

EASTER

The Untold Story



EASTER

The Untold Story

By Gerald E. Weston

EUS Edition 1.4 | December 2021
©2016 Living Church of God™
All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

This booklet is not to be sold!

It has been provided as a free public educational
service by the Living Church of God

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are
taken from the New King James Version (© 1982 by Thomas
Nelson, Inc.). Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Contents

Chapter 1: What's in a Name?	1
Chapter 2: The Queen of Heaven	7
Chapter 3: Worshiping Christ in Vain	15
Chapter 4: Three Days and Three Nights	19
Chapter 5: The Significance of Passover	27
Chapter 6: "For that Sabbath was a High Day"	33
Chapter 7: What Happened on Sunday?	39

The Neglected Truth

Every year, professing Christians celebrate the holiday known as Easter, but few understand its true origins. How is it that a day supposedly picturing the resurrection of Jesus Christ came to be known by the name of the pagan goddess Eostre? What are the origins of celebrating the day with rabbits and colored eggs and how did they come to be associated with it? What do these have to do with the resurrection of Christ?

Do you realize that the Good Friday crucifixion and Easter Sunday resurrection tradition **contradicts** the one sign Jesus said He would give to prove He was the prophesied Messiah? Shockingly, literally hundreds of millions profess that Jesus Christ is their Savior, but their very traditions deny the **one and only** sign Jesus said He would give that He was who He claimed to be—the Son of God. Consider what this means! Either Jesus is not the Messiah He claimed to be, or the professing Christian tradition is wrong. **It cannot be any other way!**

It is time to dust off your Bible and look into the one and only true source that reveals what really happened at the time of Jesus' crucifixion! The truth of what happened—and what your Bible records—is not what most people think! If you are willing to look into the biblical record and the facts recorded by well-respected historians, you can know the truth about Easter and its pagan past—and you can know the truth of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Chapter I

What's in a Name?

For many professing Christians, Easter is the most sacred holiday of the year. For others, it is a time to show off a new set of clothes and perhaps a hat or bonnet. For children, it is an exciting time to search for brightly colored eggs that were hidden in the garden or around the house. Some children even receive live chickens or rabbits from well-meaning parents.

But consider: What does all this have to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ? The simple answer is, absolutely nothing! Nevertheless, most people look at such customs as harmless fun for the children. But are they? Or do they obscure the truth about the most important event in the history of mankind: Christ's life, message, crucifixion, and resurrection?

I often tell people a true story about my uncle George. He was a colorful character, to say the least. He was a self-made man who left home at the age of 16 and went on to invent various electronic instruments used in the oil-drilling industry. I knew for many years that he was a passionate atheist, but I never knew why until a few years before his death when he explained it to me. When he was five years old, his mother, my grandmother, told him to go out and look for the eggs the rabbits laid. It was Easter Sunday. Even at this early age he knew that rabbits did not lay eggs, because my grandmother raised rabbits for sale. He immediately protested, "Rabbits don't lay eggs." And she replied, "Georgie, if you look real hard you'll find them."

As he explained to me, he really did look, but he did not find any. He went back into the house and disgustingly informed her, “Mother, you lied to me. Rabbits don’t lay eggs.” And, as he further explained, “That’s when I began to question the whole idea of God and Christianity.”

Why is it that Christians lie to their children about such things when the Ninth Commandment tells us, “You shall not bear false witness”? Are they not aware of Revelation 21:8, which tells us that “all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”? Maybe these “little white lies” are more serious than we realize! Maybe we should rethink what we teach our children!

What History Reveals

From where do these seemingly harmless lies and quaint customs originate? Historians reveal a great deal about the origins of Easter traditions, starting with the very name itself. Easter is nothing more than another spelling for the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre, but where did this goddess originate? The *New World Encyclopedia* suggests a connection between Eostre and Easter with the very popular and ancient goddess Ishtar: “Scholars likewise speculate that *Eostre*, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of Spring whose name later gave rise to the modern English ‘Easter,’ may be etymologically connected to Ishtar” (“Ishtar”).

Interestingly, the Melkite Greek Catholic Church admits this about the origin of the name Easter, but gives a slightly different spelling from that of *Ishtar*: “The word ‘Easter’ comes from Old English and refers to the Norse Goddess of Fertility, ‘Istra’—who was symbolized by a rabbit” (“Great Lent and Holy Week,” *Melkite.org*, August 14, 2010).

Thus the connection between Easter and rabbits, but why was Istra symbolized by a rabbit? Historians confirm that this goddess, spelled variously as Ishtar and Istra, was known as the goddess of fertility, and the rabbit is a well-known fertility symbol. Even today people can be heard using the expression “breeding like rabbits.” An example of this is seen in a November 2011 *Scientific American* article titled “Why Pioneers Breed Like Rabbits.”

The rabbit is not the only fertility symbol passed down from antiquity. *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* explains this

about Easter: “The holiday comes in the early Spring and is clearly related to ancient fertility myths of reborn heroes.... For many, Easter is synonymous with fertility symbols such as the Easter Rabbit, Easter eggs, and the Easter lily” (“Easter,” p. 111).

Easter and the Egg

While the egg is clearly a fertility symbol, many historians trace the origin of the Easter egg back to the Babylonian myth of a large egg falling from the sky into the Euphrates River, from which the goddess Astarte was hatched. Astarte was revered by the ancient Phoenicians as goddess of the moon and the measurer of time. But who was Astarte? Is there any connection with this goddess and Easter traditions? Historians tell us Astarte is merely another name for Ishtar: “The name Ishtar is likely Semitic in origin, and was identified in ancient times with Canaanite goddess Ashtoreth or Astarte” (“Ishtar,” *New World Encyclopedia*).

As we are beginning to see, this goddess—from which we derive the name of what is supposed to be a most solemn Christian celebration—has quite a past. She was no obscure figure, but was known by different names in different languages and cultures. The highly respected *Encyclopaedia Britannica* confirms the connection between Astarte and Ishtar: “Astarte was worshiped in Egypt and Ugarit and among the Hittites, as well as in Canaan. Her Akkadian counterpart was Ishtar. Later she became assimilated with the Egyptian deities Isis and Hathor (a goddess of the sky and of women), and in the Greco-Roman world with Aphrodite, Artemis, and Juno” (“Astarte,” *Britannica.com*).

These all refer to the same goddess, either with different spellings or with different names in various cultures. Here is a quote tying Ishtar with another important name: “Ishtar, a goddess of both fertility and war, is the Akkadian name of the Sumerian goddess Inanna and the Semitic goddess Astarte, the three names referring to the same deity in different cultural contexts. She inspired great devotion in the ancient Babylonian empire, as evidenced by the many grand temples, altars, inscriptions, and art objects devoted to her” (“Ishtar,” *New World Encyclopedia*).

Interestingly, just as there came in ancient cultures to be a connection between the moon and the various goddesses of fertility,

the rabbit became entwined in many of these myths. Why the rabbit? With a gestation period of just about one month, the rabbit's cycle came to be associated with the lunar cycle across a number of cultures.

With our modern understanding of biology we may laugh at this today, but many in the ancient world believed the rabbit to be a hermaphrodite—an animal that could reproduce without losing its virginity. This led to an association between the supposedly virgin rabbit and the Virgin Mary, as typified by the painter Titian's *Madonna of the Rabbit*. When former goddess-worshippers discovered Christianity, it was easy for them to take their old reverence for a goddess and transfer it to Mary, in contradiction to Scripture and actual Christianity. Thus the various myths expanded and prevailed.

Of course, just as there were variations of myth across the different world cultures, there were also variations of worship from one culture to another, just as we see variations in spellings and customs in our modern world in the worship of gods that transcend national and cultural boundaries.

But does any of this matter? As long as we are celebrating Christ's resurrection, what difference does it make? If there were no God, it probably would not matter, but if the God of the Bible does exist, it matters plenty!

God told Moses to warn ancient Israel that they were to make "no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth" (Exodus 23:13). Yet most of professing Christianity has done just that! And we cannot rely on the tired argument that this admonition applied only to the Jews under the Old Covenant. Malachi 3:6 tells us that God does not change, and Hebrews 13:8 tells us, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"! This same Jesus Christ, prior to His human birth, was the very God Family Member who inspired Exodus 23:13. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, **and that Rock was Christ**" (1 Corinthians 10:1–4). It is no wonder that Jesus protests, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

If Jesus Christ had proclaimed the observance of Easter, we would of course be obliged to do as He had instructed us. Even if it were His Apostles who had begun the observance in harmony with His instructions, we would do well to follow their example. But neither Christ nor the Apostles left us any example of observing such a festival.

Indeed, as we will see throughout this booklet, the vast majority of nominal Christians today are observing a festival that Scripture reveals is not just non-Christian—it is actually repugnant to God. Worse yet, most are neglecting the actual festival that Jesus Christ observed and taught His disciples to observe in memory of His sacrificial death. Read on and learn the amazing truth that may change your life forever!



Chapter 2

The Queen of Heaven

As we have seen, Ishtar was the ancient goddess of fertility and love, and was also known by the names Istra, Eostre, Easter, Astarte, Aphrodite, Artemis, and Inanna. In the Hebrew language, the plural form of Astarte was Ashtaroth—and we find many references to the worship of Ashtaroth in the Old Testament, but never in a positive context! She seems to have been known as the “Queen of Heaven,” as we learn from *The New World Encyclopedia*: “Astarte may also be the ‘Queen of Heaven’ spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah several centuries later during the seventh or early sixth century B.C.E. Here, the people of Judah fear that by heeding the words of the prophets and abandoning the worship of the goddess, they have brought ruin upon themselves” (“Astarte”).

A Heavy Price to Pay

The encyclopedia goes on to reference Jeremiah 44:18, an instructive passage of Scripture that we would do well to examine closely. The time setting was shortly after the Jewish nation fell to king Nebuchadnezzar and his Chaldean Empire. Most were killed or deported to Babylon, but a few poor among them were left behind. Jeremiah was also spared and allowed to remain in the land of Judea.

The remnant leaders approached Jeremiah, requesting that he seek God’s will on their behalf. Should they stay in Judea, or go to Egypt? They unequivocally assured Jeremiah that they would do

whatever God directed: “Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God to whom we send you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God” (Jeremiah 42:6).

Ten days later, Jeremiah returned God’s answer—that they should remain in Judea—but by now they had discounted the earlier profession and had set their hearts to go to Egypt. How true to human nature! We want to do God’s will—as long as it agrees with our own!

Through His prophet Jeremiah, God again gave a strong indictment against this rebellious remnant upon their arrival in Egypt. “Why do you commit this great evil against yourselves, to cut off from you man and woman, child and infant, out of Judah, leaving none to remain, in that you provoke Me to wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have gone to dwell, that you may cut yourselves off and be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth?... They have not been humbled, to this day, nor have they feared; they have not walked in My law or in My statutes that I set before you and your fathers” (Jeremiah 44:7–8, 10).

Idolatry was a primary cause behind the house of Israel going into captivity, and later the house of Judah was overthrown for the same reason. They defended their rebellion against their Creator rather than admit the obvious. No doubt, very few who are reading this booklet are burning literal incense to worship a literal statue or false god, so it may be very easy for us to condemn the Israelites’ actions. But, in our own way, do many of us do the same? Do we also defend our pagan customs and traditions while failing to obey our Creator? Notice their response and the connection to the queen of heaven: “As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you! But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to **the queen of heaven** and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble. But since we stopped burning incense to **the queen of heaven** and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine” (Jeremiah 44:16–18).

Cakes for the Queen

How easily people are deceived! This ragtag Jewish remnant chose to worship an ineffective pagan goddess rather than the Creator of the universe and the One who earlier had brought them out from Egyptian bondage to become a nation. The attitude we find today among the majority of professing Christians is not all that different from the people of Jeremiah's day—defend tradition over Scripture at all cost! If one human rationalization fails to work, try another. Here is one rationalization that we would **not** likely find today: “The women also said, ‘And when we burned incense to **the queen of heaven** and poured out drink offerings to her, did we **make cakes for her**, to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her without our husbands’ permission?’” (Jeremiah 44:19).

Jeremiah responded to the people by explaining the reason for the fall of their nation and their current pitiful state. “The incense that you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them, and did it not come into His mind? So the LORD could no longer bear it, because of the evil of your doings and because of the abominations which you committed. Therefore your land is a desolation, an astonishment, a curse, and without an inhabitant, as it is this day. Because you have burned incense and because you have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD or walked in His law, in His statutes or in His testimonies, therefore this calamity has happened to you, as at this day” (Jeremiah 44:21–23).

A Family Tradition

It is not as though the people were not warned. Jeremiah had rebuked them years earlier, prior to the time of their captivity, for their worship of this “queen of heaven” and what the results would be if they did not repent. Yet, as we know, traditions laden with emotion and family sentiment can exert a powerful pull! These pagan celebrations and customs involved the whole family. Each member played a part in this warm and comforting family affair. “The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven” (Jeremiah 7:18). We should not minimize the appeal such a celebration has on the human psyche.

Baking cakes of bread sounds innocent enough—and, of course, the problem is not with bread, but with the purpose for which people bake it. How many professing Christians read these words and look down upon that poor, misguided tribe of Judah, but then do exactly the same? What Jeremiah is describing in these verses is one Easter custom that is popular even to this day in some countries around the world—baking small cakes or buns with a cross cut into them prior to baking, or a sweet glaze cross placed on top after baking. These are especially popular on what is called Good Friday, the supposed day of Jesus’ crucifixion. Note this April 2012 quote from the popular *British Food History* blog, describing these buns in light of Jeremiah’s denunciation: “The cross, people assume, is to denote the cross upon which Jesus was crucified. This is in fact nonsense; spiced buns with crosses were being produced throughout much of pagan Europe. Spiced buns have always been symbolic in worship and ones adorned with crosses were made for the goddess Eostre (where Easter gets its name)” (“Hot Cross Buns”).

God’s reaction follows Jeremiah’s description of this practice. “Do they provoke Me to anger?” says the LORD. ‘Do they not provoke themselves, to the shame of their own faces?’ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place—on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched” (Jeremiah 7:19–20).

Encyclopaedia Britannica links the Queen of Heaven with Astarte, also known as Ashtoreth, whose worship God condemns. “Astarte/Ashtoreth is the Queen of Heaven to whom the Canaanites burned offerings and poured libations (Jeremiah 44)” (“Astarte,” *Britannica.com*). The Bible refers to Ashtoreth as an abominable pagan goddess (1 Kings 11:5, 33; 2 Kings 23:13).

Ezekiel 8 introduces another element to this dark picture. Ezekiel is in Babylonian captivity and is taken in vision to the temple in Jerusalem, where he is shown abominations committed by his people. He is first taken “to the door of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the image of jealousy was, which provokes to jealousy” (Ezekiel 8:3). What can this possibly be? We may not be able to know for sure, but the highly regarded *New Bible Commentary: Revised* makes an educated guess. “The image of jealousy... may have been an image of

the Canaanite goddess, Asherah. Manasseh had set up such an image... in the Temple and later removed it (2 Ch. 33:7, 15)” (p. 670).

But who is the Canaanite goddess Asherah? “Other names of this deity were Ashtoreth (Astarte) and Anath. Frequently represented as a nude woman bestride a lion with a lily in one hand and a serpent in the other.... Characteristically Canaanite, the lily symbolizes grace and sex appeal and the serpent fertility” (“Asherah,” *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, p. 484).

We cannot say for certain that Ezekiel’s “image of jealousy” was indeed the same-named goddess, but this goddess that we find with so many names is all about sex appeal, fertility, and various customs we now associate with Easter! We know that there is nothing inherently sinful about rabbits, eggs, cakes, or lilies, but when they have the name Easter attached to them, we ought to wonder why any of this should be associated with Christ.

Ezekiel was told to turn again, to see greater abominations. After digging in a wall, he came to a door that he entered and saw “all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls” (Ezekiel 8:10). Then he was told, “Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing” (v. 13). And what did he see? He found that “to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz” (v. 14).

Who was Tammuz, and how is he connected to Easter? The online edition of the *New World Encyclopedia* traces an important mythical tale involving Ishtar’s [Easter’s] descent into the underworld. There she attempts to usurp the throne of her sister, who is queen of the underworld; but her sister, Ereshkigal, hangs Ishtar on the wall by a hook. Her uncle intercedes and sets her free, but she must find a replacement. Her husband Tammuz temporarily angers her and she seizes him and drags him below to the underworld.

Ishtar, also called Inanna in the tale, soon regrets her rash act toward Tammuz. Now we will pick up the story as told by the *New World Encyclopedia*: “Ishtar arranges for Tammuz’s sister to substitute for him during six months of the year—thus explaining the mystery of the sun’s diminishing in winter and growing stronger [in] summer. The story of Ishtar and Tammuz prefigures those of Cybele and Attis, of Aphrodite and Adonis, and of the Egyptian Isis and Osiris—all

of them tales of a young god who dies, and a goddess who mourns him” (“Ishtar”).

A Sunrise Service and Pagan Gods from the East

It is difficult for the average person growing up in a nominally Christian church, whether Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant or other, to realize just how heavily influenced their cherished practices are by ancient pagan traditions, but there is one more found in Ezekiel 8, where Ezekiel is told, “Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these” (v. 15). What could these possibly be?

“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” (v. 16).

This passage is clearly describing a “sunrise service,” as the sun rises from the east. Such practices go back for thousands of years, linking the sun with ancient pagan deities. As historian Alexander Hislop observed, “Long before the fourth century, and long before the Christian era itself, a festival was celebrated among the *heathen*, at that precise time of the year, in honour of the birth of the son of the Babylonian queen of heaven; and it may fairly be presumed that, in order to conciliate the heathen, and to swell the number of the nominal adherents of Christianity, the same festival was adopted by the Roman Church, giving it only the name of Christ. This tendency on the part of Christians to meet Paganism half-way was very early developed” (*The Two Babylons*, pp. 93). Festivals focusing on the solstice days were observed in the name of pagan gods long before there was any “Christian” idea of celebrating Christmas or Easter!

To the east, in central Asia Minor, more than a thousand years before the Romans, the Hittites also worshipped a great mother goddess. On the side of a hill near Sardis is a giant rock carving of a mother goddess that the ancient poets Homer, Ovid, and Sophocles describe as the “Mother of the Gods, the oldest goddess of all” (John Garstang, *The Hittite Empire*, p. 176). On statues and carvings, this Hittite deity “assumes the aspect of a goddess of the skies, or Queen of Heaven, a familiar attribute of Astarte” (p. 205). Astarte was the Phoenician goddess of war, the evening star, sexual love, and fertility. Temple

prostitution was part of her worship. She was often depicted naked, wearing “a crown of cows’ horns enclosing a sun disc”—similar to the Egyptian goddess Isis (Michael Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods*, p. 29). The Roman army spread the worship of this ancient Hittite goddess across Europe from Germany to Britain because her cult “found great favour among the soldiers” (Garstang, p. 302).

And this pagan Queen had a child. In Egypt, Isis was worshiped as one of the greatest deities. She was usually depicted seated on a throne “holding the child Horus... both official theology and popular belief proclaimed... Isis and Horus the perfect mother and son” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol. 6).

How abominable! In this way, Jesus—the Word made flesh—was connected with a goddess-mother whose worship predated His birth by hundreds of years!

All around the world, sincere people get up early on Easter Sunday to watch the sun rise. I remember such an occasion when my family did so to be part of a sunrise service at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. Not only does this practice hearken back to ancient mother-goddess-and-child worship, it relies on the supposition that Jesus rose early Sunday morning. Yet, as we will see, even this simple question of timing is an unbiblical deception!



Chapter 3

Worshipping Christ in Vain

It may be easy to look back with pity—even condescension—on such ignorant people who believed in those preposterous tales and practices. But, if that is the case, why do we find the very symbols of their worship so prominently featured in today’s professing Christianity? Why have professing Christians chosen the name of paganism’s outrageous goddess for the name of what many consider the most sacred of all Christian holidays?

Does this really matter? In spite of the overwhelming evidence of pagan origins for Easter celebrations, some rationalize that mixing a little *innocent* paganism into Christian celebrations brings more people to Christ and makes Christian celebrations more colorful and enjoyable. But how does the God of the Bible see this? We have already read in Ezekiel and Jeremiah that these pagan practices were **not** pleasing to God 2,600 years ago, so why would He would be pleased today?

Many people wrongly assume the only thing that is important is that we believe in Jesus. But is belief alone enough? James says, “No!” We read, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19). Furthermore, have we considered that it is possible to make a show of worshipping Jesus, but do so in vain? Notice what Jesus Himself declared: “He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”’” (Mark 7:6–7).

Jesus asked this thought-provoking question: “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). One of the things for which Jesus condemned the religious leaders of His day was that they rejected God’s commandments and substituted their traditions. One of God’s commandments is that His people are not to borrow pagan ideas and blend them with His observances. We are explicitly told **not** to think, “‘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).

And yet, this is exactly what traditional Christianity does! Highly respected encyclopedias and history books admit that much of what we think of as Christian simply **was** not and **is** not. The well-respected *Eerdmans’ Handbook to the History of Christianity* confesses:

The Christian church took over many pagan ideas and images. From sun-worship, for example, came the celebration of Christ’s birth on the twenty-fifth of December, the birthday of the Sun. *Saturnalia*, the Roman winter festival of 17–21 of December, provided the merriment, gift-giving and candles typical of later Christmas holidays. Sun-worship hung on in Roman Christianity and Pope Leo I, in the middle of the fifth century, rebuked worshippers who turned round to bow to the sun before entering St Peter’s basilica. Some pagan customs which were later Christianized, for example the use of candles, incense and garlands, were at first avoided by the church because they symbolized paganism (pp. 131–32).

To learn more, request our informative booklet *Is Christmas Christian?*

As we have already shown, these pagan influences are also clearly seen in Easter traditions. We might do well to ask, “How can ‘pagan’ customs be Christianized?” More often than not, professing Christians who read the Old Testament have a misguided understanding as to the nature of ancient Israel’s actual problem. While it

is true that they gave themselves over entirely to pagan influences at various times, that is not the whole story.

In the days of the famous prophet Elijah, their major problem involved mixing paganism with the worship of the true God. After Elijah prayed that it would not rain for three-and-a-half years, in an attempt to wake the people up from their sins, Elijah and King Ahab gathered the people together to settle the issue. Elijah's question to the people is most instructive: "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). His very question indicates a blending of the worship of the true God with heathen Baal worship. Here is what *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* has to say about Elijah's question:

It seems to be literally, "Till when are you hopping at two forks?" The sin of the people had been not in rejecting the worship of [God], but in trying to combine it with the worship of Baal. Such syncretism [blending religious customs and worship] is always considered to be broad-minded, whereas the other is narrow-minded. But [the God] of Israel left no room for other gods. Elijah makes this clear: *If Yahweh is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him* (pp. 343-344).

The pagan origin and celebration of Easter is a major problem for professing Christianity, but it is only part of the problem. In addition to blending pagan customs and traditions into the worship of the true God, contrary to His command, we find that even the part of Easter that supposedly comes from the Bible is terribly flawed—as we will see in the next chapter of this booklet!



Chapter 4

Three Days and Three Nights

Have you ever considered why you believe the things you do? If we are truly honest with ourselves, every one of us primarily believes what we were taught growing up. Even if you have cast aside belief in God, you most likely accept the things you **think** the Bible says. You may still picture a long-haired Jesus and His twelve disciples all stationed on the same side of a long table eating something called “the last supper.” Sadly, this is a poor fabrication of what really occurred. Even those who never darken the doors of a church building for anything other than a wedding or funeral probably believe that the Bible teaches that Jesus was crucified on Friday and resurrected Sunday morning.

Every year, so-called Christians and atheists celebrate Mardi Gras in New Orleans and similar festivals across Central and South America. It is a time of partying and “letting go.” How many do not realize this is connected to the Easter celebration? Mardi Gras simply means “Fat Tuesday” and is the last day to “let it all hang out” (sometimes literally!) before the next day that begins 40 days of “fasting.” This is followed by Good Friday and Easter Sunday. There are also a number of other special days thrown in, such as Palm Sunday and Ash Wednesday, none of which are biblically based.

These customs and traditions are so entrenched in people’s minds and culture that it seems heretical for anyone to question them. Yet we are told in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (*KJV*).

Three Days and

Jesus Christ gave one sign of His
The scriptural account shows Him fulfilling
the grave, contrary to the "Good F

***Tue.**

Wednesday

Thursday

Instituting the
New Testament
Passover, Christ
ate the Passover
meal with His
disciples shortly
after sunset.

Christ was
crucified around
9:00 a.m., died
around 3:00 p.m.,
and was entombed
shortly before
sunset.

***Nisan 14**
Preparation Day (John 19:31)

Nisan 15
First Day of Unleavened Bread

Nisan

*Biblical days begin and end at sunset.
Roman days begin and end at midnight.

72 HO

Three Nights

Messiahship: the “Sign of Jonah.”
Following that sign, spending exactly 72 hours in
the “Friday-to-Easter Sunday” tradition.

Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<p>After the High Day and before the weekly Sabbath, the women purchased and prepared spices used for anointing Christ's body.</p>		<p>Before sunrise, the women found Christ's tomb empty.</p>
Nisan 16	Nisan 17 Weekly Sabbath	Nisan 18
72 HOURS		

Virtually all people who think they understand anything about the Bible believe that Jesus was crucified on a Friday, put in the tomb in the late afternoon of that day, and then resurrected early Sunday morning.

But where did this idea come from? People may assume they read it in the Bible, because that is what they were taught in Sunday School. It is what they see every year—billions of professing Christians take note of “Good Friday” and think of Christ’s crucifixion, then two days later (or is it a day-and-a-half?) they celebrate Easter Sunday. “Sunrise services” are widely advertised, and people just follow along, because “everybody’s doing it.” Why, after all, would anyone do differently?

Well, if the Bible says differently, we surely should be doing differently. After all, no matter how many human customs we may come up with (Rabbits laying eggs? Really?), the Bible is in fact the only truly reliable source we can turn to for a proper answer to this question.

The Only Sign Jesus Gave

We can begin with a simple question: How long did Jesus Himself say that He would be in the tomb? “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’” (Matthew 12:38–40).

Consider: Jesus said that no sign would be given to that generation except for the sign of Jonah. What was that sign? It was that Jesus would be in the grave the exact same length of time as Jonah was in a great fish’s belly. How long was that time? According to both Jesus and Jonah, **three days and three nights!**

Try as you might, you cannot count three days and three nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. Even if you count parts of days, you still come up short. Try it for yourself. Scripture tells us Jesus was put in the tomb right at sunset, but some count a few minutes before sunset as day one. Friday night would be one night; the daylight portion of Saturday would be the second day and Saturday night would make the second night. Now **if** Jesus rose

Sunday morning after sunrise we might count that as day three, but where is the third night? It just is not there! And that is stretching the case by counting a few minutes of daylight at the beginning and end as two of the three days.

Many nominal Christians have never even read Matthew 12:38–40, and of those who have read it, many have never really studied what it means. As a result, professing Christians often simply assume that the period from Good Friday through Easter Sunday counts as three days. Yet that is hardly what Jesus said and meant! If we accept the Good Friday-to-Easter Sunday tradition, we are left with three possibilities: We have not properly understood the sign Jesus gave, Jesus was wrong and He is not our Savior, or the Good Friday-to-Easter Sunday tradition is wrong.

So, has the world properly understood the sign Jesus gave? If so, what are the implications? Was He wrong about how long He would be in the grave? Did He literally mean three days **and** three nights? As we have seen, you cannot count three days and three nights from late Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning. If He meant what He said, we have a significant problem. Recognizing this problem, *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* bluntly tells us Jesus was mistaken: “The statement made is inaccurate, for Jesus was in the grave only from Friday evening to Sunday dawn” (commentary on Matthew 12:40, p. 976).

Most popular commentaries are not as cynical and choose instead to explain that the statement is not to be taken literally. Is this because the true unprejudiced Scriptures demonstrate this? Or is it possible that tradition is trumping truth?

Traditionalists allege that the Greek expression used in this verse simply means a “day/night,” or a single 24-hour day. Further, the first and third days only need to be a portion of a “day/night.” However, Jesus’ sign is not dependent on Matthew 12:40 alone. Jesus’ words were recorded in the Greek language, and it is true that the Greek expression used in this verse **may** mean parts of three days. Even so, that reasoning is controversial at best among scholars of Greek (as we have just read from *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*, which is so careful about the Greek that it shockingly assumes Jesus was wrong!).

What is the truth? We must remember what Jesus said: “For **as** Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish,

so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40). Should we not then investigate what the Bible tells us about how long Jonah was in the belly of the fish? What does the original account tell us? “And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17).

The book of Jonah was written in the Hebrew language, and we must look to that language and its common usage to understand this expression. *The Companion Bible* explores the meaning of three days and three nights in Hebrew usage. After giving a technical explanation that three days in Hebrew usage can mean all or parts of three days, it then explains that in Hebrew usage, when it speaks of days **and** nights, it means both three days and three nights. It then sums up the discussion: “Hence, when it says that ‘Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights’ (Jonah 1:17) it means exactly what it says, and that this can be the only meaning of the expression in Matthew 12:40” (Appendix 144, p. 170).

This is the first reason we know that Jesus’ claim means a full three days and three nights—the meaning of Matthew 12:40, when taken in the context of the account of Jonah, can only mean three days and three nights.

“In,” “After,” and “The”

The second reason we know that the Good Friday/Easter Sunday tradition is in error can be discerned by comparing other statements Jesus made about how long He would be in the grave. Jesus spoke figuratively of His body on a number of occasions as “this temple,” and even declared, “Destroy this temple, and **in three days** I will raise it up” (John 2:19).

“In three days” means that it has to be **within** three days, but on other occasions we read that He would be resurrected to life **after** three days. “And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and **after three days** rise again” (Mark 8:31).

Following His resurrection, Jesus explained to His disciples what happened and why. “Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead **the third day**, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46–47).

So here we have three different expressions that clarify how long He would be in the tomb: “in three days,” “after three days,” and “the third day.” When we put these three statements together, along with Matthew 12:40 and Jonah 1:17, there can be only one time that fits—exactly 72 hours, not a minute before or a minute after. The time is precise!

There is a third convincing proof that Jesus would be in the tomb exactly 72 hours. That proof is found in the biblical chronology of events. Sadly, this is something few understand, because most who call themselves Christians today have substituted pagan holidays and traditions, choosing to reject the Festivals and Holy Days that God gave to His people—days that were kept by Jesus Christ Himself, as well as His Apostles and the original first-century Christian Church.

***Pascha* or Easter?**

The name Easter is nowhere to be found in the Bible, with one exception. The men who translated the *King James Version* of the Bible inserted “Easter” for Passover in Acts 12:4. No modern translation supplies the word *Easter*, as they all properly translate the Greek ***Pascha*** as ***Passover***. This is so well understood that some of the more modern commentaries, such as *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, do not even address the subject, though older ones (which relied on the *King James Version*) do. For example, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* has this to say about Acts 12:4 and the proper translation:

“Perhaps there never was a more unhappy, not to say absurd, translation than that in our text [KJV].... The term Easter, inserted here by our translators, they borrowed from the ancient Anglo-Saxon service-books.... The Saxon [various Greek spellings] are different modes of spelling the name of the goddess Easter, whose festival was celebrated by our pagan forefathers on the month of April; hence that month, in the Saxon calendar.... Every view we can take of this subject shows the gross impropriety of retaining a name every way exceptionable, and palpably absurd” (*Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, vol. 5, “Acts 12:4,” pp. 774–775).

The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* is more abbreviated, simply saying, “Easter—rather, ‘after the Passover;’ *i.e.*, after the whole festival was over (The word in our [*King James Version*] is an ecclesiastical term of later date, and ought not to have been employed here)” (vol. 3, p. 507).

Chapter 5

The Significance of Passover

Why do most people assume Jesus was crucified on a Friday? The truth is that many have no idea other than “That is what I was taught.” Still, those who are more biblically literate understand from Scripture that He was crucified on a Preparation Day leading up to a Sabbath. For example, we have Luke’s statement regarding Jesus’ burial by Joseph of Arimathea: “This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near” (Luke 23:52–54).

As all students of the Bible should know, the weekly Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. So, on the surface it might appear that Jesus was crucified Friday morning and put in the grave very late Friday afternoon, but this is **not** what happened—as we shall see.

Many errors are the result of a carelessly made false assumption and that is the case on this subject. There is no doubt that Jesus was crucified on the Preparation day for a Sabbath, but which Sabbath was this? Was it the weekly Sabbath, which began Friday evening at sunset and ended Saturday evening at sunset? Or is it possible that it was a High Day, an annual Sabbath?

What is commonly called the Lord’s Supper, or the Last Supper, was in fact the Passover. There can be no doubt about this, although some scholars reject clear scriptures and claim otherwise. Matthew,

Mark, and Luke all call Jesus' final supper with His disciples the Passover. Here is Luke's account:

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." So they said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare?" And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room **where I may eat the Passover** with My disciples?..."' So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and **they prepared the Passover**. 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" (Luke 22:7-15).

For further evidence, see Matthew 26:17-20, where the Passover is mentioned three times in connection to His final meal. Also see Mark 14:12-17, where the Passover is mentioned four times. The three synoptic gospels combined (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) mention the Passover at least twelve times in relation to what is commonly called the Last Supper! Can there be any doubt that the last supper was indeed the Passover?

God counts each day from sunset to sunset (Genesis 1:3-5). So, we can see how, on the day of His crucifixion, Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples in the evening, was taken into custody that night and was crucified during the daylight portion of the Passover day. The Passover is a very special day, but it is not a Sabbath day. However, as we shall see, the day that began at the sunset after His death was an annual Sabbath day: the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread!

Many professing Christians are woefully ignorant of what the Bible actually says and many have no idea of the historical events of Scripture. Were it not for the movie *The Ten Commandments*, even fewer would know about Israel's journey out of Egypt, but it is important for us to be aware of those events if we are to understand the true crucifixion and resurrection account.

Freed from Slavery

The family and nation of Israel were slaves in Egypt and served under cruel bondage. In the course of time, God sent Moses to rescue them and take them to the land that had been promised to their ancestor Abraham. Nine miraculous plagues fell upon Egypt, but Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. Then came the tenth plague by which all the firstborn in Egypt died, except those protected by a special ceremony.

The Israelites were commanded to set aside a yearling male lamb or goat on the tenth day of the month and follow these instructions.

Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover (Exodus 12:6–11).

Again, since the Bible counts time from sunset to sunset, this was the beginning of the fourteenth day, which began that year on a Tuesday evening after sunset. The firstborn in every household had death pass over them if they were in a house marked by the blood of a sacrificed lamb or goat—this evening became known as the Passover.

During the daylight hours of Nisan 14, the children of Israel “spoiled” the Egyptians and traveled to the city of Rameses, from where the Exodus began after sunset at the beginning of Nisan 15. It took the children of Israel seven days to go from Rameses to the other side of the Red Sea, and this time period was memorialized as the Days of Unleavened Bread, because the Israelites were on the move and did not have time to allow their bread to rise.

The Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread were very closely associated, such that we sometimes see “Passover” used to

indicate both festivals together. The difference between the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is clearly delineated in Leviticus 23:5-7: “On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD’S Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you **must** eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.” See also Numbers 28:16-18. In both accounts, we learn that Nisan 15, the first day following the Passover, is a day to congregate and to rest from our customary work. It is an annual Sabbath—a High Day—a little-understood fact with profound implications, as we shall see in the next chapter.

God's Master Plan

The Meaning of the Festivals

Old Testament

Passover

Blood of a sacrificed lamb was placed around the doors of Israelite houses. God "passed over" in slaying the Egyptian firstborn (Leviticus 23:5).

Days of Unleavened Bread

A seven-day festival during which leavening is put out of dwellings and is not eaten (Leviticus 23:6-14).

Pentecost

A day celebrating the gathering in of the first and smaller of the two annual harvests, observed 50 days from a fixed point in the previous Feast (Leviticus 23:15-22).

Feast of Trumpets

Called *Rosh Hashanah* by the Jews; a day of rejoicing marked by the blowing of trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25).

Day of Atonement

A day of fasting and repentance, known to the Jews as *Yom Kippur* (Leviticus 23:26-32).

Feast of Tabernacles

A seven-day celebration of the great fall harvest, observed by living in temporary dwellings for the duration of the Feast (Leviticus 23:33-43).

Last Great Day

Adjacent to the Feast of Tabernacles, this eighth day is considered a separate Feast (Leviticus 23:36, 39).

New Testament

Passover

Pictures Jesus Christ shedding His blood for the sins of mankind.

Days of Unleavened Bread

Putting out leaven pictures a Christian's duty to "put out sin" from a life yielded to Jesus Christ.

Pentecost

Pictures the Christian receiving God's Holy Spirit.

Feast of Trumpets

Pictures a time of war and plagues leading to the "first resurrection" and Christ's return as King of kings.

Day of Atonement

Pictures the binding of Satan at the beginning of the Millennium and the world becoming at one with God.

Feast of Tabernacles

Pictures the Millennium, when the earth will be ruled by Jesus Christ and His saints.

Last Great Day

Pictures the "White Throne Judgment" when all those not previously called will be able to hear the true Gospel and accept salvation.



Chapter 6

“For that Sabbath was a High Day”

Without knowing that the Sabbath right after Christ’s crucifixion was an “annual Sabbath,” it is difficult to understand the New Testament account, but with this understanding the whole story opens up to us. The day following the Passover was a high day, an annual Sabbath where work was not to be done. Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples at the beginning of the day (shortly after sunset), then was put in the grave late in the afternoon at the end of the Passover day. When the sun set that evening, the first day of Unleavened Bread, an annual Sabbath day, had begun; this is exactly what the Apostle John reveals in John 19:31: “Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (**for that Sabbath was a high day**), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.” Of course, Scripture shows that Christ’s legs were not in fact broken (v. 33), in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy (Psalm 34:20).

John tells us that it was not the preparation for a **weekly** Sabbath, but for a High Day Sabbath! Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples on Nisan 14. Then, as John confirms, the next day was (as every Bible student **should** know) an annual Sabbath! The day on which Passover is kept is also the Preparation Day for the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

So, why is this not widely understood by today’s professing Christians? Why do priests and ministers not teach this truth plainly?

John 19:31 is not unknown to biblical scholars, so how do they deal with it? Different commentaries have varying explanations, but the *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary on the Whole Bible* is typical in explaining away the **true** significance of this verse, describing only “the first day of unleavened bread, and, as concurring with an ordinary Sabbath, the most solemn season of the ecclesiastical year” (vol. 3, p. 457). The *New Bible Commentary: Revised* says, “It was doubly important to the Jews to observe their ritual requirements on a day which was both Sabbath and festival.” But is this accurate? Scholars recognize that Jesus died on the Preparation Day for an annual Sabbath, but miss the importance of this statement. By hanging on to their tradition, they reject the clear teaching of Scripture!

Two Sabbaths

What is generally missed is that the Bible records **two Sabbaths** involving the time Jesus was in the tomb! Scripture tells us the women rested on the Sabbath and then bought spices. “Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him” (Mark 16:1). Notice that this took place **after** a Sabbath!

But Luke 23 tells us they prepared the spices and **then** rested on the Sabbath. “That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near. And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment (Luke 23:54–56).

It goes without saying that you cannot prepare the spices before you buy them! Read those two scriptures again. Mark tells us that they did not buy the spices until after the Sabbath, but Luke tells us they prepared them and rested on the Sabbath. These two passages give infallible proof that the women rested on the High Day (the annual Sabbath), then bought and prepared the spices the next day, then rested on the weekly Sabbath. This is the only way to harmonize these verses! Either there were two Sabbaths, with an ordinary day in between, or the Bible contradicts itself!

If this is too hard for you to visualize or follow along with after so many years of having learned the wrong sequence of events, just look at the chart in the center of this booklet. Jesus kept the Passover with

His disciples Tuesday evening after sunset. Following the Passover meal, He then left the upper room and took His disciples with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane. This is where Judas led the authorities to arrest Jesus, and where Judas betrayed Him with a kiss. Jesus was illegally tried and abused that night and during the early morning hours of Wednesday. Around 9:00 a.m. Wednesday morning, He was taken out and crucified. He then died about 3:00 p.m. Wednesday afternoon. What happened next?

“Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath [the annual High Day Sabbath, John 19:31], Joseph of Arimathea... went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus” (Mark 15:42–43). Permission was granted only after Pilate summoned the centurion, who affirmed that Jesus was indeed dead (vv. 44–45).

The gospel of John informs us that Joseph, along with help from Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came to Jesus by night (see John 3:1–21), collected the body and carried it to a nearby tomb. It is evident from the details that they worked very quickly, as there was only a short span between Jesus’ death and the beginning of the annual Sabbath which began at sunset Wednesday. “And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby” (John 19:39–42).

Luke clarifies how close to the Sabbath it was when Joseph and Nicodemus finished their work preparing and burying Christ. “Then he [Joseph] took it [the body of Jesus] down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. That day was the Preparation, **and the Sabbath drew near**. And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid” (Luke 23:53–55).

Now, count three days and three nights with this background in mind. Wednesday at sunset began the annual high-day Sabbath so Wednesday night was the first night. Daylight Thursday was still the

High Day Sabbath and was the first day. The High Day came to an end when the sun set Thursday evening. Sunset Thursday until sunset Friday was another preparation day and was an ordinary work day between two Sabbaths. This was when the women bought and prepared the spices, satisfying both Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56.

Thursday night is our second night and daytime Friday is our second day. When the sun set on Friday afternoon, the weekly Sabbath began. Friday night is our third night and daytime Saturday is our third day. Jesus was raised from the grave late Saturday afternoon (right before sunset), three days and three nights after He was put in the grave. Clearly, Christ's words in Matthew 12:40 were fulfilled: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Note also that the Apostle Paul was inspired to remind us that Jesus rose exactly as He said He would (1 Corinthians 15:4).

The Sign of Jonah

Jesus told His enemies, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:39–40).

Three days and three nights—this is the sign Jesus gave to establish His Messiahship. Our Savior staked His very identity on what some might brush off as a seemingly trivial detail. Yet the Pharisees did not consider it so trivial. Notice how they responded to Christ’s death: “On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, ‘Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, “After three days I will rise”” (Matthew 27:62–63).

The chief priests and Pharisees feared that Christ’s disciples might try to fake His resurrection, following the exact timetable He gave, thus continuing His influence even after His death. In response, Pilate authorized additional security to make sure no one

would tamper with the grave (vv. 65–66).

Significantly, when Scripture is describing Jonah’s ordeal in the belly of the fish, the book of Jonah uses the **exact same words** for day and night that are used in Genesis 1:5. “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days [*yowm*] and three nights [*layil*]” (Jonah 1:17).

Our Creator is a God of perfect timing. He gave exact instructions for keeping the Passover on time (Exodus 12:12, 22). He gave human beings exact instructions for keeping a specific day of rest and worship (Exodus 20:8). He instructs us to observe specific annual Holy Days throughout the year (Leviticus 23). When it comes to prophecy, He has perfect timing, knowing “the end from the beginning” (Isaiah 46:10).

Indeed, the prophet Daniel foretold the timing of Christ’s first coming, hundreds of years in advance (Daniel 9:24–26). So we can understand that the death and resurrection of the Savior of the world would occur with perfect timing, as confirmed by the sign of Jonah.



Chapter 7

What Happened on Sunday?

The Scriptures nowhere use the names we now use to label the days of the week. We never read in the Bible the name “Sunday.” Instead, as we look at how the days around Christ’s crucifixion are described, we find reference to the Preparation Day, the Sabbath, the first day of the week, and a High Day. In this regard, virtually all scholars understand that the Preparation Day is the day before either a weekly or annual Sabbath. The weekly Sabbath runs from what we know as Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. The first day of the week is what we call Sunday in the English language. And a High Day is understood by scholars to indicate an annual Sabbath. Sadly, to maintain their tradition (contrary to the Scriptures), scholars and religious leaders have generally tried to conflate the annual Sabbath with the weekly Sabbath.

Interestingly, as an aside for those who claim we cannot know when the biblical seventh-day Sabbath is, the Good Friday/Easter Sunday tradition identifies both the weekly Sabbath (Saturday) and the first day of the week (Sunday)! And, as we have seen, so does the true chronology of events. Those who use the specious argument that time has been lost and we cannot know the day are without excuse! If you have not read our booklets *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?* and *The Holy Days: God’s Master Plan*, please call, write or go online to TomorrowsWorld.org to read or order your free copies.

Where does the idea come from that Jesus was resurrected Sunday morning? Mostly from tradition, but Scripture should take

precedence over tradition. A careful reading reveals that when the women came to the tomb it was around dawn on the first day of the week. This is when most people erroneously think the resurrection took place. But notice what it says—and, even more importantly, what it does **not** say—in Luke 24:1–6: “Now on the first day of the week [Sunday], very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!’” Take note that it does not say that He rose that morning; it says only that when they arrived, He was gone—already risen!

But some would ask, “Doesn’t the Bible actually say that Jesus rose Sunday morning?” The answer is “Yes, but no!” Notice this in Mark 16: “Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons” (v. 9). On the surface, this certainly looks as though Jesus rose Sunday morning, so what do we do with all the other evidence we have seen that contradicts this? Which is correct? John tells us that “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Therefore we must take a closer look at this verse.

Most people take for granted the chapters, verses, and sentence structures found in the Bible, but it was not always this way. The first New Testament Greek manuscripts had no punctuation as we understand it today. All the letters were written in *uncials*, what we would call capital letters. Later manuscripts were written in minuscules, what we might call cursive small letters. Among the uncials, all words were run together with no spaces between them. Mark 16:9 looked this way, except that instead of English letters, they were Greek letters:

NOWWHENHEROSEEARLYONTHEFIRSTDAYOFTHEWEEKHEAPPEAREDFIRSTTOMARYMAGDALENE

We can be thankful that translators and publishers have, over time, made Bible reading easier by adding capitalization and punctuation. More often than not they do a very fine job of this, but we must

realize that their own biases creep into our translations—and that is the case with this verse.

Mark 16:9 can be punctuated in at least two different ways. The *King James Version*, the *New King James Version*, and many other translations have punctuated it according to their traditional beliefs; hence, that Jesus rose early on the first day of the week. However, as we have seen, if this were the case, the very sign Jesus gave that He was the Messiah and Son of God would be contradicted. We would also have a major contradiction about when the women bought and prepared the spices and the whole flow of events as given in the Bible would be wrong.

We firmly believe that the Bible was inspired (God-breathed) and without error in its original writings, but no translation is without errors. Many of these deviations do not introduce truly major misunderstandings, but the *KJV* and *NKJV* renderings of Mark 16:9 do. If we change the punctuation to be in harmony with the rest of Scripture, it would read this way: “Now, when He rose, early on the first day of the week He appeared first to Mary Magdalene.” Here we see that the emphasis is not on when He rose, but on when He first appeared to Mary Magdalene. The fact is that the **only** way to know how it should be punctuated is to read it in both its immediate context and the context of Scripture as a whole. Since we know the proper order of events as shown earlier, we know that the emphasis is **not** on when Jesus rose, but on when He appeared to Mary. Punctuating it this way is totally legitimate and the only way to harmonize this verse with the rest of Scripture.

Does It Matter?

To deny the sign Jesus gave is to deny Jesus as our Savior. Millions of very sincere people have done just that, not realizing they have been deceived by traditions handed down from generation to generation and perpetuated in mainstream Christian churches. Instead of doing what Paul commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5:21—“Test all things; hold fast what is good”—they have gone along with quaint sentimental customs involving rabbits, eggs, lilies, and pagan deities and days.

Some would protest that it is the thought that counts and as long as we are doing it for Jesus it is okay. But is this what Jesus told His followers? No! Notice: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the

Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 4:23). Worshiping Him sincerely is important, but we must also worship Him in **truth!**

We are specifically told **not** to ask, “‘How did these nations serve their gods? [And not to say,] 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; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire 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).

If you would like to learn more about the Holy Days that God instructed mankind to keep and how they portray the incredibly exciting plan God is working out here below, please call, write, or go to *TomorrowsWorld.org* to order your own free copy of our booklet *The Holy Days: God’s Master Plan* or to read it online. And if you are tired of being led about by unbiblical, man-made, and pagan traditions, and would like to meet with others who are keeping the biblically inspired Sabbath and Holy Days, please contact the Regional Office nearest you and request to speak to one of our representatives. We have congregations in many cities and countries around the world where people faithfully observe the days God instituted.

Regional Offices

United States

PO Box 3810
Charlotte, NC 28227-8010
Phone: +1 (704) 844-1970

Australasia

PO Box 300
Clarendon, SA 5157, Australia
Phone: +61 8 8383 6266

Canada

PO Box 465
London, ON N6P 1R1
Phone: +1 (905) 814-1094

New Zealand

PO Box 2767
Shortland Street
Auckland 1140
Phone: +64 9-268 8985

Philippines

PO Box 492
Araneta Center Post Office
1135 Quezon City, Metro Manila
Phone: +63 2 8573-7594

South Africa

Private Bag X3016
Harrismith, FS 9880
Phone: +27 58 622 1424

United Kingdom

Box 111
43 Berkeley Square
London, W1J 5FJ
Phone/Fax: +44 844 800 9322