemoration of the crucifixion, irrespective of the day of the month.

"Generally speaking, the Western Churches kept Easter on the first day of the week, while the Eastern Churches followed the Jewish rule.

"Polycarp, the disciple of John the Evangelist, and bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome...to confer with Anicetus, the bishop of that see, on the subject, and urged the tradition which he had received from the apostles of observing the 14th day. Anicetus, however, declined. About forty years later, the question was discussed in a very different spirit between Victor, bishop of Rome, and Polycrates, metropolitan of proconsular Asia. That province was the only portion of Christendom which still adhered to the Jewish usage. Victor demanded that all should adopt the usage prevailing at Rome. This Polycrates firmly refused to agree to, and urged many weighty reasons to the contrary, whereupon Victor proceeded to excommunicate Polycrates and the Christians who continued the Eastern usage. He was, however, restrained from actually proceeding to enforce the decree of excommunication...and the Asiatic churches retained their us-

age unmolested. We find the Jewish usage from time to time reasserting itself after this, but it never prevailed to any large extent.

"A final settlement of the dispute was one among the other reasons which led Constantine to summon the council at Nicaea in 325. At that time the Syrians and Antiochenes were the solitary champions of the observance of the 14th day. The decision of the council was unanimous that Easter was to be kept on Sunday, and on the same Sunday throughout the world, and that 'none hereafter should follow the blindness of the Jews.'

"...The few who afterwards separated themselves from the unity of the church, and continued to keep the 14th day, were named 'Quarto-decimani,' and the dispute itself is known as the "Quarto-Deciman controversy."

This same record of how Easter supplanted Passover is found in other historical accounts from this time. One account of this was written by Eusebius, who wrote the following:

"A question of no small importance arose at that time. For the parishes of all Asia, as from an old tradition, held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jew were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should be observed as the feast of the Saviour's Passover...the bishops of Asia, led by Polycrates, decided to hold to the old custom handed down to them. He himself, in a letter which he addressed to Victor and the church of Rome, set forth in the following words the tradition which had come down to him:

"We observe the exact day; neither adding, nor taking away. For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of our Saviour's coming, when he shall come with glory from heaven, and shall seek out all the saints. Among these are Philip... John... Polycarp... Thraseas... Sagaris... Papirius... All these observed the fourteenth day of the passover according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith." (*Ecclesiastical History*, book V, chs. XXIII and XXIV).

## **Council of Nicaea Decides Fate of Passover**

It was at the Council of Nicaea that the Roman Emperor Constantine, along with the council he presided over, forbade the observance of the Passover and installed Easter Sunday in its place. However, many of the faithful continued to follow the plain teachings of the Bible and our Savior and continued to observe the Passover on the 14th of Abib. It was then that Constantine issued this edict: "We have directed, accordingly, that you be deprived of all houses in which you are accustomed to hold your assemblies...public or private" (*Life of Constantine*, Book III).

Since the Church of Rome had the backing of the Roman Emperor, it grew greatly in size and influence. It soon has political power to pass decrees imposing the death sentence upon anyone who continued to observe the Passover and biblical Sabbaths. Those who remained faithful to the plain teachings of the Bible were martyred and their property confiscated.

What if this were the law today? How many would give up their lives and property to serve the Almighty according to his commandments? Would you? Or would you continue following the crowd in keeping Easter Sunday? Today we all have a free choice, but our salvation depends on making the correct choice.

## Easter and Ancient Israel

We know from the Bible that ancient Israel borrowed the worship of Astarte or Ashtaroah from the nations around them. "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Eternal Yahweh, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroah (Hebrew for Easter), and the idols of Syria, and the idols of Zidon, and the idols of Moab, and the idols of the children of Ammon, and the idols of the Philistines, and forsook the Eternal Yahweh, and served not Him. And the anger of the Eternal Yahweh was hot against Israel," Judges 10:6-7.

Is not our Heavenly Father's anger being kindled against those who continue to perpetuate this worship today? It appears that churchianity today has much in common with ancient Israel, for as Israel "forsook the Eternal Yahweh, and served Baal and Ashtaroah (Easter),"--so has modern churchianity (Judges 2:13).

Our Heavenly Father still speaks to His people today through His word, calling out a people from the midst of modern Babylon to serve only Him, Revelation 18:4. Will you be one of those who heed His calling? Will you forsake the unscriptural customs of modern religion?

The prophet Samuel has a message for us today. Writing in 1 Samuel 7:3, he instructs us, "If you return unto the Eternal Yahweh, with all your hearts, then put away the deities and Ash-taroah [Easter] from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Eternal Yahweh, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you...." "There is only one hope for deliverance and that is through the shed blood of our Savior, commemorated by the Passover observance. Each year those who serve our Heavenly Father remember His Son's sacrifice by taking the emblems of the Passover. Will you observe the Passover, or will you continue to keep holidays steeped in worship our Heavenly Father condemns?

You cannot serve the Heavenly Father while celebrating a festival in honor of the goddess Easter. Our Savior said, "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other," Luke 16:13.

If you love the Heavenly Father and want to serve Him totally, then you will keep His commandments, John 14:15. He who says he loves Him "and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" 1 John 2:3.

Yahweh's Assembly in Messiah

*HalleluYah!*