

The True Origin of
EASTER

by David C. Pack

Herbert W. Armstrong led the Worldwide Church of God (formerly The Radio Church of God until 1968) until his death in 1986. Hundreds of millions heard his voice and read his literature. God called him in the fall of 1926 and he was converted in the spring of 1927. Over the course of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, God revealed through him a great many true biblical doctrines, which had been lost to the Church through the centuries. After his death, his successors ceased to believe and teach these doctrines. Although copyright law prohibits The Restored Church of God from reproducing and distributing literature produced while he led the Worldwide Church of God, we are committed to the preservation and teaching of all of these truths!

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Easter is a worldwide tradition involving many customs that people believe to be Christian. What is the origin of Lent and sunrise services? How did rabbits, eggs and hot cross buns become associated with Christ's Resurrection? Is Easter mentioned in the Bible? Did the apostles and early Church keep it? The answers will shock you!

Most people follow along as they have been taught, assuming that what they believe and do is right. They take their beliefs for granted. Most do not take time to *prove* why they do the things that they do.

Why do you believe what you believe? *Where* did you get your beliefs? Is the source of your religious beliefs the Bible—or some other authority? If you say the Bible, are you sure?

What about Easter? Since hundreds of millions keep it, supposedly in honor of Jesus Christ's Resurrection, then certainly the Bible must have much to say about it. Surely there are numerous verses mentioning rabbits, eggs and egg hunts, baskets of candy, hot cross buns, Lent, Good Friday and sunrise services—not to mention Easter itself.

Easter requires close scrutiny and this booklet examines it carefully.

Bible Authority for Easter?

The Bible is the source for all things Christian. Does it mention *Easter*? Yes.

Notice Acts 12:1. King Herod began to persecute the Church, culminating in the brutal death of the apostle James by sword. This pleased the Jews so much that the apostle Peter was also taken prisoner by Herod. The plan was to later deliver him to the Jews. Verse 3 says, "Then were the *days of unleavened bread*." The New Testament Church was observing these feast days described in Leviticus 23. Now read verse 4: "And when he [Herod] had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions [sixteen] of soldiers to keep him; intending after *Easter* to bring him forth to the people."

Is this Bible authority for Easter?

This passage is *not* talking about Easter. How do we know? The word translated *Easter* is the Greek word *pascha* (derived from the Hebrew word *pesach*;

there is no original Greek word for *Passover*), and it has only one meaning. It *always* means Passover—it can *never* mean Easter! For this reason, we find a *Hebrew* word used in the Greek New Testament. Once again, this Hebrew word can *only* refer to Passover. And other translations, including the Revised Standard Version, correctly render this word *Passover*.

Instead of endorsing Easter, this verse really proves that the Church was still observing the supposedly Jewish Passover ten years *after* the death of Christ!

Now let's go to the *other* scriptures authorizing Easter. This presents a problem. *There are NONE!* There are absolutely *no* verses, anywhere in the Bible, that authorize or endorse the keeping of Easter celebration! The Bible says nothing about Lent, eggs and egg hunts, baskets of candy, etc., although it does mention hot cross buns and sunrise services as abominations, which God condemns. We will examine them and learn why.

The mistranslation of Acts 12:4 is a not-so-subtle attempt to insert a pagan festival into scripture for the purpose of authorizing it. We will examine the Passover more closely later.

A Brief Look at Passover

The well-known Old Testament Passover story centers on God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt through ten miraculous plagues. These included how the death angel would "pass over" all the houses where the Israelites lived. They were instructed to put blood over their doorposts to ensure that only the firstborn of Egypt would die. In this first Passover, it was only the blood of the slain lamb that protected each Israelite home. While Egypt suffered the plague of death, the Israelite firstborn were delivered by blood. By obeying God's command and by faith in His promise to protect them, they were spared from death.

The Passover account is found in Exodus 12:12-14. Verse 14 states that the Passover ceremony was commanded by God to be an annual memorial feast to be kept by Israel "forever." (This command is repeated in Leviticus 23:5.) Exodus 12:15 introduces the seven-day festival called the Days of Unleavened Bread (also repeated in Leviticus 23:6-8), which was to immediately follow the Passover feast each year. This is why Acts 12:3 states, "Then were the *days of unleavened bread*," before mentioning the Passover in the next verse. These days were always kept in conjunction with one another.

What About the New Testament?

If the Passover was instituted *forever*, then New Testament instruction for its observance should be clear. This instruction is found in I Corinthians 5:7-8: "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even *Christ our Passover* is sacrificed for us: Therefore let

us keep the *feast* [of unleavened bread, which always followed Passover, as explained above]...”

Christ, as the Lamb of God (John 1:29; Acts 8:32; I Peter 1:19; Rev. 5:6), replaced the Old Testament lamb eaten on Passover evening each year. The New Testament symbols of the bread and wine were instituted so that Christians could eat the body and drink the blood of Christ, the true Lamb of God. Jesus’ sacrifice replaced the need to kill a spring lamb. Luke 22:19 shows that Jesus substituted the bread and wine to be taken annually in commemoration of His sacrifice for the remission of our sins—both spiritual and physical.

(Read our free booklet *How Often Should the Lord’s Supper Be Taken?* It proves Christ did *not* replace Passover with a different festival! Also, it makes plain that the only thing that He replaced was the spring lamb with His own sacrifice—and the institution of the bread and wine to symbolize it!)

Early Christians kept the Passover, not Easter. Notice this from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edit., Vol. 8, p. 828: “There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers...The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals [God’s festivals of Leviticus 23], 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 Christ as the true Paschal Lamb...continued to be observed.”

The original apostles and early New Testament Church did not observe Easter. Notice: “In the second century AD, Easter Day was, among Christians in Asia Minor [these would be the Gentile churches that Paul raised up in places such as Philippi, Colossae, Galatia, etc.—and he warned the Galatians (4:9-10) about taking days such as Easter] the 14th of Nisan [or Abib] the seventh month of the [civil] Jewish calendar” (*World Almanac*, 1968 edit., p. 187). The date described here is not Easter Day, but rather the Passover—which was kept on the 14th day of the *first* month (Nisan) of the sacred calendar. The apostles and early Church did not observe Easter!

Despite the overwhelming proof that God’s Holy Days, as listed in Leviticus 23, are still to be kept by Christians today (Acts 2:1; 12:3; 18:21; 20:6, 16; I Cor. 5:7-8; 16:8), almost no one who claims to believe in the God of the Bible keeps them! Almost no one who professes to worship Jesus Christ observes the Passover as He commanded! Why?

Since instruction to observe Easter is not in the Bible, and God’s permanent command to keep Passover is, then where *did* Easter originate? After surveying the origin of Passover, we are ready to study the origin of Easter.

When Easter Came to America

Easter has long been known to be a pagan festival! America’s founders knew this! A children’s book about the holiday, *Easter Parade: Welcome Sweet*

Spring Time!, by Steve Englehart, p. 4, states, “When the Puritans came to North America, they regarded the celebration of Easter—and the celebration of Christmas—with suspicion. They knew that pagans had celebrated the return of spring long before Christians celebrated Easter...for the first two hundred years of European life in North America, only a few states, mostly in the South, paid much attention to Easter.” Not until after the Civil War did Americans begin celebrating this holiday: “Easter first became an American tradition in the 1870s” (p. 5). Remarkable! The original 13 colonies of America began as a “Christian” nation, with the cry of “No king but King Jesus!” The nation did not observe Easter within an entire century of its founding. What happened to change this?

Where *Did* Easter Come From?

Does the following sound familiar?—Spring is in the air! Flowers and bunnies decorate the home. Father helps the children paint beautiful designs on eggs dyed in various colors. These eggs, which will later be hidden and searched for, are placed into lovely, seasonal baskets. The wonderful aroma of the hot cross buns mother is baking in the oven waft through the house. Forty days of abstaining from special foods will finally end the next day. The whole family picks out their Sunday best to wear to the next morning’s sunrise worship service to celebrate the savior’s resurrection and the renewal of life. Everyone looks forward to a succulent ham with all the trimmings. It will be a thrilling day. After all, it is one of the most important religious holidays of the year.

Easter, right? No! This is a description of an ancient Babylonian family—*2,000 years before Christ*—honoring the resurrection of their god, Tammuz, who was brought back from the underworld by his mother/wife, Ishtar (after whom the festival was named). As Ishtar was actually pronounced “Easter” in most Semitic dialects, it could be said that the event portrayed here is, in a sense, Easter. Of course, the occasion could easily have been a Phrygian family honoring Attis and Cybele, or perhaps a Phoenician family worshipping Adonis and Astarte. Also fitting the description well would be a heretic Israelite family honoring the Canaanite Baal and Ashtoreth. Or this depiction could just as easily represent any number of other immoral, pagan fertility celebrations of death and resurrection—including the modern Easter celebration as it has come to us through the Anglo-Saxon fertility rites of the goddess Eostre or Ostara. These are all the same festivals, separated only by time and culture.

If Easter is not found in the Bible, then where did it come from? The vast majority of ecclesiastical and secular historians agree that the name of Easter and the traditions surrounding it are deeply rooted in pagan religion.

Now notice the following powerful quotes that demonstrate more about the *true* origin of how the modern Easter celebration got its name:

“Since Bede the Venerable (*De ratione temporum* 1:5) the origin of the term for the feast of Christ’s Resurrection has been popularly considered to be from the Anglo-Saxon *Eastre*, a goddess of spring...the Old High German plural for dawn, *eostarun*; whence has come the German *Ostern*, and our English Easter” (*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, Vol. 5, p. 6).

“The fact that vernal festivals were general among pagan peoples no doubt had much to do with the form assumed by the Eastern festival in the Christian churches. The English term Easter is of *pagan origin*” (Albert Henry Newman, D.D., LL.D., *A Manual of Church History*, p. 299).

“On this greatest of Christian festivals, several survivals occur of ancient heathen ceremonies. To begin with, the name itself is not Christian but *pagan*. *Ostara* was the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring” (Ethel L. Urlin, *Festival, Holy Days, and Saints Days*, p. 73).

“Easter—the name Easter comes to us from *Ostera* or *Eostre*, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, for whom a spring festival was held annually, as it is from this *pagan festival* that some of our Easter customs have come” (Hazeltine, p. 53).

“In Babylonia...the goddess of spring was called *Ishtar*. She was identified with the planet *Venus*, which, because...[it] rises before the Sun...or sets after it...appears to love the light [this means *Venus* loves the sun-god]...In Phoenecia, she became *Astarte*; in Greece, *Eostre* [related to the Greek word *Eos*: “dawn”], and in Germany, *Ostara* [this comes from the German word *Ost*: “east,” which is the direction of dawn]” (Englehart, p. 4).

As we have seen, many names are interchangeable for the more well-known *Easter*. Pagans typically used many different names for the same god or goddess. *Nimrod*, the Bible figure who built the city of *Babylon* (Gen. 10:8), is an example. He was worshipped as *Saturn*, *Vulcan*, *Kronos*, *Baal*, *Tammuz*, *Molech* and others, but he was always the same god—the fire or sun god universally worshipped in nearly every ancient culture. (Read our free booklet *The True Origin of Christmas* to learn more about this holiday and *Nimrod*’s role in its early history.)

The goddess *Easter* was no different. She was *one* goddess with *many* names—the goddess of fertility, worshipped in spring when all life was being renewed.

The widely-known historian, *Will Durant*, in his famous and respected work, *Story of Civilization*, pp. 235, 244-245, writes, “*Ishtar* [*Astarte* to the Greeks, *Ashtoreth* to the Jews], interests us not only as analogue of the Egyptian *Isis* and prototype of the Grecian *Aphrodite* and the Roman *Venus*, but as the formal beneficiary of one of the strangest of Babylonian customs...known to us chiefly from a famous page in *Herodotus*: Every native woman is obliged, once in her life, to sit in the temple of *Venus* [*Easter*], and have intercourse with some stranger.”

We must now look closer at the origin of *other customs* associated with the modern *Easter* celebration.

The Origin of Lent

According to Johannes Cassianus, who wrote in the fifth century, “Howbeit you should know, that as long as the primitive church retained its perfection unbroken, this observance of Lent did not exist” (*First Conference Abbot Theonas*, chapter 30). There is neither biblical nor historical record of Christ, the apostles or the early Church participating in the Lenten season.

Since there is *no* instruction to observe Lent in the Bible, where did it come from? A forty-day abstinence period was anciently observed in honor of the pagan gods Osiris, Adonis and Tammuz (John Landseer, *Sabaeen Researches*, pp. 111, 112). Alexander Hislops, *The Two Babylons*, p. 104-105, says this of the origin of Lent: “The forty days abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshippers 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-worshippers 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...Such a Lent of forty days was observed in Egypt...”

Lent came from paganism, not from the Bible! (To learn more about the Lenten season, read our article “The True Meaning of Lent.”)

Eggs, Egg Hunts and Easter

Eggs have always been associated with the Easter celebration. Nearly every culture in the modern world has a long tradition of coloring eggs in beautiful and different ways. I once examined a traveling display of many kinds of beautifully decorated egg designs that represented the styles and traditions of virtually every country of modern Europe.

Notice the following: “The origin of the Easter egg is based on the fertility lore of the Indo-European races...The egg to them was a *symbol of spring*... In Christian times the egg had bestowed upon it a religious interpretation, becoming a symbol of the rock tomb out of which Christ emerged to the new life of His resurrection” (Francis X. Weiser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs*, p. 233). This is a direct example of exactly how pagan symbols and customs are “Christianized,” i.e., Christian-sounding names are superimposed over pagan customs. This is done to deceive—as well as make people feel better about why they are following a custom that is not in the Bible.

Notice: “Around the Christian observance of Easter...folk customs have collected, many of which have been handed down from the ancient ceremonial...symbolism of European and Middle Eastern *pagan spring* festivals...for example, *eggs*...have been very prominent as symbols of *new life* and resurrection” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991 ed., Vol. 4, p. 333).

Finally, the following comes from *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*, James Bonwick, p. 211-212: “Eggs were hung up in the Egyptian temples.

Bunsen calls attention to the mundane egg, the emblem of generative life, proceeding from the mouth of the great god of Egypt. The mystic egg of Babylon, hatching the Venus Ishtar, fell from heaven to the Euphrates. Dyed eggs were sacred Easter offerings in Egypt, as they are still in China and Europe. Easter, or spring, was the season of birth, terrestrial and celestial.”

What could be more plain in showing the true origin of the “Easter egg”? An “Easter” egg is just an egg that pertains to Easter. God never authorized Passover eggs or Days of Unleavened Bread eggs, but there have been Easter eggs for thousands of years!

It naturally progressed that the egg, representing spring and fertility, would be merged into an already pagan springtime festival. Connecting this symbol to Christ’s Resurrection in the spring required much creativity and human reasoning. However, even highly creative *human reasoning* has never been able to successfully connect the next Easter symbol to anything Christian, because there is not a single word about it anywhere in the New Testament!

The Easter Bunny

Here are two additional quotes from Francis Weiser about the origin of the “Easter bunny”: “In Germany and Austria little nests containing eggs, pastry and candy are placed in hidden spots, and the children believe that the Easter bunny, so popular in this country, too, had laid the eggs and brought the candy” (p. 235) and “The Easter bunny had its origin in pre-Christian fertility lore... The Easter bunny has *never* had religious symbolism bestowed on its festive usage... However, the bunny has acquired a cherished role in the celebration of Easter as the legendary producer of Easter eggs for children in many countries” (p. 236).

Here is further proof of the origin of Easter eggs and rabbits. It demonstrates how no one has ever been able to connect the Easter bunny to anything Christian, let alone to the Bible: “The Easter bunny is not a true Christian symbol” (John Bradner, *Symbols of Church Seasons and Days*, p. 52), and “Although adopted in a number of Christian cultures, the Easter bunny has never received any specific Christian interpretation” (Mirsea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, p. 558).

None of this will stop scores of millions of professing Christians from decorating their lawns and houses with Easter bunnies each spring.

Consider this last quote: “The hare, the symbol of fertility in ancient Egypt, a symbol that was kept later in Europe... Its place has been taken by the Easter rabbit” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991 ed., Vol. 4, p. 333).

Even in modern times, rabbits have remained common symbols of fertility. While their rapid rate of reproduction is well known, another problem arises with rabbits—they do not lay eggs! While both are clearly fertility symbols, there is no logical way to connect them. In a world filled with pagan tradition, truth *and* logic can be lost. Merging these symbols with Christianity makes an already idolatrous practice worse.

There is nothing Christian about *any* of these symbols. The true history of these fertility symbols, rabbits and eggs, is completely unknown to all the unsuspecting children who have been led by adults to think them so special.

The entire concept that these are Christian is a *lie* foisted on innocent children who will believe that “the moon is made of cheese” just because someone tells them so. While these are shocking facts, they are true nonetheless.

A Counterfeit Savior?

One of the central themes of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ came to die for mankind’s sins and offer redemption to a world cut off from God.

The master counterfeiter (Satan the devil, called the “god of this world” in II Cor. 4:4) seeks to counterfeit *every* aspect of God’s plan. He “deceives the *whole* world” (Rev. 12:9). As the arch-deceiver, he would not be content to counterfeit all *other* aspects of Christianity but not the identity and worship of the true Savior!

Who is the *real* “savior” central to the “Easter Sunday” tradition? Is it the Jesus Christ of the Bible? If you say “yes,” are you sure? History answers this question plainly, with this:

First notice that “...the conception of a Saviour-God was quite normal in the ancient pagan world...a conception of salvation underlies the notion of such Gods as Osiris, Attis, and Adonis...” (John M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 395).

And then this: “It has often been urged that this belief in the Resurrection of Jesus is due to ideas of divine resurrection current in the contemporary world...stories of Attis, Adonis, and Osiris...In the pagan stories the rising again is a joyous reversal of defeat; in the Christian story it is the complement of victorious death. It may be said that Attis and Osiris saved by rising again, Jesus by dying...the Easter observance did not arise at once out of belief in the Resurrection, but developed later by gradual stages out of the Jewish Pasch. The notion implied in the Easter greeting Christ is risen is a secondary development; the idea comes from this festival and from its occurrence in spring; the festival does not come from the idea. The idea of Christ’s resurrection was injected into the old practice of Easter observance and not the other way around” (A. Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background*, pp. 105-107).

And, finally, the powerful theme of this oft-repeated counterfeit is made most clear by the famous historian, James George Frazer: “Now the death and resurrection of Attis were officially celebrated at Rome on the 24th and 25th of March, the latter being regarded as the spring equinox, and... according to an ancient and widespread tradition Christ suffered on the 25th of March...the tradition which placed the death of Christ on the 25th of March...is all the more remarkable because astronomical considerations prove that it can have had *no historical foundation*...When we remember

that the festival of St. George in April has replaced the ancient pagan festival of the Parilia; that the festival of St. John the Baptist in June has succeeded to a heathen Midsummer festival of water; that the festival of the Assumption of the Virgin in August has ousted the festival of Diana; that the feast of All Souls [following Halloween] in November is a continuation of an old heathen feast of the dead; and that the Nativity of Christ himself was assigned to the winter solstice in December because that day was deemed the Nativity of the Sun; we can hardly be thought to be rash or unreasonable in conjecturing that the other cardinal festival of the Christian church—the solemnization of Easter—may have been in like manner, and from like motives of edification, adapted to a similar celebration of the Phrygian god Attis at the vernal equinox...*It is a remarkable coincidence...* that the Christian and the heathen festivals of the divine death and resurrection should have been solemnized at the same season...*It is difficult to regard the coincidence as purely accidental*" (*The Golden Bough*, Vol. I, pp. 306-309).

We can summarize the above source. The Roman Catholic Church had a practice of incorporating pagan festivals—of pasting “Christian” names over them and calling them “Christian.” This was done to make “Christianity” more palatable and familiar to heathen worshippers, whom the Church was trying to attract. How did such a state of affairs develop?

It can now be better understood why the apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians to beware of the subtle deceit of “*another Jesus* whom we have not preached.” He said, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that comes preaches *another Jesus*, whom we have not preached, or if you receive *another spirit*, which you have not received, or *another gospel*, which you have not accepted...” (II Cor. 11:3-4).

People today can *think* that they are worshipping the true Savior when they are really worshipping a *false savior*—another Jesus! The entirety of traditional Christianity is actually worshipping Baal, the mediator and sun god, who was named after his “wife” Ishtar (who was actually his *mother* Semiramis)—who we will later see is the one the Bible calls the “Queen of Heaven.”

People can worship in ways that represent things that are far different than what they sincerely believe or intend. Consider the following classic example.

Sunrise Services

Sunrise services *are* mentioned in the Bible. But what God says about this custom is not what you expect. Notice these astonishing verses. The prophet Ezekiel was being shown, in vision, an important prophecy concerning the sins of God’s people in our time.

The entire context of these verses needs to be examined carefully to understand the heightening condemnation toward which God builds in His conclusion: "...Turn you yet again, and you shall see greater abominations that they do...and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz...And He brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, 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*...that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they...have returned to provoke Me to anger... 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" (Ezek. 8:13-18).

Observing sunrise services is serious to God! He so hates this vile practice that He will ultimately destroy all who persist in it (Ezek. 9)!

It is no "light thing" to God that many millions do this every Easter! It may seem "beautiful," "religious," and "deeply moving" to those participating in it, but God has forbidden His true people to devise their own religious customs and ideas. He is not interested in what *people* may personally *feel* or *think* is right. He is interested in those who care about what *He thinks!* As far as God is concerned, ancient sun worship, dressed up in Easter finery and bonnets, is just modern packaging of a very old, idolatrous pagan custom.

Consider God's own words in Deuteronomy 12:28-32 (NKJ): "Observe and obey all these words which I command you...When...you...dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them...and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' *You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way*; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods...*Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.*"

God tells Christians to never mix what is godly with what is pagan—or the true with the false! Do not let men tell you that what God says makes no difference. *It does!*

Hot Cross Buns

When I was in the first grade, all the children in my class had to sing a solo of his or her choice. I will never forget this terrifying moment. I was so embarrassed and nervous that I picked the shortest song in our little songbook, "Hot Cross Buns," and sang it before the class. Of course, I had no idea what I was singing. Though short (it was only fifteen words), I have never forgotten the lesson of its meaning.

Notice Jeremiah 7:18: "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 to other gods, that they may provoke me to anger.” The cakes offered to the queen of heaven were these same hot cross buns that millions of children sing about today (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 107). What seems so innocent is not innocent at all.

Who is the “queen of heaven”?

Ashtaroth—The Queen of Heaven

Astarte (Easter)-worship was always associated with the worship of Baal or sun worship. Astarte was Baal’s wife. Notice that another name for Astarte was Ashtaroth. The following quote makes this point clear: “What means the term Easter itself? It is not a Christian name. It bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. *Easter* is nothing else than *Astarte*, one of the titles of Beltis, the *queen of heaven*. . . Now, the Assyrian goddess, or Astarte, is identified with Semiramis by Athenagoras (*Legatio*, vol. ii. p. 179), and by Lucian (*De Dea Syria*, vol iii. p. 382). . . Now, no name could more exactly picture forth the character of Semiramis, as queen of Babylon, than the name of ‘Asht-tart,’ for that just means ‘The woman that made towers’ . . . Ashturit, then. . . is obviously the same as the Hebrew ‘*Ashtoreth*’” (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pp. 103, 307-308).

Notice this conclusive quote from *Microsoft Encarta Multimedia Encyclopedia*: “Ishtar was the Great Mother, the goddess of fertility and the QUEEN OF HEAVEN.” So, in actuality, Ashtaroth (Ishtar) was Nimrod’s harlotrous, mother/wife widow, Semiramis, as many other ancient historians attest! Easter is now established as none other than the Ashtaroth of the Bible! We can now examine the scriptures that show how God views the worship of this pagan goddess—by any name!

God Calls Easter Evil

Now that we know that Easter is the goddess Ashtaroth, we need to look into the Bible and see what God thinks of her. Look at this verse: “And the children of Israel did *evil* in the sight of the LORD. . . And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and *Ashtaroth* [Easter]” (Jdg. 2:11, 13).

The context shows that God allowed His people to be taken from their land into captivity as a result of *this sin!* It continues, explaining how God delivered His people over and over again through a series of judges. After each deliverance, Israel returned to the same false gods, which in turn brought *another* captivity, via conquest by the nations around them. They never seemed to learn, as verse 19 makes clear: “And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves. . . *in following other gods*. . . and. . . they ceased not from *their own doings*, nor from their *stubborn way*.” In chapter 10, verse 6, Israel repeats this pattern of stubbornness. And God, just as stubbornly, still calls it evil.

Baal and Ashtaroah worship reappeared during Samuel's time. Samuel told Israel, "...*put away* the strange gods and *Ashtaroah* from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the *LORD*, and *serve Him only*...Then the children of Israel *did* put away Baalim and Ashtaroah, and *served the LORD only*" (I Sam. 7:3-4). Later, in I Samuel 12:10-11, Samuel publicly recounted Israel's history to them. He reminded them that they continually returned to obeying God, only to fall backwards into idolatry again and again!

It has been said that "The only thing man has learned from history is that no one learns from history." George Santayana took it further, saying, "Those who do not learn the lesson of history are *doomed to repeat it*."

This lesson describes ancient Israel—but it also describes today's modern world. Because Israel could not stay on track, they were eventually taken into captivity, becoming lost to history! One more time of captivity and punishment is foretold to happen again soon.

One Final Example

The Bible states that King Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. Yet, he made a mistake that God considered so great that, after his death, He punished Solomon by removing the kingdom from his son.

His mistake?

He married a woman who led him into the worship of Easter (Ashtaroah). Notice I Kings 11:4-6: "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods...For Solomon went after Ashtaroah the goddess of the Zidonians...And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father." Verses 11-12 demonstrate that the kingdom *was* taken from his son.

Two Churches: The Great Switch

There are two completely different churches pictured in the New Testament. One, the true Church that Jesus built, is described as the bride of Christ, forsaking involvements with this world and its customs in order to be pure when He comes for her. But, throughout the New Testament, it was prophesied that false teachers would creep in and gain control of the church organization. True Christians would have to flee from many of their original congregations to continue to obey God. They would, therefore, be a "little flock," often scattered, never having political power in this world.

The world has kept little track of this small, scattered, persecuted Church, but Christ promised that He would never leave or forsake it and that "the gates of hell [the grave] shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Though it has periodically had to scatter for its life (Acts 8:1; Dan. 12:7), Christ has faithfully kept His promise to remain with it, empowering and strengthening it through His Spirit. Despite continual persecution—even during periods of great martyrdom by the

large popular churches that have always sought to destroy it—a remnant has always remained throughout the last nearly 2,000 years. It has continued to “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

God has always commanded His Church not to keep pagan festivals! This little Church has been willing to obey Him. The inset 12th chapter of Revelation gives a brief overview of its history, including God’s promise to protect it through future, horrific world punishment.

Paul warned the Thessalonian congregation, “...the mystery of iniquity [lawlessness] does already work” (II Thes. 2:7). This mystery was already having an influence within the true Church just twenty years after Christ established it in 31 AD. It was the very Chaldean Mystery, embodied in Christmas and Easter—its two greatest festivals! Invariably, the arrival of these false pagan celebrations required true Christians to flee.

It is this same pattern at work that has caused this booklet to have to be written. Since the death of Herbert W. Armstrong (the leader of the Church of God from 1934 to 1986), the prophesied “falling away” (the Greek word *apostasia* here means “to defect from truth”) before the Return of Christ (II Thes. 2:1-3) has now occurred. Many of Mr. Armstrong’s writings are no longer available and all have been rewritten by The Restored Church of God.

Thus, the previously described true Church organization joined the *other* church of this world that is founded on lawlessness. Gradually, *this* church, centered at Rome, adopted more and more pagan doctrines and practices until the only discernible difference between it and pagan religion was its use of the name of Jesus Christ. This is how Easter came to be celebrated in place of the true Christian Passover.

The entire false religious system of today masquerades under the banner of “Christianity.” All of its organizations have adopted pagan practices.

The Quartodeciman Controversy: From Passover to Easter

What does history say about how and when the idolatrous pagan festival of Easter came to replace the Passover service ordained by God? A series of extensive quotes tell this story—commonly referred to as the “Quartodeciman Controversy.” Several sources are quoted so that the story of how the counterfeit Easter came to replace Passover will be perfectly clear. This problem—Passover versus Easter—became so pivotal, as a test of the power of the great church that wished to stamp out the “little flock,” that eventual disobedience brought the *death sentence* upon any who continued to keep either God’s Sabbath or His true festivals.

Make no mistake! Whether one keeps God’s Passover or celebrates the pagan Easter is *serious*!

First notice the following by Eusebius (a well-known historian of the early Church) from his work, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, chapters XXIII and

XXIV: "A question of no small importance arose at that time. For the parishes of all Asia, as from an older tradition, held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jews 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 days; neither adding, nor taking away. For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming, when he shall come with glory from heaven, and shall seek out all the saints. Among these are Philip, one of the twelve apostles...and, moreover, John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord...and Polycarp in Smyrna, who was a bishop and martyr; and Thraseas, bishop and martyr from Eumenia...the bishop and martyr Sagaris...the blessed Papirius, or Melito...All these observed the fourteenth day of the passover according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith."

The 1967 *New Catholic Encyclopedia* states, "Quartodeciman, a term used to describe the practice in the early Church of celebrating Easter on the 14th of Nisan (*die quarta decima*), the day of the Jewish Passover (Ex. 12:6). Quartodecimanism, prevalent in Asia Minor and Syria in the 2nd century, emphasized the death of Christ, the true Paschal victim (Jn. 18:28; 19:42), while Roman practice emphasized the observance of Sunday as the day of the Resurrection. Implicit in these two positions is the disputed chronology of Holy Week. As Christianity separated from Judaism, gentile Christians objected to observing the principal Christian feasts on the same day as the Jewish Passover.

"Roman efforts to induce the Quartodecimans to abandon their practice were unsuccessful. On a visit to Rome (c. 155), St. Polycarp of Smyrna amiably discussed the question with Pope Anicetus without, however, reaching agreement. Pope Victor (189-198) sought unity through a series of synods held in both East and West; all accepted the Roman practice except the Asiatic bishops. When Victor attempted coercion by excommunication, St. Irenaeus of Lyons intervened to restore peace (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.23-25). During the 3rd century Quartodecimanism waned; it persisted in some Asiatic communities down to the 5th century" (Vol. 12, p. 13).

The following very lengthy statement from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, well summarizes and details the story of how Easter slowly came to replace the Passover by AD 325 within visible, organized "Christianity": "Although the observance of Easter was at a very early period in the practice of the Christian Church [false], a serious difference as to the day for its observance soon arose between the [true] Christians of Jewish and those of Gentile descent, which led to a long and bitter controversy...The Jewish Christians... (observed) the 14th day of the moon at evening...without regard to the day of the week. The Gentile Christians (Roman Catholics) 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 (Roman Catholic) kept Easter on the 1st day of the week, while the Eastern Churches [including the remnant of the true Church] followed the Jewish rule [the true Christian Passover].

“Polycarp, the disciple of John the Evangelist (last of the 12 apostles), and bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome in 159 (sic) 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 (197), the question was discussed in a very different spirit between Victor, bishop of Rome, and Polycrates, metropolitan of proconsular Asia. That province [embracing churches founded through the apostle Paul, like Antioch and all of those identified in Revelation 2 and 3 as the true Church] 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 [correct] Eastern usage. He was, however, restrained (by counsel from other bishops) from actually proceeding to enforce the decree of excommunication...and the Asiatic churches retained their usage unmolested. We find the Jewish usage (the true New Testament Passover) 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 [Roman Emperor] 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. [Or, in other words, no one was allowed to follow the example of Christ and the true Church He founded!]...The FEW who afterwards separated themselves from the unity of the [politically organized] church, and continued to keep the 14th day, were named Quartodecimani [from the Latin word for 14], and the dispute itself is known as the Quartodeciman controversy” (Vol. VIII, pp. 828-829).

This is a very powerful quote making absolutely plain the full story of *what* happened and *how* it happened. History records that Polycarp was martyred on the way back from Rome (burned to death in a farmhouse), just days after his meeting with Anicetus over the issue of keeping Passover or Easter. He was almost certainly killed because he would not compromise regarding the proper keeping of the Passover.

The 1967 *New Catholic Encyclopedia* states this: “Occasionally, the Quartodecimans celebrated Easter on the day that other Christians were observing Good Friday. Originally both observances were allowed, but gradually it was felt incongruous that Christians should celebrate Easter on a Jewish

feast, and unity in celebrating the principal Christian feast was called for” (Vol. 5, p. 8).

Now read this quote from the same source, concluding the matter of how the Council of Nicea “decided,” for all, the matter of Easter versus Passover: “As for Easter, the Fathers decreed (1) that all Christians should observe it on the same day, (2) that Jewish customs should not be followed, and (3) that the practice of the West, of Egypt, and of other Churches should remain in force, namely, of celebrating Easter on the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox” (Vol. 5, p. 433).

The 1909 edition of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* says, “After the Pope’s strong measures the Quarterdecimans seemed to have gradually dwindled away. Origen in the “Philosophumena” (VIII, xviii) seems to regard them as a *mere handful of wrong-headed nonconformists*. SECOND PHASE—The second stage of the Easter controversy centers around the Council of Nicaea [AD 325] granting that the great Easter festival was always to be held on a Sunday, and was not to be coincident with a particular phase of the moon, which might occur on any day of the week” (Vol. 5, p. 228).

The truth is that the Passover was always tied directly to the moon, regardless of the day of the week on which it fell! (The word *month* is derived from *moon*.) The 14th day of Nisan (Abib) was God’s instruction (Exodus 12:1-6)—not the nearest Sunday to this or any other date.

This same edition of *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, when describing the final decision at Nicaea in AD 325, quotes the words of the Emperor Constantine, writing to all the churches: “At this meeting the question concerning the most holy day of Easter was discussed, and it was resolved by the united judgment of all present that this feast ought to be kept by all and in every place on one and the same day...And first of all it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin...for we have received from our Saviour a different way [this is false because Christ did not ever instruct “a different way”]...And I myself have undertaken that this decision should meet with the approval of your Sagacities in the hope that your Wisdoms will gladly admit that practice which is observed at once in the city of Rome and in Africa, throughout Italy and in Egypt...with entire unity of judgment” (Vol. 5, p. 228).

Finally, this same source continues a few paragraphs later with, “The final decision always lay with accepted *ecclesiastical authority*...was primarily a matter of *ecclesiastical discipline* and not astronomical science” (p. 229). These two short phrases make it clear that *church authority at Rome*, and not God’s Word, determined whether Easter or the Passover would be kept.

Only the “few” remained faithful to the truth—and it has always been this way. Eventually, as the false pagan church grew in political influence, the death penalty was imposed on anyone found keeping God’s seventh-day Sabbath or His other Festivals, such as the Passover. True Christians have always had to

flee to wherever they could continue keeping God's commandments and truths. (Read our free book *Where Is the True Church? – and Its Incredible History!*)

Throughout the centuries, though ignored and persecuted by the world, these same Christians (a single *true* Church of God) have always held to and kept the truth of God on this vital doctrinal point—as well as many other true biblical doctrines!

The Passover Was Commanded

We have already seen that God never instructed, but rather actually *commanded against*, keeping Easter. It has always been His purpose that the Passover should be kept once a year—*forever*. The early portions of this booklet briefly discussed the New Testament instruction to keep the Passover through the newly instituted symbols of the bread and wine.

The New Testament Passover also includes an ordinance of humility called the footwashing. This instruction is found in John 13:2-15 and was commanded by Christ to be taught to all who would learn God's doctrines. Christ commanded His disciples, "Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them...Teaching them to observe *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

This instruction includes the Passover, with the footwashing and the symbols of the bread and wine. It also includes keeping the Days of Unleavened Bread and the rest of God's annual feast days. If you are determined to no longer participate in this world's Easter tradition, then the previously offered booklet *How Often Should the Lord's Supper Be Taken?* will help you learn what is entailed in keeping God's New Testament Passover service. The Restored Church of God can help you learn how to do this.

What Will You Do?

Can Easter be kept "in honor of Christ"? Some may say, "Okay, I know Easter comes from paganism—but *I'm* not pagan! I celebrate it in honor of Christ. I focus on *Him*." Because God knew that Israel would feel this way when they encountered the religious customs of pagan nations, and would try to use *false* customs to honor the *true* God, He gave the instruction in Deuteronomy 12:28-32. God always commanded that people worship Him *exactly* as He instructed! So did Christ.

Read our booklet *Christ's Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*. It explains how and why the "Sunday Resurrection" idea came into use as a means of endorsing Sunday-keeping (worshipping on the day of the sun, or the *sun's day*) in place of keeping God's true Sabbath day. Also read our related article, "Christ's Crucifixion Was Not on Friday."

Jesus told the Pharisees, "Thus have you made the commandment of God of none effect by your *tradition...in vain do they worship Me*, teaching for

doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:6, 9). Mark’s parallel account adds an important element: “*Full well* you REJECT the commandment of God, that you may keep your own *tradition*” (7:9). These verses have clear application to those who reject the Passover that they may keep pagan Easter.

Hundreds of millions keep the rank idolatrous pagan feast known as Easter, believing themselves to be honoring Jesus Christ! Most are in complete ignorance of what they are doing. God’s answer to all is “...the times of this ignorance God winked at; *but now commands all men every where to repent*” (Acts 17:30)!

From Easter Back to the Passover

The following is from the conclusion of Herbert W. Armstrong’s booklet *The Plain Truth About Easter*. It follows a brief overview of the importance of keeping God’s Passover instead of pagan Easter:

“We need to return to the faith once delivered. Let us humbly and obediently observe this sacred ordinance [Passover] as we are commanded, at the scriptural time, after sunset, the 14th of Abib [Nisan] according to the Sacred Calendar.”

The following literature expands on topics discussed in this booklet:

- Where Is the True Church? – and Its Incredible History!
- Christ’s Resurrection Was Not on Sunday
- How Often Should the Lord’s Supper Be Taken?
- The True Origin of Christmas
- “Christ’s Crucifixion Was Not on Friday”
- “The True Meaning of Lent”

112017
TOE

The Restored Church of God

1000 Ambassador Drive
Wadsworth, OH 44281
USA

P.O. Box 4064
St. Catharines, ON L2R 7S3
CANADA

Phone: (330) 334-2266
Fax: (330) 334-6513
E-mail: info@rcg.org
Web: rcg.org