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**CHRISTIANS WHO DON'T CELEBRATE EASTER.
WHAT DO THEY KNOW?**

Mar 29, 2007 by Jerold Aust

Easter is the most important holiday for hundreds of millions of believers around the world. Yet thousands of Christians don't observe it. Do they know something that others don't?

If you want to be a true disciple of Christ Jesus, you need to carefully examine whether your beliefs agree with the Bible.

Every spring, the anticipation and excitement of Easter is electrifying for many people. Churches prepare elaborate Easter programs that illustrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Parents take time to color Easter eggs and hide them so their children can hunt for them.

It's typical for TV movies this time of year to depict Easter as an enjoyable occasion of renewed happiness. Television advertisements and commercial

[If Easter isn't found in the Bible, where exactly did it come from? And just exactly what does the name Easter mean?](#)

businesses also get very involved with Easter as they offer colorful Easter baskets, Easter costumes and chocolate rabbits to celebrate this great religious event.

Many churches advertise outdoor Easter sunrise services, with any and all invited. Weather permitting, the Easter celebration is visually reinforced by watching the sun rise in the east.

But what do bunnies and colored eggs have to do with Jesus' resurrection?

And if this celebration is so important, why didn't Jesus teach His apostles and the early Church to observe it? The books of the New Testament were written over a span of decades after Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, yet nowhere do we see so much as a hint of any kind of Easter celebration.

So where exactly did Easter and its customs come from? Why do hundreds of millions of people celebrate the holiday today?

Can we find Easter in the Bible?

Easter is considered the most important religious festival in today's Christianity. "The Easter feast has been and still is regarded as the greatest in the Christian church, since it commemorates the most important event in the life of its Founder" (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1986, Vol. 2, "Easter"). Given its popularity, one would think that surely this observance is found in God's Word.

Some cite [Acts 12:4](#) as authority for celebrating Easter. But there's a problem in that Easter isn't really mentioned there at all. The King James Bible translators substituted "Easter" for the Greek word *Pascha*, which means "Passover." "The word [Easter] does not properly occur in Scripture, although [the King James Version] has it in [Acts 12:4](#) where it stands for Passover, as it is rightly rendered in RV" (ibid.).

The vast majority of Bible translations recognize this error in the King James Version and rightly translate the word as "Passover" in [Acts 12:4](#). The truth is, "there is no trace of Easter celebration in the [New Testament]" (ibid.)

Where did *Easter* come from?

If Easter isn't found in the Bible, where exactly did it come from? And just exactly what does the name *Easter* mean?

It's important to review credible historical sources to understand the celebration's true history. For example, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* tells us: "At Easter, popular customs reflect many ancient pagan survivals—in this instance, connected with spring fertility rites, such as the symbols of the Easter egg and the Easter hare or rabbit" (15th edition, Macropaedia, Vol. 4, p. 605, "Church Year"). In the ancient world of the Middle East, people were far more connected to the land and cycles of nature than we are today. They depended on the land's fertility and crops to survive. Spring, when fertility returned to the land after the long

desolation of winter, was a much-anticipated and welcomed time for them. Many peoples celebrated the coming of spring with celebrations and worship of their gods and goddesses, particularly those associated with fertility. Among such deities were Baal and Astarte or Ashtoreth, mentioned and condemned frequently in the Bible, whose worship typically included ritual sex to promote fertility throughout the land.

It was only natural to the peoples of the ancient Middle East to incorporate symbols of fertility—such as eggs and rabbits, which reproduce in great numbers—into those pagan celebrations for their gods. As *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* notes above, Easter eggs and the Easter rabbit are simply a continuation of these ancient spring fertility rites.

Nineteenth-century Scottish Protestant clergyman Alexander Hislop's work *The Two Babylons* is still considered a definitive work on pagan customs that survive in today's religious practices.

On Easter, he wrote: "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, whose name, as pronounced by the people of Nineveh, was evidently identical with that now in common use in this country. That name, as found by [early archaeologist Sir Austen Henry] Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar" (1959, p. 103).

The name *Easter*, then, comes not from the Bible. Instead its roots go far back to the ancient pre-Christian Mesopotamian goddess *Ishtar*, known in the Bible as Astarte or Ashtoreth.

Ancient resurrection celebrations

What did worship of this goddess Ishtar involve? "Temples to Ishtar had many priestesses, or sacred prostitutes, who symbolically acted out the fertility rites of the cycle of nature. Ishtar has been identified with the Phoenician Astarte, the Semitic Ashtoreth, and the Sumerian Inanna. Strong similarities also exist between Ishtar and the Egyptian Isis, the Greek Aphrodite, and the Roman Venus.

"Associated with Ishtar was the young god Tammuz [mentioned in [Ezekiel 8:14](#)], considered both divine and mortal . . . In Babylonian mythology Tammuz died annually and was reborn year after year, representing the yearly cycle of the seasons and the crops. This pagan belief later was identified with the pagan gods Baal and Anat in Canaan " (*Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1995, "Gods, Pagan," p. 509).

Alan Watts, expert in comparative religion, wrote: "It would be tedious to describe in detail all that has been handed down to us about the various rites of Tammuz . . . and many others . . . But their universal theme—the drama of death and resurrection—makes them the forerunners of the Christian Easter, and thus the first 'Easter services.' As we go on to describe the Christian observance of Easter we shall see how many of its customs and ceremonies resemble these former rites" (*Easter: Its Story and Meaning*, 1950, p. 58).

He goes on to explain how such practices as fasting during Lent, erecting an image of the deity in the temple sanctuary, singing hymns of mourning, lighting candles and nighttime services before Easter morning originated with ancient idolatrous practices (pp. 59-62).

Another author, Sir James Frazer (1854-1941), knighted for his contributions to our understanding of ancient religions, describes the culmination of the ancient idolatrous worship this way: "The sorrow of the worshippers was turned to joy . . . The tomb was opened: the god had risen from the dead; and as the priest touched the lips of the weeping mourners with balm, he softly whispered in their ears the glad tidings of salvation.

"The resurrection of the god was hailed by his disciples as a promise that they too would issue triumphant from the corruption of the grave. On the morrow . . . the divine resurrection was celebrated with a wild outburst of glee. At Rome, and probably elsewhere, the celebration took the form of a carnival" (*The Golden Bough*, 1993, p. 350).

A new celebration with ancient idolatrous roots

In various forms, worship of this god under the names Tammuz, Adonis and Attis, among others, spread from the outer reaches of the Roman Empire to Rome itself. There a truly remarkable development took place: Early Catholic Church leaders merged customs and practices associated with this earlier "resurrected" god and spring fertility celebrations and applied them to the resurrected Son of God.

The customs of the ancient fertility and resurrection

[If Jesus were in the flesh today, would He](#)

celebrations weren't the only ones morphed into a new

[celebrate Easter? The simple answer is No.](#)

"Christian" celebration, but they are among the most obvious. After all, many historians readily admit the origin of the name *Easter* and the ancient fertility symbolism of rabbits and decorated eggs (which you can verify yourself in almost any encyclopedia).

Frazer observes: "When we reflect how often the Church has skilfully contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith on the old stock of paganism, we may surmise that the Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis" (p. 345).

He goes on to note that the desire to bring heathens into the Catholic Church without forcing them to surrender their idolatrous celebrations "may have led the ecclesiastical authorities to assimilate the Easter festival of the death and resurrection of their Lord to the festival of the death and resurrection of another Asiatic god which fell at the same season . . . the Church may have consciously adapted the new festival [of Easter] to its heathen predecessor for the sake of winning souls to Christ" (p. 359).

Surprisingly, the celebration of Easter didn't finally win out until A.D. 325, nearly 300 years after Jesus Christ's death and resurrection!

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains in the section titled "The

Liturgical Year," "At the Council of Nicaea in 325, all the Churches agreed that Easter . . . should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon . . . after the vernal equinox" (1995, p. 332).

Up until this time, many believers had continued to commemorate Jesus' death through the biblical Passover as Jesus and the apostles had instructed ([Luke 22:19-20](#); [1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#)). Now, however, with the power of the Roman Empire behind it, the Catholic Church enforced its preference for Easter. Those who wished to continue to observe the biblical Passover had to go underground to avoid persecution.

Would Jesus Christ celebrate Easter?

The record of the New Testament is clear: The faithful members of the early Church continued to observe all that the apostles taught them, as they were taught by Jesus Christ. The record of history is equally clear: In later centuries new customs, practices and doctrines were introduced that were quite foreign to the original Christians, forming a new "Christianity" they would scarcely recognize. So a key question is, should a Christian follow what Jesus taught or what later religious teachers taught?

It's always a good idea to ask the question, *what would Jesus do?*

If Jesus were in the flesh today, would He celebrate Easter? The simple answer is *No*. He does not change. "Jesus Christ is *the same, yesterday, today, and forever*," as [Hebrews 13:8](#) tells us (emphasis added throughout). Jesus never observed Easter, never sanctioned it and never taught His disciples to celebrate it. Nor did the apostles teach the Church to do so.

Today, Jesus would observe the biblical Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread as Scripture teaches and as He practiced and taught ([John 13:15-17](#); [1 Corinthians 5:7-8](#)). In fact, He specifically said that He anticipated observing the Passover with His true followers "in My Father's kingdom" after His return ([Matthew 26:26-29](#)).

The feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread have deep meaning to Christ's true disciples. They reveal aspects of God's plan for the salvation of humanity—commemorating the fact that Jesus died for us and lives in us and for us ([1 Corinthians 11:26](#); [Galatians 2:20](#); [Colossians 3:3-4](#)).

Should you observe Easter?

If you want to be a true disciple of Christ Jesus, you need to carefully examine whether your beliefs agree with the Bible. It is not acceptable to God to merely assume that He approves of or accepts non-biblical celebrations, regardless of whether they are done for proper motives.

The fact is that God says, "Learn not the way of the heathen"—those who don't know God's truth ([Jeremiah 10:2](#), King James Version).

His Word gives us explicit instructions regarding worshiping Him with practices adopted from pagan idolatry: "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*" ([Deuteronomy 12:30-32](#)).

Jesus Christ now commands everyone to repent of following all man-made religious traditions: "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" ([Acts 17:30](#); compare [Matthew 15:3](#)).

Will you honor Christ's lifesaving instructions so that God can bless you? He said: "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor" ([John 12:26](#)).

God wants you and me to obey His life-giving Word. When we do, we can serve Christ as His ambassadors on earth. There is no greater calling on earth and throughout time. For your ongoing happiness and security, turn to God now and seek His complete and perfect way.

Why Some Christians Don't Observe Easter

Remarkably, there are thousands of Christians who don't celebrate Easter, yet they firmly believe in Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, and His resurrection. Why have they made this choice? Here they explain in their own words:

An office manager from Australia wrote:

"I don't observe Easter because it has nothing to do with Christ, His sacrifice or the Bible. It derives its origins from pagan celebrations and rituals God tells us not to learn: 'Learn not the way of the heathen' ([Jeremiah 10:2](#), KJV).

"God does not want us to learn the way of the heathen lest we start to do as the heathen do. What do the Easter bunny and colored eggs have to do with Christ and His dying for the sins of the world and being resurrected on the third day? They don't have anything to do with it at all. Christianity has adopted pagan festivals and called them Christian and, in doing so, has disobeyed God."

—A.H., Australia

A California high school principal shared the reasons he doesn't celebrate Easter:

"My wife and I, many years ago, discovered that Easter is a pagan custom and has nothing to do with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter was never observed by the early New Testament Church. Once we found out about its pagan origin, we stopped observing it.

"The Easter bunny, Easter eggs, Easter parade and all the customs of this holiday are not in the Bible and should not be observed. We do believe, however, in the New Testament Passover, as observed by the New Testament Church, and directed by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, and we also believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

—D.S., California

An editor gave her feelings about Easter:

"As a wife and mother, I don't observe Easter because I realize that dressing up for Easter Sunday service in the latest fashion, sometimes including a hat, for

myself and children has absolutely nothing to do with the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, it appears to make a mockery of it. "And to allow and teach youngsters to hide and hunt colored eggs and have stuffed rabbits or bunnies is not instructing them in the right principles God expects them to live by. There are so many marvelous godly principles that do that. I do not desire to mislead or deceive them."

—M.A., Texas

A university professor from Georgia gave several reasons that Easter shouldn't be celebrated:

"The only time the term Easter is mentioned in the Bible, it is a mistranslation of the godly ordained Passover ([Acts 12:4](#)). The term *Easter* is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Its observance is not commanded elsewhere in the Bible and yet many other days are commanded and described as being kept. "The events surrounding Christ's resurrection do not indicate that Christ rose at sunrise or even close to it. For example, John indicates that by the time Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb it was still dark—Christ had already risen. The etymology of the term *Easter* is traceable back to a false god of fertility and not the Bible."

P.A., Georgia

A North Carolina businessman offered his reasons as to why he doesn't participate in the Easter celebration:

"First of all, the holiday or celebration of Easter by the world's Christian community, is not an event, a celebration, or a worship service that can be found anywhere in the Bible. In fact, the name *Easter* is really the name of an ancient pagan goddess that has roots from ancient Babylonian times dating before the birth of Christ.

"Secondly, there is no teaching in the New Testament by either Christ or His apostles about Easter or any related specifics. The practice and observance of Easter came into the Church of Rome well after all the apostles were dead and the

church that Christ established had been scattered.

"Thirdly, if Christ wanted us to observe and honor His resurrection through Easter, why didn't He give specific instructions to His disciples and Church leaders? You can't find any teaching anywhere in the New Testament to observe or honor His resurrection. There's no festival or ceremonies given or outlined.

"However, there are plenty of instructions and examples of Christ teaching us to honor, remember and observe His death by what we call the Passover. The Bible clearly gives such evidence of Christ being the Passover and the symbolism of this event. Then, following His death, the New Testament apostles and Church continued with the observance of the Passover, not Easter."

—*J.B., North Carolina*

A Texas businessman and farmer shared his view:

"There is no biblical command to observe Easter. Conversely, there is a command to memorialize Christ's death and sacrifice for all of mankind. The biblical command to keep the symbols of His sacrifice was given by Jesus himself and reiterated by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11.

"To get wrapped up in the symbols of Easter—bunnies, eggs, etc.—is a throwback to ancient pagan gods of fertility, as any good encyclopedia will clearly show. In several places, the Scriptures teach us to not learn the way of the heathen or to partake in the rudiments of this world."

—*D.B., Texas*