

Easter or Passover

***Which day should
Christians observe?***

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Easter or Passover

Many professing Christians consider Easter to be one of the most important and meaningful celebrations of the year. Celebrants rejoice with a profound sense of liberation as the new life of spring merges with thoughts of Christ's resurrection. Decorations are made, eggs boiled and colored, baskets assembled, and parties are planned. Millions are enticed by cheerful pastel colors such as lavender, pink, blue, yellow, and green. Children are tantalized by thoughts of candy filled baskets. Youngsters run to and fro in delight as they hunt for Easter eggs. Easter Sunday is filled with religious services, games, family gatherings, and specially prepared meals.

Shocking as this may sound, God condemns the Easter holiday! That unbiblical spring celebration actually glorifies illicit sex and pagan fertility rites, and it is a blatant counterfeit of God's commanded Passover.

Prove All Things

Have you ever researched Easter in an encyclopedia or on the internet? Did you ever wonder why there is an almost whimsical nature reflected in the holiday that is so closely connected to Christ's brutal death and resurrection? What does the term Easter mean, and what is the origin of this holiday? Did God ever command Lent, Good Friday, or Easter to be observed? What do the various Easter symbols represent, and do they coincide with the Scriptures?

What days did Jesus, His disciples, and first century Christians observe? Why don't the modern churches celebrate the holy days that God commanded in the Bible? Was the Passover

abolished after Christ died, or was it commanded to be observed as a memorial of His death? What do the symbols of Passover mean, and is it possible that you should observe the New Testament Passover and not Easter?

Are you willing to examine the facts and heed what you learn? God instructs believers to search the scriptures and prove all things (Acts 17:11; 1Ths. 5:21). Can you put personal feelings aside and accept the challenge to search out the truth and prove it for yourself? Should you observe Easter or Passover?

Easter is not Christian

The Bible and secular history both record that the early Christian Church did not celebrate Easter. More than 20 years after Christ's resurrection, the Apostle Paul wrote to both Jewish and gentile converts urging them to properly keep God's Passover (1Cor. 5:7-8). The early Christians understood that Easter was a pagan observance, and as such it is condemned by God. It was an unconverted Roman emperor who ordered everyone to keep Easter or suffer the loss of their property or life. *Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia* reveals the true origin of this holiday stating:

Our name Easter comes from *Eostre*, an ancient Anglo-Saxon goddess, originally of the dawn. In pagan times an annual spring festival was held in her honor. Some Easter customs have come from this and other pre-Christian spring festivals (v. 4, p. 200).

The goddess Eostre is the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the Babylonian Ishtar, the Phoenician Astarte, and the Sidonian Ashtoreth mentioned in the book of *Kings* found in the *Old Testament*. This false god has had several other names depending on the region of worship. As archeologist William Foxwell Albright and the Pagan Library on the web explain:

This festival is named after the Anglo-Saxon Goddess Eostre or Eastre, also known in Old German as Ostara. Little is known about this Goddess, except that her festival was celebrated at the Spring Equinox, and became

Easter, and that She was a Goddess of fertility, and was connected with hares and eggs. She may also be connected with the Greek Eos and the Roman Aurora, both Dawn Goddesses, and with the Babylonian Ishtar and Phoenician Astarte, both love Goddesses. The Anglo-Saxon lunar month, which became April, was called Eastermonath (https://www.paganlibrary.com/introductory/wiccan_sabbats.php, retr. 6/16/2015).

The ceremony and symbols of Easter existed centuries before Christ was born. Further, we are told that the celebration comes from the worship of a pagan goddess—a false god! This goddess has a promiscuous reputation. Her worship featured fertility rites, and immoral sexual acts! Nils Ringdal mentions the licentious theme of Ishtar worship in his book titled *Love for Sale: A World History of Prostitution*:

Ishtar is an exciting and dangerous deity, simultaneously goddess of love and war. She is the daughter of the moon god, related to the superior gods and considered Queen of Heaven. Her main symbol is the planet Venus. She was venerated as both the morning and evening star; she was born anew as a maiden every morning but became a whore every evening...

The women in Ishtar's service helped the men who offered money to her temples, with the sacred powers of their bodies, yet the way in which the aristocratic women served remained more of a holy secret. Ishtar calls herself protector of all prostitutes, including those who offered their bodies in doorways outside the temples or tempted the men in taverns. But when the goddess speaks about herself as a harlot, it has little to do with paid sex: She would make love to any man she happened to desire (pp. 10-11).

It is no wonder the symbolism pervading the celebration of Easter is oriented toward sex and reproduction. Consider the symbolism of the lily. Easter celebrants go to church services and delight in the great numbers of lilies decorating their altar. What they do not realize is that this flower was widely misused from

ancient times as a symbol of sex and reproduction. Archeologist William Albright wrote:

Sacred prostitution was an almost invariable concomitant of the cult of the Phoenician and Syrian goddess... As sacred prostitute the goddess was, strangely enough from our point of view, called “the Holy One,” literally, “the holiness (*qudshu*) of (Asherah, etc.)” The Egyptian representations of Qudshu, “the Holy One,” show here *en face* as a naked woman in the prime of life, standing on a lion, with a lily in one hand and a serpent (or two serpents) in the other... The lily and the serpent are characteristically Canaanite; the former indicates the charm and grace of the bearer—in a word, her sex appeal—and the latter her fecundity. It was only natural that the Phoenicians should attribute to Astarte two sons, named (according to Philo) “Sexual Desire” (Pothos) and “Sexual Love” (Eros) (*Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, pp. 74-75).

The cute and cuddly Easter bunnies are also culpable. Though these creatures are a creation of God, as a religious symbol, these animals are declared unclean in the Bible. They have no place in the worship of the true God (Lev. 11:6). The *Catholic Encyclopedia* in the year 1913 admits the following about the mythical egg laying Easter bunny:

The custom may have its origin in paganism, for a great many pagan customs, celebrating the return of spring gravitated to Easter... The Easter rabbit lays the eggs, for which reason they are hidden in a nest or in the garden. The rabbit is a pagan symbol and has always been an emblem of fertility (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, v. 5, p. 227).

The egg is another symbol that played a role in the pagan religions from ancient times. It was taught that the goddess connected to our modern Easter celebrations came from a giant egg. In his book titled *The Two Babylons*, Alexander Hislop explained details of this ancient pagan tale:

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. From Egypt these sacred eggs can be distinctly traced to the banks of the Euphrates. The classic poets are full of the fable of the mystic egg of the Babylonians; and thus its tale is told by Hyginus, the Egyptian, the learned keeper of the Palatine Library at Rome, in the time of Augustus, who was skilled in all the wisdom of his native country: “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, hatched it, and 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 (p. 109).

In many parts of the world, hot cross buns have also been a staple of Easter. The buns are baked with the symbol of a cross on top of them, and today many claim the mark is to represent the cross of Christ. This is also a fraud. Buns such as these were used in worship centuries before Christ. They were offerings to a supposed queen of heaven, Ishtar, Astarte, or Ashtoreth pagan goddess of fertility. The cross actually originated as a T, representing Tammuz the brother of Ishtar—not Christ! Notice what God told His prophet Jeremiah:

Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and *they* pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger (Jeremiah 7:17-18).

The *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* explains how these cakes were used in worship:

The object of worship, particularly by women, in Judah in the time of Jeremiah; cakes possibly shaped as figurines were offered to her with libations... the

reference might be to Ishtar, the goddess of love and fertility, who was identified with the Venus Star and is actually entitled “Mistress of Heaven” in the Amarna tablets (1962, v. 3, p. 975).

Easter comes from ancient worship of the goddess Ishtar or Ashtoreth. For this reason, the early Church leaders rejected such celebrations. They understood that God and the Bible condemn such false goddesses and the vile practices of those who worship them.

Easter Condemned

The Bible shows God’s people coming into contact with pagan deities in Egypt. There they were immersed in the worship of numerous false gods of that land. When God freed the Israelites from Egypt, He not only delivered them from slavery, He also delivered them from the worship of these false gods. The Eternal then reinstated His true days of worship that were lost by Israel hundreds of years prior.

Passover is so important to God that it was the final great miracle used to free Israel (Exo. 12). So vital is this observance that God commanded individuals who were either too ill to observe it, or those who were traveling out of the country, to keep Passover on the same day the following month (Num. 9:9-11). Further, Passover was commanded to be observed forever, throughout every generation:

So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance (Exodus 12:14).

Designed to be kept perpetually, the observance of God’s holy days represents our willingness to obey God. They are a mark of a true Christian (Deu. 6:1-8). As the Eternal stated:

Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you (Exodus 31:13).

Passover is one of God's signs that are to be worn in the forehead and hand (Exo. 13:9). The forehead symbolizes what people think about; and the hand pictures what they set their mind to do with their strength.

After revealing the Passover to Israel, God gave them His law and holy days. Israel was then commanded to invade the land of Canaan and stamp out every last vestige of the people's pagan practices—including Easter. Before the children of Israel entered their new land, God forewarned them. The people of the land worshiped in many perverse ways; including their version of the Ishtar fertility rites. The Israelites were not to adopt the religious practices of the inhabitants which they were commanded to dispossess! Moses recorded God's warning to them, and His warning is also for us today:

When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, 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 (Deuteronomy 12:29-31).

Despite God's command not to worship Him the way the pagans worshiped their gods, Israel eventually lost sight of Passover and began to worship pagan gods. As punishment for this sin, God split the nation of Israel in two. The chronicler wrote:

Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon... because they have forsaken Me, and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians (1Kings 11:31-33).

Watson's Biblical and Archeological Dictionary of 1833 explains more about Ashtoreth, stating:

Ashtaroth, or Astarte, a goddess of the Zidonians. In groves consecrated to her, such lasciviousness was committed as rendered her worship infamous. She was also called the queen of heaven; and sometimes her worship is said to be that of “the host of heaven...” Solomon, seduced by his foreign wives, introduced the worship of Ashtaroth into Israel; but Jezebel, daughter of the king of Tyre, and wife to Ahab, principally established her worship (<https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/wtd/a/ashtaroth.html>, ret. 5/5/2015).

Ashtoreth was the name of the chief female deity worshiped in ancient Syria, Phoenicia, and Canaan. The Phoenicians called her Astarte, the Assyrians worshiped her as Ishtar, and the Philistines had a temple of Ashtoreth (1Sam. 31:10). Because of Israel’s incomplete conquest of the land of Canaan, Ashtoreth worship survived and plagued Israel (Judges 2:13).

Ashtoreth is the same goddess associated with Easter celebration. God severely punished His people for worshiping her then, and He absolutely does not accept such worship today in any shape or form.

After the tribes split apart, Israel continued a downward spiral into idolatry. God revealed to Ezekiel how far His people had sunk into this sin:

So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the LORD’s house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14).

Tammuz was the mythical brother of Ishtar; goddess of spring and fertility. The Israelites wept during his supposed absence in winter hoping their tears would bring back the sun and abundant crops. As foolish as this was, God noted another celebration of the return of Tammuz with his sister Ishtar in the spring. The prophet recorded God to say:

Have you seen *this*, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these.” So He brought me into the inner court of the LORD’s house; and there, at the

door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, *were* about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, and they were worshipping the sun toward the east (Ezekiel 8:15-16).

God condemned those who turned their backs on Him and worshiped the sun in a morning Ishtar sunrise service. The Almighty described this practice as a greater abomination. He condemned it! When professing Christians assemble on the ancient festival dedicated to the same pagan goddess, and they face the sun as it rises, does the Eternal consider this to be an acceptable way to honor Him?

Israel had rejected proper worship of the God. They abandoned Passover. In time they came to thing they were honoring God with pagan celebrations and symbols. This is exactly what many professing Christians unwittingly do today. For more on the subject please read our free booklet—*The Truth about Easter*.

God's Passover Lost and Found

Over time, Israel let Passover slip into disuse. They adopted pagan practices of worshiping false gods. Israel was divided into two nations which became known as the House of Israel and the House of Judah (Jer. 5:11). God eventually sent the House of Israel into captivity for their abominations. Their more obedient brothers in the south were spared for a hundred or so years, but in time they too fell to pagan practices. The Passover was again lost.

When King Hezekiah began to reign, he restored worship of the true God. The began by eradicating idolatry and commanded the House of Judah to keep God's Passover. However, the decree was made too late that year to keep the first observance. But according God's mercy found in the decree for a second opportunity, Judah kept Passover 30 days later in the second month (Num. 9:6-14):

And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel. For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to

keep the Passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at the regular time, because a sufficient number of priests had not consecrated themselves, nor had the people gathered together at Jerusalem. And the matter pleased the king and all the assembly. So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem, since they had not done *it* for a long *time* in the *prescribed* manner (2Chronicles 30:1-5).

Hezekiah instituted many reforms during his reign as king of the House of Judah. But after his death God's people again yielded to pagan influence. They slipped back into idolatry and lost sight of God's holy days.

50 years had passed before God's book of the law was rediscovered and brought to the young King Josiah. Josiah had the books read to him and he was deeply moved to repentance. His immediate response was to swiftly cleanse the land of idolatry and restore the holy days:

Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all *his* heart and all *his* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant... Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven... And he broke in pieces the *sacred* pillars and cut down the wooden images, and filled their places with the bones of men... Then the king commanded all the people, saying, "Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as *it is* written in this Book of the Covenant." Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah (2Kings 23:3-21).

When God's people returned to true worship, they rejoiced in the truth they had found and observed Passover. But the pattern of apostasy continued and eventually the Jews lost sight of God's law again. God then took them captive as He did their brethren. After seventy years, the Jewish people were finally released from captivity in Babylon. They returned to their land where they once again revived the observance of Passover. There the people of Judah awaited the coming of the Messiah.

Christ Kept Passover

The patriarch Jacob prophesied that the Messiah would come out of Judah (Gen. 49:10). Therefore, Christ could not have been born in any other place in the world than the tiny territory of Judea. Had He been born in a gentile nation; He would have been raised in a culture that observed the ancient Ishtar rites.

Christ had to be born and live in an environment where He would keep Passover. If the Messiah had not kept Passover He would have sinned, and we would have no Savior. Therefore, Christ was born in Judea where Passover was respected and observed. As Luke recorded:

His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover (Luke 2:41).

Christ kept Passover, and He taught His disciples to continue to keep it. In fact, the last meal He ate was the Passover. Christ told His disciples to prepare for the annual observance that final evening:

Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat" (Luke 22:7-8).

When all was ready, Christ observed God's Passover with His disciples. Luke recorded that:

When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, "With *fervent*

desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:14-16).

This was no ordinary supper. The verse states “when the hour had come.” This was a specific time period when God had commanded Passover to begin—after sunset on the 14th of Nisan (Lev. 23:5). Christ’s sacrifice began at this hour with betrayal by a friend. It continued with an illegal trial, a horrific beating, and it concluded with His crucifixion that afternoon.

The Disciples Kept Passover

Christ taught His apostles how they were to keep Passover, but the Apostle Paul was not among the twelve at the last Paschal meal. He was an apostle of equal rank with the twelve, but called to minister to the gentiles (Acts 13:46-47). Paul was taught through revelation by Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11-12). Christ showed Paul how to keep Passover the same way that He taught the others. The instructions were not given to replace the annual Passover with a weekly communion. They were written as a reminder that believers are to continue to observe Passover, but with new symbols and an added perspective. They were to faithfully keep Passover and the corresponding Feast of Unleavened Bread. While in Ephesus, Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth about 55 A.D. He sent them a letter during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, stating:

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth (1Corinthians 5:6-8).

Paul was not addressing whether the Church should keep this feast or not. Paul was confirming the way they were to keep the celebration. The fact that they were to keep the holy days was a predetermined conclusion.

Paul proceeded to explain more about how to properly keep God's Passover. The Corinthian Church had been confronted with a number of heresies, and Paul finally explained that the Christian Passover was no longer to be celebrated by eating a meal. The apostle wrote:

Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper (1Corinthians 11:20).

Some would come to the ceremony hungry. Others were eating large meals, and a few were actually drinking too much alcohol. Paul reminded the gentile Christians that he was teaching them what Christ had shown him:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; **do this in remembrance of Me.**" In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me" (1Corinthians 11:23-25).

Notice first that the Passover service was not a weekly Sunday morning observance as some presume to celebrate today. Instead, it was a night service kept only once a year. It was the night that Christ was betrayed. They were eating a supper, and that night was the evening of the 14th day of the first month.

That evening Christ changed the symbols from eating a lamb to the eating of bread and drinking a small amount of wine. Therefore, Paul taught exactly what Christ had said. Do this in remembrance of Him. It is a command from the Savior, and we must not do it any time we wish. Christ observed Passover, Paul kept Passover, and we are to observe the same days. Christ kept it as God commanded, and Paul taught the gentiles to practice this observance once a year respectfully and sincerely.

The New Testament Church Kept Passover

God's true Church has always celebrated Passover. After Christ was crucified and resurrected, the entire Church continued this practice. In fact, Passover and the corresponding Feast of Unleavened Bread are an intrinsic part of the Christian's life. Notice how the Holy Spirit inspired the author of the book of Acts to record the time of year coinciding with these days:

And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:3).

Luke, would not record time in terms of Passover and the adjacent Feast of Unleavened Bread unless these days were paramount to the Christian faith. The next verse also references Passover. However, under the influence of the Church of England, the translators of the King James Version of the Bible mistranslated this scripture. They put the word "Easter" into the text where it did not belong. Their translation reads:

When he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people (KJV, Acts 12:4).

A few other translations of the Bible make this same mistake by replacing the original word *Pascha* with the pagan observance of Easter. However, almost all other translations get it right; such as the New King James rendering which reads:

So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover (Acts 12:4).

God's faithful people never kept Easter. Consequently, the word "Easter" would never have been a part of Luke's vocabulary, and it has no legitimate place in this verse. Further, this pagan

holiday entered a corrupt form of Christianity in 300 A.D. Paul and his assistants kept Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Notice how Luke refers to Paul's travels:

But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days (Acts 20:6).

The faithful Church continued to keep Passover, and all legitimate scholars acknowledge this truth. The *Encyclopedia Britannica 11th* edition states:

There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers... The ecclesiastical historian Socrates (Hist. Ecc. v. 22) states, with perfect truth, that neither the Lord 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."

This is doubtless the true statement of the case. The first Christians 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 Christ as the true Paschal Lamb and the first fruits from the dead, continued to be observed, and became the Christian Easter (v. 8, p. 828).

Historians recognize that the early Church faithfully kept Passover. However, the original teachings of Christ and the apostles were eventually corrupted by many. This heresy included dishonoring God's Passover.

How Did Easter Replace Passover?

During the first three centuries after Christ began His Church, the observance of God's Passover dwindled. It was eventually replaced by a form of worship that pagans observed since ancient times. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* is one of

many historical witnesses noting the replacement of God's Passover with a pagan holiday:

The development of the church calendar was a remarkably slow process in Christianity, and equally striking is the fact that so little of the Jewish year originally found a place in Christian celebrations. Where we should have expected a Christian transformation of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succoth, Chanukah, Purim, etc., we find only the retention of the paschal festival. This is due to the fact the church year was largely the creation of the Gentile church, and the background of such notable days as Christmas, Epiphany, Ember, etc. is pagan, not Jewish (1962, R-Z, v. 4, p. 894).

The preserved "paschal festival" mentioned above is a reference to the observance of Easter. Although some believe that Easter is linked to the ancient and enduring Passover, it has no relationship whatsoever. The supposed connection stems from the fact that false Christians attempted to replace God's Passover with the pagan holiday dedicated to their goddess of fertility.

Understanding how these gentile holidays came to replace the original Church celebrations is of great value in determining how we should worship God today. The change from Passover to Easter did not occur from a command of God. It did not evolve over time based on a Biblical principle or Scripture. It did not come from a Christian Church leader. Instead, this radical change followed the same pattern of apostasy set by ancient Israel.

Many decades after Christ established the New Testament Church, new leaders looked upon the old ways as outdated and "Jewish." They took it upon themselves to modify doctrine in order to appeal to various cultures they were attempting to conquer. It wasn't long before presumptuous and unconverted men turned the heathen Easter holiday into a celebration of Christ's resurrection.

The following excerpt from Reader's Digest Association describes how religious leaders adopted the fertility feast and attempted to transform Easter into a celebration of Christ's rebirth:

By a stroke of tactical genius the Church, while intolerant of pagan beliefs, was able to harness the powerful emotions generated by pagan worship. Often, churches were sited where temples had stood before, and many heathen festivals were added to the Christian Calendar. Easter, for instance, a time of sacrifice and rebirth in the Christian year, takes its name from the Norse goddess Eostre, in whose honour rites were held every spring. She in turn was simply a northern version of the Phoenician earth-mother Astarte, goddess of fertility. Easter eggs continue an age old tradition in which the egg is a symbol of birth; and cakes which were eaten to mark the festivals of Astarte and Eoster were the direct ancestors of our hot-cross buns (*The Last Two Million Years*, 1981, p. 215).

The heretical church underwent a metamorphosis as heathen practices and festivals were adopted. Author Jesse Hurlbut described what was a first an obscure change that began in the first century when he wrote:

We name the last generation of the first century, from 68 to 100 A.D., 'The Age of Shadows,' partly because the gloom of the persecution was over the church; but more especially because of all periods in the history, it is the one about which we know the least... For fifty years after St. Paul's life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church fathers we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul (*The Story of the Christian Church*, p. 41).

After 100 AD a church calling itself Christian was very different than the one under the leadership of Christ and the apostles. This church was completely transformed. It was no longer the Church built upon Christ and the prophets. What happened? How did the changes come about?

When church historians discuss this period, they claim to have no records of this time, but they ignore the Bible as a historical

source. The Bible tells us clearly what was occurring during this first century. Not long after Christ's resurrection, false ministers crept into positions of influence and power in the church. God's apostles fought valiantly to keep the true doctrines alive, but as early as 50-51 A.D. a false system was already in the process of being established. As Paul wrote:

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work
(2Thessalonians 2:7).

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6-7).

A false teaching regarding Christ and the law was well-known by 51 A.D. Within two years false ministers were being accepted by some congregations. The Apostle Paul spoke of this matter to the Church at Corinth, stating:

For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it (2Corinthians 11:4).

Paul continued to criticize the destructive work of false teachers that may appear to be legitimate on the outside, but teach wrong doctrine to unsuspecting believers:

For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light (2Corinthians 11:13-14).

Peter was forced to write a similar testimony:

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will

secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed (2Peter 2:1-2).

By 69 A.D., Peter, Paul, and many other Church leaders had been martyred. This created a power vacuum into which ambitious and immoral men rushed to fill the void. One of the last letters in the New Testament was written in the late eighties or early nineties A.D. It addresses this apostate situation in the Church. As Jude wrote:

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 3-4).

As the Church approached the close of the first century, the Bible reveals that true Christians were finding it difficult to hold on to the original teachings of Christ and His apostles. A different gospel was being preached, another Jesus was being propagated, and a different spirit had crept into the Church. God's law was being minimized and the Church was being changed slowly from within.

After a Jewish uprising and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., anti-Jewish sentiment spread throughout the Roman Empire. To avoid persecution, many of the professing Christians began to avoid any thing that seemed Jewish. Further, many had come from a pagan background, and had observed Sunday ceremonies in honor of the sun for decades before this time. Consequently, many began to return to their previous Ishtar worship—claiming to celebrate Christ's resurrection on Sunday.

Contrary to the true meaning of the Biblical phrase, many began to call Sunday "the Lord's Day." This seemed to give Sunday and Easter legitimacy. Many reverted to ancient pagan ways of

worship, but some remained faithful. The Churches ministered by the Apostle John in Asia continued to observe Passover. These faithful Christians are known in the history books as Quartadecimans. As historian J. Van Goudoever explained:

In the second century of our era there were many churches in Asia which kept the fourteenth day (i.e. the full moon) of the first lunar month after the spring equinox as their Passover. They were called 'Quartadecimans,' which means the keepers of the fourteenth day of the lunar month. Among the observers of the quartadeciman festival are counted Polycarp of Smyrna...

In 1940 Bonner published a newly discovered homily on the Passover by the quartadeciman Bishop of Sardes, Melito. In this homily it is told that Chapter xii of the Book of Exodus is first read in Hebrew, and then translated, 'how the sheep is sacrificed and how the people is saved. Therefore hear ye beloved: Thus the mystery of the Passover is new and old, eternal and transient, corruptible and incorruptible, mortal and immortal. It is old according to the Law (of Moses), but new according to the Word; transient according to the world, but eternal through grace; corruptible as to the slaughter of the sheep, incorruptible because of the Life of the Lord; mortal because of the burial of the Lord, immortal because of the Resurrection from the dead.' This Passage makes it incontrovertibly clear that the quartadeciman Christians celebrated 'Passover'. The name and the date of the festival are the same as in the Israelite calendar. The same story is read, the same metaphors are used. Yet it is different with at least a new content... It has been suggested that the quartadeciman Christians commemorated only the Death of the Lord Jesus, and not his Resurrection... it is a homily for a quartadeciman festival, their 'Passover'. This Passover is not the same as Easter (*Biblical Calendars*, pp. 155-157).

Before the Apostle John died, he personally taught a young disciple named Polycarp. By 159 A.D., the observance of Easter had become the predominate observance in the western churches, and

Polycarp traveled to Rome to counteract this pagan practice which had arisen there. Church historian, Eusebius, recorded the following about Polycarp's visit to Rome:

About this time, when Anicetus was at the head of the Roman church, Irenaeus says that Polycarp was yet living, and coming to Rome, had a conference with Anicetus, on a question respecting the day of the passover. He also gives another account of Polycarp, which should be added to what is already related respecting him. The story is taken from the third book of Irenaeus against the heresies, and is as follows: "And Polycarp, a man who had been instructed by the apostles, and had familiar intercourse with many that had seen Christ, and had also been appointed bishop by the apostles in Asia, in the church at Smyrna, whom we also have seen in our youth, for he lived a long time, and to a very advanced age, when, after a glorious and most distinguished martyrdom, he departed this life. He always taught what he had learned from the apostles, what the church had handed down, and what is the only true doctrine... The same Polycarp, coming to Rome, under the episcopate of Anicetus, turned manly from the aforesaid heretics to the church of God, proclaiming the one and only true faith, that he had received from the apostles... (*Ecclesiastical History Eusebius Pamphilus*, p. 130).

Polycrates also noted the continuing observance of Passover by Polycarp and others who remained faithful:

The bishops, however, of Asia, persevering in observing the custom handed down to them from their fathers, were headed by Polycrates. He, indeed, had also set forth the tradition handed down to them, in a letter which he addressed to Victor and the church of Rome. "We," said he, "therefore, observe the genuine day; neither adding thereto nor taking therefrom. For in Asia great lights have fallen asleep which, which shall rise again in the day of the Lord's appearing, in which he will come with glory from heaven, and will raise up all the saints; Philip, one

of the twelve apostles, who sleeps in Hierapolis, his two aged virgin daughters. His other daughter, also, who having lived under the influence of the Holy Ghost, how likewise rests in Ephesus; also Polycarp of Smyrna, both bishop and martyr. Why should I mention Sagaris, bishop and martyr, who rests at Laodicea. Moreover, the blessed Papirius: and Melito, the eunuch, whose walk and conversation was altogether under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who now rests at Sardis, awaiting the episcopate from heaven, when he shall rise from the dead. All these observed the fourteenth day of the passover according to the gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith. Moreover, I, Polycrates, who am the least of all of you, according to the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have followed. For there were seven of my relatives bishops, and I am the eighth; and my relatives always observed the day when the people (i.e. Jews) threw away the leaven” (*Ecclesiastical History Eusebius Pamphilus*, p. 196-197).

Because Rome was the capitol city of the empire, the Roman church began to view itself as the headquarters for all Christianity. However, Rome had long been a hub of pagan activity. Desiring to convert tens of thousands of heathens, the Roman church began to integrate pagan festivals. Over time, the Roman church patterned itself after the civil government. Having set themselves up to be the leaders, the church in Rome began to demand that all the churches in the empire submit to their rule—even when their decisions were unbiblical.

Finally, approximately 40 years after Polycarp’s visit to the capital city, the Roman church was convinced she now had the power to demand that the churches in the east eliminate the observance of Passover. The faithful Polycarp had long since been martyred, but he had trained a man named Polycrates to replace him. This new leader of the churches in the east carried on the fight to hold fast to the faith once delivered to the saints. Consequently, Polycrates also traveled to Rome to contest the new Roman bishop on the issue of Easter or Passover. *The Encyclopedia Britannica 11th edition* makes not of the result of the disagreement:

St Polycarp, the disciple of St John the Evangelist and bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome in 159 to confer with Anicetus, the bishop of that see, on the subject; and urged the tradition, which he had received from the apostle, of observing the fourteenth day. Anicetus, however, declined to admit the Jewish custom in the churches under his jurisdiction, but readily communicated with Polycarp and those who followed it. 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, and 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... The few who afterwards separated themselves from the unity of the church and continued to keep the fourteenth day, were named Quartodecimani, and the dispute itself is known as the Quarto-deciman controversy (v. 8, pp. 828-829).

The famous writer, Irenaeus, persuaded the Roman bishop Victor not to excommunicate all the churches in the east who continued to keep Passover. Still, the controversy raged on for many years. This division over the Easter issue was not solved until it was formally ruled upon by the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine in the council of Nicaea in 325 A.D.

Centuries before this famous council, the prophet Daniel had foretold of a "little horn" that was to come. This little horn symbolized a leader who, while limited in power, would think to change times and seasons (Dan. 7:25). Constantine fulfilled this ancient prophecy of Daniel in part. It was this heretical leader who was responsible for the union of church and state which became the Holy Roman Empire. Constantine realized that because of rampant immorality amongst his subjects the empire was degenerating. On the other hand, within the empire there was an outlawed movement called Christianity whose adherents were highly moral and who

would die before they would abandon their faith. Constantine seized upon the growing Christian faith to unite and strengthen his fracturing kingdom.

The pagan emperor decided to legalize Christianity. He issued the edict of toleration, and throughout the empire believers rejoiced because the new law halted their persecution. But this joy was short lived. Eventually, Constantine outlawed any religion except for Rome's apostate version of the faith.

Regarding the issue of Easter or Passover, Constantine's concern was for unity in his empire. The observance of Passover by some of the churches was a threat to the solidarity he needed to cement his failing empire. Consequently, the emperor called the bishops to Nicaea to resolve this question and end the division.

At this famous council, the emperor ultimately declared that he would outlaw Passover and make Easter an official state and church holiday. After his decision, he wrote a letter to all the churches in the empire explaining his reasoning on the subject. The following is an excerpt from that letter translated in English:

When the question relative to the sacred festival of Easter arose, it was universally thought that it would be convenient that all should keep the feast on one day; ...it was declared particularly unworthy for this, the holiest of all festivals, to follow the custom of the Jews, who have soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded... We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews... in unanimously adopting this mode, we desire, dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews, for it is truly shameful for us to hear them boast that without their direction we could not keep this feast... They do not possess the truth in this Easter question; a Divine Providence wills that this custom should be rectified and regulated in a uniform way; and everyone, I hope, will agree upon this point. As, on the one hand, it is our duty not to have anything in common with the murderers of our Lord; and as, on the other, the custom now followed by the Churches of the West, of the South and of the North, and by some of those of the East, is the most acceptable...

You should consider not only that the number of churches in these provinces make a majority, but also that it is right we should have nothing in common with the Jews (*Found in Eusebius, Vita Const., Lib. iii., 18–20*).

The decision was made to universally adopt the observance of Easter and reject Passover. This law then became binding for all who professed Christianity. From that time forward, those who were a part of the Roman Empire celebrated Easter, and those who held fast to the teaching of Christ and the apostles went underground in order to flee persecution and stay true to their faith.

In this context, it is very important to consider why this decision was made. Was this judgment legitimate? Did it have God’s approval? The emperor’s letter outlines three main reasons for his historic decision.

1. It was convenient for all to keep the same day
2. The majority were already keeping Easter
3. To have nothing in common with the Jews

When it came to the decision regarding Passover, there was no discussion of what the Scriptures said about God’s appointed observance. There was no reference to what Christ practiced and no mention of what the apostles taught. There was certainly no reference to the verse that states that the Jews were given the unique role in all human history to preserve the sacred Scriptures (Rom. 3:1-3).

This apostate church became a part of the Roman Empire. The Roman church leaders influenced the emperor, and he, rather than God, dictated what the church was to believe and practice. The decisions made by this combined church and state government were based on political reasons—not on Scripture.

Faithful Christians Continued to Observe Passover

The council of Nicaea was a defining moment in the history of all western civilization. The growing church which called itself “Christian” became inextricably joined together with the Roman

political system in a prophesied unholy alliance. The “little horn” of Daniel did his work, and the woman (a church in prophetic symbolism) began to ride the beast which was the Holy Roman Empire (Rev. 17:3-6). From this moment in time, the church shifted from being persecuted to being a persecutor!

The apostate system began to kill and imprison true believers who did not comply with the new faith. As Christ had prophesied, they murdered God’s people thinking they were doing God a service (John 16:2). But these attacks by the great, false church did not stop the faithful from worshiping as Christ had taught.

The Savior had promised that His Church would never die out. He said the gates of hell (the grave) would not prevail against it (Mat. 16:18). Therefore, the Church continued to exist, and God’s people persisted in keeping Passover. In his book, *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine*, Karl Baus traced the history of the faithful from the third century through the fifth:

The Quartodeciman minority remained faithful to their previous practice throughout the whole of the third century, and the Novatians in Asia Minor followed them in this. The first canon of the Synod of Aries in 314 imposed the Sunday Easter, and the Council of Nicaea expelled the Quartodecimans from the ecclesiastical community. Thereafter, their numbers continually declined, though even into the fifth century the great Church had to deal with them on occasion (p. 271).

By the 7th century A.D., the Church became visible again. During this time, the mountains in Asia Minor and Armenia hid a people known as Paulicians. Church historian E.H. Broadbent described these people in *The Pilgrim Church*:

The persecutions to which they were subjected, and the systematic destruction of their literature, hide from us all but occasional glimpses of their history, though what remains is sufficient to show that there were in those wide regions of Asia Minor and Armenia, around Mount Ararat and beyond the Euphrates, churches of baptised believers, disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, who kept the teaching

of the Apostles received from Christ and contained in the Scriptures, in an unbroken testimony from the first (p.44).

Fred Coneybeare found and translated the last known writings of the Paulicians. In his book, *The Key of Truth: A Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia*, Coneybeare explained that he had finally understood that these people were a remnant of the original Church:

And now I at last understood who the Paulicians really were. All who had written about them had been misled. All who had written about them had been misled by the calumnies of Photius, Petrus Siculus, and the other Greek writers, who describe them as Manicheans. I now realized that I had stumbled on the monument of a phase of the Christian Church so old and so outworn, that the very memory of it was well-nigh lost...

The Sabbath was perhaps kept, and there were no special Sunday observances... Wednesday and Friday were not kept as fast-days. Of the modern Christmas and of the Annunciation, and of the other feasts connected with the life of Jesus prior to his thirtieth year, this phase of the Church knew nothing. The general impression which the study of it leaves on us is that in it we have before us a form of Church not very remote from the primitive Jewish Christianity of Palestine (pp. vi, cxci).

The Paulicians remained visible until about the 10th century. Following Christ's example, they kept Passover for centuries before they finally became lost to history.

By the 13th century, the Church reappeared in secular history books. This time they were identified as the Waldenses. Calling the annual observance of Passover the "Lord's Supper," *New Schaff Herzog Religious Encyclopedia* notes the existence of a faithful people at that time:

They had apparently determined to celebrate the Lord's Supper only once a year... In France it was apparently the custom, from an early time, to partake of fish as well

as unleavened bread and wine at this celebration (vol. 12, p. 243).

The authors of this respected encyclopedia spoke of Passover that the Waldenses kept as Christ directed with the symbols of unleavened bread and wine.

Historian John Mosheim explained that remnants of this same group were called Passaginians during the years 1100-1200 in Italy. They kept God's Ten Commandments and rejected the theory of the Trinity. Mosheim explained their beliefs, saying:

In Italy and especially in Lombardy, which was the principal seat of heretics, a singular party spread itself among the people denominated, though I cannot say why, the Pasagini or Pasagii, and also the Circumcised... First they taught that the law of Moses ought to be observed under the New Testament with the exception of the sacrifices; and accordingly they practiced circumcision, abstained from the meats prohibited by Moses, observe the sabbath of the Jews, and the like. Secondly, they corrupted the doctrine of three persons in the divine nature, and taught that Christ was only the first and a spotless creature of God (*Mosheim's Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*, Cent, 12, part 2, p. 430).

The Church appeared once again in history books during the 17th century. The London Public Library contains the following excerpt from the notebook of a religious man of the time made an interesting observation:

A complaint is entered on certain people for celebrating the Lord's Supper in the morning, when it is said it should be celebrated in the evening. The name 'church of God' is mentioned twice referring to people holding the Passover in the evening (*Antipaedobaptism in the thought of John Tombes*, pp. 12-13).

The History of the True Church by Andrew Dugger and Clarence Dodd also described people that are considered to be an

era of the Church of God in America observing Passover during the 17th and 18th centuries:

The church in Rhode Island was founded the year 1671, and Ephrata, Pennsylvania, May 1725, with numerous other congregations throughout the eastern states... we find companies in one place called the Church of Christ, in another place the Church of God, while in other communities they were simply called “Sabbatarian Congregations,” but the belief was practically the same. They stood for the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, observing the true Sabbath, keeping the Lord’s Supper yearly on the 14th of the first month with other tenets of faith in harmony with the true faith today (*A History of the True Religion*, pp. 252-253).

Henry Clarke recorded that the Church was still observing Passover 100 years later when He wrote:

Consequently they believe in the seventh-day to be the Sabbath of the Lord—and in water-baptism, by way of immersion, and, generally, in the laying on of hands, as also the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgment; likewise in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper... Some sections of several of those churches, believe in washing one another’s feet, at appointed times... (*A History of the Sabbatarians or Seventh Day Baptists in America*, p. 63).

Throughout history, congregations of the Church of God around the world have faithfully observed Passover. For more on this subject read our book—*Evidence for Eras*. The Eternal Church of God is one of those assemblies committed to keeping this sacred day that memorializes deliverance from bondage through the sacrifice of Christ. We understand that even when Christ returns, it will not be the end of this observance. Instead, His return will herald a time when all people will observe Passover. As God declared:

So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations.

You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance (Exodus 12:14).

Passover is a permanent ordinance. It was not done away when Christ died, and it will not be eliminated at His return. At the last supper, Christ talked longingly with His disciples and He made the following promise:

“With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this and divide *it* among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:15-18).

The Savior spoke to His followers about His return. He explained that He would again keep Passover with them. And yet few have grasped this truth. When Christ came the first time, He did not do away with or change the holy days. He kept them and His followers continue their commemoration. Further, all will keep them in the millennium.

When Christ comes the second time, He promised to take a much more aggressive approach. The prophet Zechariah revealed that Christ will require the nations to observe His commanded feasts. Those who refuse will be penalized:

And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be *that* whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain (Zechariah 14:16-17).

After Christ returns, He will set up His Kingdom. It will be the government of God on earth. He will gather the scattered tribes of Israel from around the world to the land of promise a second time. There he will rebuild Jerusalem. He will construct a magnificent

temple, set a prince over it and require His holy days be observed.

Several chapters in the book of Ezekiel discuss this new temple which will be the headquarters for the government of the entire world. In chapter 45, Ezekiel recorded various offerings that will be given at that time. Ezekiel explained that the prince of the temple will teach people to keep God's Passover. He wrote:

In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten (Ezekiel 45:21).

Christ will enforce observance of His holy days during the millennial rule. Eventually all will come to know God and His ways. Habakkuk wrote these encouraging words:

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

This wonderful time is coming soon. Christ will rule the earth with His saints for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4). During this period, all will come to know God. People will no longer observe Easter. All will keep His sacred commanded ceremony—the Christian Passover. All will come to understand the love of God and the magnitude of the sacrifice that He made for each one of us.

Faced With a Choice

Like the ancient Israelites who fell away, losing awareness of God's holy days, many professing Christians today have lost the knowledge of God's Passover. They do not realize that God will require keeping His Passover in the future, and that His faithful people have always kept this ceremony. Many do not understand that God planned the Passover observance from the very beginning. The scriptures reveal that Christ was actually slain before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). This means that Passover was planned before human existence. Before creating the first man and woman, God set the astronomical calendar in the heavens with a specific purpose in mind:

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years” (Genesis 1:14).

On the fourth day of creation, God set the great astronomical bodies of the sun and moon in their respective orbits for “signs and seasons.” The word “sign” is *oth* in the Hebrew and means a “signal, beacon, or mark” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, H226). *Oth* is the same word God used when He stated that His Sabbaths are a “sign” between Him and us (Exo. 31:13). The Eternal also created the Sabbath on the seventh day, and that weekly celebration continues to this day. The other word that God used to describe His purpose for placing the sun and moon in their respective positions is “seasons.” This word is *moed* in the Hebrew, and it literally means “an *appointment*, that is, a fixed *time* or season; specifically a *festival*; conventionally a *year*; by implication, an *assembly* (as convened for a definite purpose); technically the *congregation*; by extension, the *place of meeting*” (*Strong’s*, H4150).

This truth gives us enormous insight. God actually set the astronomical calendar in motion before He created man. These vast bodies serve as a lunar-solar calendar to signal the times in which His holy days are to be observed. This is of great significance! It means that God planned to atone for man’s sin before the foundation of the world. Therefore, He set the Passover, picturing His atoning death, in the astronomical calendar to be observed on the first full moon of the first month of every year as a memorial.

God later revealed this celebration to His people when He freed them from their bondage in Egypt. When God’s people were faithful to Him, they kept Passover. When they fell away from God, they celebrated Easter.

In the New Testament, Christ kept Passover as an example for us to follow (Luke 22:8). His apostles observed it, and Paul taught the gentiles to keep it (1Cor. 5:7). Further, the Church of God has faithfully kept this ordinance. Today there exists many congregations of the true Church of God around the world keeping the Commandments and holy days instead of the traditions of men.

Finally, when Christ returns, He will teach all mankind to observe His holy days.

A Decision to Make

What about you, and what about now? What will you do with the knowledge that you have been given? Your decision is of the utmost importance. To be a son or daughter of God, the individual must keep His Passover. John records Christ's words stating the following:

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53).

When the Savior made this statement, He did not mean to take communion every Sunday as many churches do. Christ never did that, neither did the apostles. Christ's words mean that we must keep Passover as He commanded. Furthermore, His words mean we must take Him inside us as the Passover symbols picture. We must surrender our will to His and allow His way of life to be in us (Gal. 2:19-20). This is the true meaning of Passover. Knowing this, everyone has a choice to make. Are you going to celebrate Easter or will you obey the Creator and observe Passover?

Some will argue that they do not believe they are worshiping false gods when they celebrate Easter. They believe that they can worship Christ using these Pagan symbols and it makes no difference to God. Before you make such an assumption, reflect on and carefully weigh the example of Aaron and the golden calf. For hundreds of years Israel had been in bondage in Egypt. They had lost the knowledge of God's way, but became very familiar with the worship of false gods. Shortly after their deliverance, when Moses had gone up the mountain for a time, the people demanded a visible god to worship. Aaron relented and instructed them to make a calf likened to Apis—the Egyptian bull god. Did Israel believe they were worshiping a false god? Absolutely not! They believed that it was okay to use heathen symbols to worship the true God. As Moses wrote:

So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD” (Exodus 32:5).

Aaron proclaimed a feast to the LORD using the familiar pagan symbol of a golden calf. He tried to worship the true God with manmade and ungodly symbols. Many people hold a similar belief today. They think that we can honor God with the pagan symbols of bunnies, eggs, and lilies? In the case of the ancient Israelites, notice God’s reaction:

And the LORD said to Moses, “Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’ “And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them (Exodus 32:7-10).

Moses was also furious when he saw the idol they had made. “Then he took the calf which they had made, burned *it* in the fire, and ground *it* to powder; and he scattered *it* on the water and made the children of Israel drink *it*” (Exo. 32:20). After 3,000 rebellious men were killed by the Levites, Moses went to God and petitioned His forgiveness, saying:

Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold (Exodus 32:31).

The Israelites had committed “a great sin” by attempting to use false symbols to worship the true God. Celebrating a feast to God with Easter symbols is also a great sin! If Moses did not intercede, God would have destroyed the people for their sin.

When God brought the people into the Promised Land, the land was filled with idolatry including the worship of the sun god

and fertility goddess Ashtoreth. God told Israel to destroy all evidence of such worship. He also gave His people a warning. He commanded them to not accept any of the ways that these people worshiped their gods. Moses records God's warning:

When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, 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 (Deuteronomy 12:29-31).

Israel was not to adopt pagan practices of worship. God did not consider it acceptable to worship Him using the same symbols or methods of the heathen. He did not tolerate such worship. He hated it! God's words echo down through the ages as He thundered His warning to Israel and all of humanity, "You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way." God does not approve of pagan symbolism in any shape or form! If we use false methods of worship, it will pervert our perspective of God. Over time we will lose sight of His holiness. Israel forgot God's command and began to use the symbols of Ashtoreth. God sent them into captivity for doing so, and He will send all professing Christians into captivity for the same abominable practices. So important is this issue that your salvation is at stake. When Christ returns, He will have to address a group of people who believe they are Christians, but will be absolutely shocked to find they are not! The Messiah stated:

Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:22-23).

These will be individuals who call Jesus their Lord. Many will have even preached a message about Him, but it is not the gospel Christ preached. They will have done many works using His name, and yet He tells them to “depart from Me.” Why? Haven’t they accepted Him as their Savior? Isn’t that all we have to do?

The reason Christ gives is that they “practice lawlessness.” This means they are people who do not obey God’s law. They believe they are worshiping Christ, but He states they are doing so in vain. They are worshiping Him according to what they think, and what they feel, not according to His command.

Grasp the eternal lesson from these verses. We cannot worship God in any way that we desire. We cannot worship the true God with ancient fertility symbols. We can only worship Him the way that He dictates. Do not make the mistake that so many have made. Christ says:

In vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9).

Easter with its practices and symbols is nothing more than the commandments of men. To celebrate Easter is to worship God in vain. Realize that the world we live in is deceived. The Apostle John wrote that Satan deceives the whole world (Rev. 12:9). Yet the deceived person does not know he or she is deceived. Millions of professing Christians do not recognize the truth regarding the question of Easter or Passover. They have been taught they don’t have to do what God commanded. Instead, they believe they can worship God any way they desire as long as they have love in their heart. This is an enormous lie!

If we desire to worship the God of the Bible, and attempt to do so by celebrating Easter, we are deceived. The name, symbols, and traditions of Easter are a dead giveaway.

From Christ’s Perspective

Consider how Christ views the celebration of Easter. Christ is the Passover (1Cor. 5:7-8). He endured the worst death a person has ever experienced. He was betrayed by a friend, kept awake all night enduring an illegal trial, physically abused, spit upon,

humiliated, and widely rejected.

Christ was then beaten by a professional whose job it was to take the victim to the very point of death, then revive him, and beat him again. Finally, he was nailed to a stake and left to writhe in agony for hours.

How do you think Christ feels after making this ultimate sacrifice for all mankind, only to see people making a game out of it with colored eggs, chocolate bunnies, and the worship of a fertility goddess? Don't be a part of such practices. Instead come out of the pagan whore that dates back to the ancient Babylonian mystery religion. As Christ says to those at the end of the age:

Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities (Revelation 18:4-5).

Make the choice to obey God, instead of the teachings and traditions of men. Choose to come out of pagan practices and begin to worship God in spirit and truth. Keep God's Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread and not Easter. Commemorate the profound meaning of Christ's death, and join the faithful throughout the ages who all share the same hope of the coming Kingdom of God.

The Eternal Church of God offers a variety of books, booklets, articles, audio, and video to help people better understand the Bible. Some of the printed material available includes:

The Truth about Mardi Gras, Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, and Lent

The Magnificent Meaning of God's Holy Days

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

The Day of Christ's Resurrection

The Truth about Halloween

The Truth about Christmas

The Truth about Heaven

The Truth about Tithing

The Truth about Easter

What it Means to be Born Again

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