

Why Do We Call it Easter?

Did you ever wonder why the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord is called “Easter?” Me, too. So I thought it proper to do some research on the subject. You can find this information for yourself, especially if you have access to the internet. Just put the word “Easter” in a search page, and you’ll find a lot of information – perhaps more than you care to know.

Since dictionaries and encyclopedias are reflections of the culture, they have a tendency to change with time. I decided to go back just a little in time so as to perhaps get a more accurate and historical perspective. The following excerpt is from the 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica:

EASTER, *the annual festival observed throughout Christendom in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The name Easter (Ger. Ostern), like the names of the days of the week, is a survival from the old Teutonic mythology. According to Bede (De Temp. Rat. c. xv.) It is derived from Eostre, or Ostdra, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, to whom the month answering to our April, and called Eostur-monath, was dedicated.*

There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers. The sanctity of special times was an idea absent from the minds of the first Christians

The ecclesiastical historian Socrates (Hist. Eccl. V. 22) states, with perfect truth, that neither the Lord nor his apostles enjoined the keeping of this or any other festival. He says: The apostles had no thought of appointing festival days, but of promoting a life of blamelessness and piety; 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.

So, first of all, the name of the holiday comes from paganism, and not Christianity. It came from a festival of worship to the goddess of spring, or fertility. Easter baskets have nothing to do with Christianity, nor do Easter eggs, Easter bunnies, Easter candles, or Easter bonnets. All these are pagan in origin, and have more to do with fertility and commerce than with Christianity.

Upon further investigation, you may find that the origin of the name goes back even farther than the Teutonic goddess. There is good historical evidence to suggest that it goes all the way back to Babel. Noah had a very intelligent but ungodly grandson by the name of Nimrod (Gen. 10:6-10), who was a builder of cities such as Babel, Asshur, Nineveh (remember Jonah?), and Calah. These cities were all involved in pagan worship, and far removed from spiritual truth. Nimrod was the founder of the Babylonian religion and, after his death, became deified as a god. His wife (Queen Samiramis) became equally popular as a goddess. Babel became Babylon, a name used often in scripture. The construction of a tower was eventually undertaken to reach to heaven but, as we know, God confused the languages and dispersed the people.

Now Nimrod and Samiramis were given different names by the different groups of dispersed people, since they no longer spoke the same language. But they continued their religion, derived from Babylon:

Jeremiah 51:6-7 Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this [is] the time of the LORD'S vengeance; he will render unto her a recompence. Babylon [hath been] a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad.

As time went on Samiramis, under different names, became more deified than Nimrod. We find, in early pagan writings, the names of Ishtar, Astarte, Ashtaroth, and Eastre. A good case can be made for the “Queen of Heaven” being identified as this goddess.

Judges 2:13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

*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 unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger.*

*I Samuel 12:10 And they cried unto the LORD, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD, and have served Baalim and **Ashtaroth**: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee.*

So the name of our holiday is not Christian at all, but pagan in origin. Perhaps we should be saying “Happy Ashtaroth” instead of “Happy Easter.” Maybe that would make us think about it a little.

How should the church celebrate Easter?

Gal 4: 9-11 *But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.*

As we have shown, there is no evidence of early Christian celebration of such a holiday. The Jews celebrated the Passover, but gentiles did not, since Paul said:

I Cor 5:7 *For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:*

Gentile Christians have nothing to gain with a celebration of the Jewish Passover or the pagan Easter. We were instructed not to observe days and times.

We show the Lord's death and resurrection in his Supper:

I Cor 11:23 – 25 *For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the [same] night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake [it], and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also [he took] the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink [it], in remembrance of me.*

If Easter is not of biblical origin, then it is a tradition of men:

Mark 7:6 – 8 *He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with [their] lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching [for] doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, [as] the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.*

Colossians 3:1 *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

The day we celebrate Easter is also a tradition of men, established by the Catholic Council of Nicea, called by the Roman Emperor Constantine, in 325AD. Because of that council, Easter is always celebrated on Sunday, even though that may not be three days after the preparation day, the day the Passover lamb was killed. The Lord was crucified on the day of temple preparation of the paschal lamb:

Luke 23:54 *And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.*

On that day, the Passover lamb was killed, and on that day the lamb of God was slain for our sins. That day was the fourteenth day of the month Abib (also called Nisan), when passover was to occur.

Leviticus 23:5 *In the fourteenth [day] of the first month at even [is] the LORD'S passover.*

Now things get a little fuzzy here, but this is reckoned from the Jewish calendar. The months began on the new moon, so the 14th day of the month would be immediately after the full moon, but those days change every year. Complicating the calculation is the fact that both the Jewish calendar and the Western calendar have changed since then (Julian to Gregorian). We can safely say, however, that if we were to be interested in celebrating the resurrection of Christ on the correct day, it would be the third day after the 14th day of Abib, or Abib 17th. This could occur on any day of the week since the new moon takes place on different days of the week to start the month. We do know from scripture that Christ was risen by morning of the first day of the week in the particular year that Christ was crucified. It would seem, however, that it might be different for other years.

Now listen closely. We know that Christ himself said he was to spend three days and three nights in the earth:

Matthew 12:40 *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

If that is true, he was not crucified on Friday. He was crucified on Wednesday. So perhaps our Good Friday celebrations are the traditions of men as well? But, you may say, what about the Sabbath? The Jewish Sabbath is Saturday.

Well, the REGULAR Jewish Sabbath is Saturday, but there are a lot of other Sabbaths.

John 19:31 *The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and [that] they might be taken away.*

That Sabbath day was not one of the regular Sabbath days, but was a “high day.” What day was that? It was the day after the preparation (the sacrifice) of the lamb of God.

Exodus 12: 16 – 17 *And in the first day [there shall be] an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save [that] which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. And ye shall observe [the feast of] unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever.*

Which day was to be observed as a Sabbath, the day of no work? It was the day of deliverance, the day after the death angel passed over – the day after the lamb was slain. On this day they were to observe the feast, and they were to keep observing it forever. We know that Christ was crucified, as the lamb of God, on the preparation day (the day the lamb was killed in the evening). We know the next day was to be observed as a Sabbath forever (a high day). We know that Christ said he was to be in the tomb three days and three nights. He went into the tomb on Wednesday evening, when the Passover lamb was to be killed, and he came out Saturday evening, three days and three nights later.

You say, “Wait a minute, I’ve got you now. We know he came out Sunday morning.” Well, let’s think a minute. What we know is that he was ALREADY out on Sunday morning.

Matthew 28:1 *In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first [day] of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.*

There are a couple of issues here. First, the Jewish Sabbath ends in the evening. The Jewish day goes from one evening to the next evening (remember Genesis – “the evening and the morning were the first day?”) What this tells us is that BEFORE daylight on Sunday, Christ was risen. Secondly, the angel does not roll back the stone to let Christ out. He was ALREADY risen. That’s what he told the women.

Matthew 28:6 *He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.*

We know from other scriptures that before daylight, the Lord was risen.

Luke 24:1 *Now upon the first [day] of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain [others] with them.*

John 20:1 *The first [day] of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.*

So Christ is risen and gone from the grave by daylight on Sunday. The sacrifice is complete. The grave has been conquered. Sin is defeated.

So we have seen the origin of Easter, we have seen the timing of the crucifixion, and we have seen our responsibility to Christ.

It would appear then, that we are celebrating a pagan holiday, we are celebrating it at the wrong time, and we are celebrating it for the wrong reason. We should recognize that Christ arose from the dead for our justification, gaining the victory over death and the grave, so that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. Let’s not get too entangled with pagan celebrations and destroy what the Lord has done. It is much more important to understand the savior than to understand all the dates and times in the Bible. It does, however, give one cause to ponder.

Have you trusted this lamb of God for your salvation? Have you turned to Him in repentance and faith to receive a free pardon from sin?

Resurrection means nothing until salvation is secure.

Matthew 11:28 *Come unto me, all [ye] that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Colossians 3:1 *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

Christ is risen. What about you?

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