

TEEN Mini-Study

The Surprising Origin of Easter

[Originally from Youth Magazine — April 1985 — this copy edited by
the Bible Fund editors, April 2020]

Instructions: The format of these mini studies is similar to that of the Bible On-Line Study Course. Look up and read in your Bible the scripture references given in answer to the questions. Comments following the questions further explain the scriptures just read. That's all there is to it! (These studies are based on the King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise stated.)

What do you think of when someone mentions Easter — brightly colored eggs, bunny rabbits, hot cross buns, Easter parades and sunrise services°

Have you ever wondered whether these traditional customs of Easter have any logical connection *with the* resurrection of Jesus Christ°

Few have ever thought about why they believe what they do — why they follow the customs they do or where those customs came from. Most grow up accepting the customs and beliefs of society without question.

Just how and when did Easter originate? Does it really celebrate the resurrection of Christ? Was Christ even resurrected on a Sunday morning° Did the original apostles, whom Jesus taught personally, celebrate Easter°

Before reading further for the surprising answers, be sure to get your Bible, a pen or pencil and some paper. Reading and then writing out the verses that answer each question will help you remember what you are learning. Now let's begin this eye-opening study.

1. It is commonly believed that the Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition began with the apostles of the New Testament Church. What do we find in the Bible about the observance of Easter° Acts 12:4, Authorized Version (KJV).

This is the only verse in the Authorized or King James Version of the Bible where the word *Easier* is mentioned. However, as any authority of the Greek language knows, it is a mistranslation.

The original Greek word here is *pasclia*, meaning Passover. In every other place in the New Testament where *pmefia* is used, it is always translated Passover. You can find examples of this in Matthew 26:2, 17-19; Mark 14:12 and 1 Corinthians 5:7.

Virtually all other translations of the Bible correctly render *pascha* as Passover in Acts 12:4.

The Revised Authorized Version (which is also called the New King James Version), for example, has “...intending to bring him before the people after Passover.”

Besides this mistranslation, you will find absolutely no biblical record of Christ's apostles and later true Christians ever observing Easter.

According to an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “There is no indication of the observance of the Easter Festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers ... The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish [that is, *God's* — Leviticus 23:1-2] festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed” (Easter, 11th edition).

2. Did Christ instruct His apostles to observe His resurrection or, rather, to commemorate the date of His death? Luke 22:8, 13-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

The evening before His crucifixion, Jesus established the New Testament Passover for Christians.

He introduced the new symbols of unleavened bread and wine in place of the slaying of the lamb. Then He commanded His true followers down through the ages, “This do ... in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Another reason why Easter Sunday was not celebrated by the early Christian Church concerns inconsistencies in the tradition that Christ was resurrected on a Sunday morning.

3. What did Jesus say about the length of time He would be in the grave? Matthew 12:39-40; Mark 8:31. Did He fulfill that sign “as He said”? Matthew 28:6.

The only sign Christ gave to prove He was the Messiah was the length of time He would be dead and buried — a period of three days and three nights, or 72 hours.

But according to the Easter tradition, Christ was crucified on Friday afternoon and resurrected Sunday morning — a period of only a day and a half, or 36 hours!

Since Christ did fulfill His sign (Matthew 28:6), the Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition is just *that* — a tradition and not a fact!

But what about the various customs and traditions associated with Easter? Most assume that the customs of this most-important religious holiday of the Western world came from Christian

Shocking as it may sound, Easter and its customs date long before the birth of Jesus. Easter was observed nearly 2,000 years before the beginning of the Christian era!

Easter is actually a slightly changed English spelling of the name of the ancient Assyrian goddess *Islilar*. It was pronounced by the Assyrians as we pronounce Easter today.

The New Funk & Wagnalls Encyclopedia (article “Easter”) tells us *the t* Easter “embodies traditions of the ancient time antedating the rise of Christianity . . . [it] was celebrated on the day of the vernal equinox [about March 21, the beginning of spring in the Northern Hemisphere], and traditions associated with the festival swive in the familiar Easter bunny . . . and in the equally familiar colored Easter eggs originally painted with bright pastel colors to represent the sunlight of spring. Such festivals [as Easter], and the myths and legends which explain their origin, abound in ancient religions.”

Encyclopedias and other reference works show that the traditions associated with Easter, such as colored eggs, hot cross buns, the Easter bunny and attending sunrise services are pre-Christian

4. A traditional custom of Easter today is to attend an Easter sunrise service. Does the prophet Ezekiel refer to such a practice occurring during his time — more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus? Ezekiel 8:16.

Does God approve of this custom? Verses 5, 7.

It was an ancient heathen custom to gather at sunrise and have a ceremony to worship the rising

Such services were being observed in Ezekiel’s day by the nation of Judah, which had borrowed some of the heathen customs, in spite of God’s command not to follow pagan practices in worshipping Him!

5. Many who understand that Easter evolved from pagan customs originally honoring a pagan goddess will say they observe it to honor Christ. But what does God warn about learning and following the customs and traditions of the heathen? Deuteronomy 12:29-31 ; Jeremiah 10:2.

God plainly commands His people not to adopt the practices of pagan nations. God will not accept this kind of worship, even though intended in His honor!

6. Did Christ say it is possible to worship Him and still do it in vain? Matthew 15:9. What did He tell His disciples about following man’s ideas about how to worship God? Mark 7:7-9.

God does not want people trying to honor Christ by following traditions and customs devised by men. Notice again God’s command, “You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way” (Deuteronomy 12:31).