

The Truth About Christmas And Easter

Kelly McDonald, Jr.

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Introduction

Some people have such fond memories of Christmas and even Easter. They view these times as days of enjoyment with family and friends. Other people view them as a burden instead of a blessing. There seems to be some controversy about these days. The interesting thing about both of these celebrations is that they are not found in the Bible. Should Christians celebrate these days, or does it matter? In this booklet, you will discover the history of these days and the symbols found in them. We will also discuss how we should live with this important knowledge.

The first thing we must talk about when it comes to this subject are the Feasts of Israel. These nine Feasts are as follows: Sabbath, Passover, the First Day of Unleavened Bread, the Seventh Day of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, the First Day of Tabernacles, and the Eighth Day of Tabernacles. The Sabbath is a weekly Feast and the others are Annual Feasts. Leviticus 23 gives us the details about these wonderful days.

Leviticus 23:3-8

3 ““There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the Lord. 4
“**These are the Lord’s appointed festivals**, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times: 5 The Lord’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. 6 On the fifteenth day of that month the Lord’s Festival of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. 7 On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. 8 For seven days present a food offering to the Lord. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.””

In these verses we see the weekly Sabbath mentioned. It is kept on the seventh day, which is from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. We also see Passover and the first and last day of Unleavened Bread. Passover is to be held on the fourteenth day of first month,

which is called Nissan. The first day of Unleavened Bread is held on the 15th day of Nissan, and the seventh day is held on the 21st day of Nissan. Passover and Unleavened Bread all occur in March or April on the Roman Calendar.

Leviticus 23:15-16, 21

15 “From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. 16 Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord. 21 On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.

In these verses, we see the reckoning for Pentecost, which is fifty days after the weekly Sabbath during Unleavened Bread. It is on a different day of the Calendar nearly every year. It is always held in the third month on the Hebrew Calendar, called Sivan. Pentecost falls in late May or early June.

Leviticus 23:23-25

23 The Lord said to Moses, 24 “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of sabbath rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. 25 Do no regular work, but present a food offering to the Lord.’”

In these verses we see the reckoning for Trumpets. It is to be celebrated on the first day of the seventh month of the Hebrew Calendar, which is called Tishri. All of the Fall Feasts occur in September and/or October.

Leviticus 23:26-27, 32

26 The Lord said to Moses, 27 “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves,[d] and present a food offering to the Lord. 32 It is a day of sabbath rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath.”

In these verses we see the reckoning for Atonement. It is to be celebrated on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Hebrew Calendar.

Leviticus 23:33-36

33 The Lord said to Moses, 34 “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the Lord’s Festival of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. 35 The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. 36 For seven days present food offerings to the Lord, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present a food offering to the Lord. It is the closing special assembly; do no regular work.

In these verses we see the reckoning for the First and Eighth day of Tabernacles. They are celebrated on the 15th and 22nd day of the seventh month of the Hebrew Calendar.

When we study this chapter, we learn some very important details. God tells us when these Feasts are to be held down to the very day and month. He gives us the names for them, and He even gives us instructions on how to keep them. If you studied these feasts throughout the Bible, you would see that specific Biblical events are mentioned with each Feast Day.

For instance, Sabbath is mentioned as a time when we enter into the Lord’s Rest (Hebrews 4:1-12). Passover is mentioned in direct connection with the Israelites leaving Egypt. Both Passover and Unleavened Bread are mentioned in remembering Christ (Matthew 26:19-29, I Cor. 5:6-8). Pentecost is directly mentioned as the day when the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was poured out (Acts 2). Trumpets is mentioned as the day when the Lord will return (Isaiah 27:13, Matthew 24:30-31). Atonement is specifically mentioned as a day of repentance and forgiveness (Leviticus 16). It is also linked with Christ making Atonement for us (Romans 3:23). The Feast of Tabernacles is directly mentioned as a Feast Jesus honored (Zech. 14:16-21, John 7). So we see the specific festival mentioned with specific events in the Bible.

In Leviticus 23, we learn about the Lord's Feasts (read verse 3). These are the appointed celebrations to honor Him. Interestingly enough, we cannot find either Christmas or Easter mentioned among these Feasts. If Christmas and Easter are not among the Lord's Feasts, then how in the world did most Christians come to celebrate them? And, why don't Christians keep the Lord's Feasts? It seems like everything is mixed up. Things are not in their proper place.

Believe it or not, this was actually prophesied in the Bible! In Daniel 7, the prophet Daniel had a vision of four beasts. These four beasts represented four world ruling empires that would have tremendous influence on world events. The last of these four beasts was the Roman Empire. The Lord gave Daniel the interpretation of this fourth empire. We read in verses 23-25, "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. 24 The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. 25 He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time.'"

The Roman Empire was conquered by 10 Germanic Kings. These represent the 10 horns in Daniel's vision. The little horn that sprang up among them is the Papacy. From history, we learn that the Papacy uprooted three of these 10 horns or kings. We are told that this little horn would do three things: 1) speak against the most high, 2) oppress his holy people, and 3) try to change the set times and laws.

Daniel was written in Aramaic. The Aramaic word for set times is *zeman*, and it refers to the Feast Days in Leviticus 23. Over the centuries, the Papacy has changed the Lord's Feast Days to Christmas and Easter. Notice that the name for Christmas is even

mixed. You have Christ as the first part of the name. The second part is mass. It is Christ's-mass. Mass is a gathering of Catholics.

The Papacy, along with Roman emperors, took elements from paganism and mixed them with Christianity. They did this so that the pagans could worship their gods and still try to worship the true God. Basically, as long as pagans paid their tithes and offerings, the Popes did not care what else they did. This mixing has continued until this day. Let's take a quote from Pope Gregory I, who wrote in 601 AD the following, "Let the shrines of idols by no means be destroyed but let the idols which are in them be destroyed. Let water be consecrated and sprinkled in these temples so that the people, not seeing their temples destroyed, may displace error and because they were wont to sacrifice oxen to devils, some celebration should be given. They should celebrate a religious feast and worship God by their feasting so that, still keeping outward pleasures, they may more readily perceive spiritual joys" (Bede, Eccl. History of the English Nation).

In this quote, the Pope is advocating destroying the idols within pagan temples, yet leaving the temples standing. He says that the pagans should just replace sacrificing these animals to devils by sacrificing them to God. This would amount to keeping demonic days in honor of God. All of this was to take place in the same temple that was dedicated to a pagan god. All over the world, the Catholic Church has blended the worship of the Bible with local traditions and customs. Study it for yourself, and you will discover it is true. I have friends from other countries that used to be Catholic. The mixing of the Bible with local pagan customs is appalling! Instead of expecting complete conversion to Christianity, the Popes wanted people to enjoy the pleasures of Christianity and other religions. It was an attempt to gain more converts.

Even today, we can see this blending in modern America. Today, little children are taught to believe in an invisible creature named Santa Claus. He gives you gifts or coals and switches based on your behavior. If you are good, you are rewarded. If you are bad, you are punished with switches and ashes. This Santa can be mul-

tiple places at one time. He dwells at the north pole. The problem with this is it sounds a lot like God. We have raised generations to believe in fantasies of Santa. They nearly have faith in him to give them what they want. The problem is that he does not exist. We are teaching children to believe in something that does not exist – it is false. We are teaching young people to put their hope in things that are not true.

Another teaching that is not true is the Easter bunny. First of all, the name for Easter comes from the Sun goddess Ishtar, which is also called Astarte or Ashtoreth in the Bible. Second of all, we see a bunny rabbit depicted as laying eggs. This is totally contrary to nature. Third, in America the “Easter bunny” brings you gifts. Again, an invisible creature giving you hope and reward. This is not truth; these are false.

God wants us to worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). He does not want us putting our hope in another. He wants us to worship Him in the things that are real and truthful. He wants us to worship Him with the things that came from Him.

The Bible actually speaks against mixing the practices of other religions with worship of Him. Let’s look at some Bible verses on this topic. In Deut. 12:2-4, 29-32, the Bible reads, “2 Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and **under every spreading tree**, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. 3 Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. 4 **You must not worship the Lord your God in their way**.... 29 The LORD your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, 30 and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, “How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.” 31 **You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates.** They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to

their gods. 32 See that you do all I command you; **do not add to it or take away from it.**” First, God commands us to completely destroy all signs and symbols of the worship of other gods from our lives. In verses 4 and 31, God said not to worship the Lord in their way. This means we should not mix the things that they worship with the things of the Lord. They do things the Lord **hates**. We find this repeated in other parts of the Bible. In Leviticus 19:19, the Bible reads, “Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed: neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee.” The idea that God sets forth in these verses is not to mix things. This means not to mix the things of God with the things of the world. We should not mix the seed of God with the seed of the world.

We see both God’s command in Deuteronomy and the one in Leviticus repeated in the New Testament. In Romans 12:2, Paul wrote, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” There is a pattern in this world of celebrating December 25th. The historian Bede says that December 25th was celebrated long before Christianity ever came to Britain (De Temp. rat. Ch. 13). The historian Alexander Frazer says that the Greeks and Romans celebrated December 25th long before it was celebrated as Christ’s birth. Even the Catholic Encyclopedia confesses that, “the well-known solar feast of Natilis Invicti – the nativity of the unconquered sun – celebrated on 25 December has a strong claim on the responsibility for our December date.” There you have it. From their own Encyclopedia, the Catholic church admits that paganism is the root of their December 25th date.

Paul said that we are not to be conformed to the pattern of this world. Our minds must be renewed in Christ to escape the pattern of this world. Believe it or not, but nearly every culture on planet earth has celebrated December 25th. They celebrated it long before Christ. They did not celebrate it to honor God – neither in the past nor today. Celebrating December 25th is a pattern of this

world. It was started by Nimrod and became part of the Babylonian Mystery religion. We will discuss this more in the next chapter.

Did you know that Paul actually spoke against this sort of thing? In Galatians 4:8-11, Paul wrote: “8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature (by the order of things) are not gods. 9 But now that you know God – or rather are known by (under) God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable (lacking) principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing days and months and seasons and years! 11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.” Many people assume that Paul’s letter to the Galatians is written to a group of Jews who are ‘going back’ to law keeping. In Galatians 1:15-16, he wrote that his calling in Jesus Christ was to preach the gospel to the *Gentiles*. A second thing to keep in mind is that one of the main issues in Galatia was adult circumcision. If he was speaking to a group of Jews ‘going back’ to law-keeping, then the issue of circumcision would not have arisen because the Galatians would have already been circumcised. Third, Paul begins this passage by saying, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you served those gods who were by nature not gods.” Paul is addressing a group of churches who at one time worshipped other gods. Fourth, the language used in this passage does not support any claim that Paul is preaching against observances found in the Old Testament. The phrase Paul uses - “days and months and seasons and years” - does not contain **any** of the Greek words used in the New Testament for the Sabbath (*sabbaton*), New Moon celebrations (*neumeneia*), or Feast Days (*heorte*).

What are the “days and months and seasons and years” to which Paul refers? To understand this phrase, one must understand some of the history of this region (Galatia was a region located in modern day central Turkey). Between 279 B.C. and 189 B.C., the peoples of this region were influenced by their own traditions of pagan worship as well as Greek mythology. The region was conquered by the Romans around 189 B.C. By the time Paul wrote to

these churches in approximately 53 A.D., this region was dominated culturally and politically by the Roman Empire. The days, months, seasons, and years to which Paul refers are the Greek and Roman worship practices that permeated Galatian culture over 300 years before Paul's visit to Galatia (see Acts 14:8-20 for an example).

For an illustration of this, take into consideration the “days” that Paul mentions. Every day was dedicated to a specific god or goddess in Roman and Greek culture. The practice of naming every day of the week comes from this custom. The day we know as the second day of the week (Monday) was dedicated to the moon god (**days**). In addition to these days, the Romans also dedicated each month to a specific god or goddess. They held ceremonies during the month to commemorate that particular deity. The month of March derives its name from the Roman god Mars. The month we call January was a month dedicated to the goddess Janus, who was said to have two faces. Julius Caesar moved the Roman New Year to Jan. 1st to honor Janus. This is where New Year's comes from (**months**). The Romans also kept certain seasons or times of celebrations to their gods that coincided with events in nature. The Saturnalia was a seasonal festival held in December to commemorate the god Saturn during the winter solstice. This is where Christmas comes from (**seasons**). The combination of observing all these events makes up years (**years**). These ancient celebrations involved worship practices such as making sacrifices to other gods and/or making vows to these gods, which are the “weak and miserable principles” Paul mentions in Galatians 4:9. Paul links these days, months, seasons, and years to a time when the Galatians served or worshipped **other gods**. Paul tells us not to go back to celebrations that originate with other religions. God wants us to have a pure worship of Him.

The Lord actually rebuked the Israelites for keeping other Feast Days. In Isaiah 1:13-15, the Lord said, “Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. 14 Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals. I

hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!” Notice that the Lord is upset at the Israelites for keeping their own assemblies. He even calls them “**Your** New Moon feasts and **your** appointed festivals.” The Feasts in Leviticus 23 were called the Lord’s feasts. The use of the word “your” in Isaiah means that the Israelites were keeping their own feasts.

In 1 Kings 11, we learn that King Solomon took many foreign wives. These wives led him astray and he served other gods. As a result of this, the Lord prophesied through Ahijah the prophet that 10 of the tribes would be torn away from him. They would be given to one of the men under him, Jeroboam. The northern 10 tribes of Israel were taken away from Solomon’s son and given to Jeroboam. This king did evil in the eyes of the Lord. I Kings 12:25-33 records how he changed the Feast of Tabernacles from the seventh month to the eighth month. He renamed this feast after a name and time of his own choosing. Israel also changed the worship of God from the seventh day to the eighth day, which was the first day of the week. Thus, they established their own feast days and Sabbath day. I Kings 12:33 reads, “On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, **a month of his own choosing**, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings.”

The prophet Ezekiel prophesies about this further in Ezekiel 22:26: “26 Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and **they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths**, so that I am profaned among them.”

The Israelites had shut their eyes to keep His Sabbath, but they were keeping their own that they had made up. In America, we see the same thing going on. People choose any day they wish

as the Sabbath, any feast day they want, and our months start the way we want them to start. We are still keeping Christmas and Easter, which many ministers know are not Biblically based! These are days of our own choosing. We are not keeping His Sabbaths and Feasts in America.

You can easily see that the Lord never intended for His people to keep these days. They are not commanded in the New Testament nor are they celebrated anywhere in the Bible. In the Kingdom of God we will all celebrate the Lord's Feasts (see Ezekiel 46, Zech. 14, and Isaiah 66:22-23). Where did Christmas and Easter come from? Over the next two chapters, we will explore this a little further.

Christmas

We established in the last chapter that Christmas was not found in the Bible. We also learned that it was associated with pagan religions prior to Christ being born. It was not celebrated by the early church, nor is it mentioned in the Bible. The Lord never mentioned remembering His birth. We are asked to remember His death (Luke 22:19, I Cor. 11:26).

When was Jesus really born? The Bible says in Luke 2:1-20 that the shepherds were watching their flocks by night when Jesus was born. We learn that it was also the time for a census. Shepherds put their flocks up for the winter before the Feast of Atonement, which occurs in Sept. or Oct. Jerusalem in winter is a colder time and it can rain a lot (the early rains). This made roads impassable. Also, flocks of animals could be lost or swept away by torrential rains. This is why Jesus said, "Pray not that your flight take place in winter" (Matthew 24:20). This was not the time for anyone to travel. Moreover, this would have been a terrible time for any kind of census. In fact, kings in ancient times did not go to war until the spring because of the weather (2 Sam. 11:1).

Most people agree that Jesus' ministry was 3 ½ years long. If Jesus died in the spring and started his ministry when he was "about thirty" (Luke 3:23), then His birth was in the fall months, particularly September and October. Astronomical research over the years has shown that Jesus' birthday was likely on the Feast of Trumpets. Take this quote from Pastor Bill Shults:

"The sign that appeared in the heavens to mark the coming of Messiah took place on September 11, 2 BC on the Julian calendar. This sign was the conjunction of Regulus and Jupiter in the heart of the constellation Leo the Lion. This took place during the month of Virgo in what we now call the Zodiac. In ancient times, the Zodiac was a solar calendar which the Jews used to reconcile the lunar calendar with the solar year. (Otherwise, the Feasts would circulate all throughout the year.) Regulus was the star of King David, Jupiter represented the nation of Israel, Leo

the Lion is the sign of the Tribe of Judah, and Virgo is the sign of the virgin birth. To the ancient Parthians this was the heavenly sign that the Messiah, King of Israel, son of David, was born in Judah. The magi were the wise men who selected the rulers of Parthia; one of the requirements was that the ruler of Parthia had to be a descendent of King David.” (Bill Shults, “From Pastor Bill”, *Pursuit*, Fall 2014).

What about the manger and the wise men? We typically see pictures and Christmas scenes showing a child in a manger with three wise men visiting him. First of all, the Bible never says that there were three wise men. There were three gifts given to Jesus, but not three wise men. The Magi (called the wise men) probably traveled with a large contingent of soldiers and other companions. This is why Herod and all of Jerusalem was disturbed when they arrived (Matthew 2:3).

We are taught as children that the wise men went to Jesus while he was in the manger. This is not true either. The Bible says in Matthew 2:11 that Jesus was already in the house when he was visited by the wise men. It is even possible that Jesus was nearly 2 years old. This would explain why Herod tried to kill all babies 2 years and younger. Herod made this decision based upon the information given to him by the Magi (Matthew 2:16). Remember, the Magi saw the star in the East and then traveled to see Jesus. The Magi were likely from the Parthian Empire located in modern day Iran or Afghanistan. From the time when they saw the star until the time they reached Jesus could have taken nearly 2 years. When they saw the sign, they had to plan and prepare the journey.

Pictures of Mary with the child Jesus are really prevalent around Christmas time. Did you know that mother and child worship long predated Jesus’ birth? This is another reason why Jesus did not want us to focus on His birth. He did not want us to confuse the worship of Him with other religions. Besides, why would Jesus want us to worship Mary? We are to worship the Lord our God and Him alone (Matthew 4:10)! Why would the Lord want

us to have pictures of this in our churches? Jesus is not a baby! He is the resurrected, glorified Son of God! He is at the right hand of the Father.

The worship of mother and child started at the time of Nimrod before the tower of Babel fell. At that time, they worshipped Semiramis with Tammuz in her arms. When the tower of Babel fell, the peoples of the earth were scattered and each had their own language. They took with them these ideas to the rest of the world. In Germany, they worshipped Hertha with a child in her arms. The Chinese call her Shingmoo. Devaki and Christna are the names of the mother and child in India. In Egypt, it was Isis and Horus. I could go on, but I think you get the point. The interesting thing is that each of these pagan religions called the mother the “holy mother” or “queen of heaven”. The Israelites fell into pagan worship in the days of Jeremiah, baking cakes to the queen of heaven (Jer. 7:18). They were worshipping the mother goddess. So, we should not glorify Mary or worship Jesus as a little child. God never speaks about this in the Bible – He wants us to remember His victory over death and the grave to redeem us from a life of sin!

The worship of trees is also very prevalent in Ancient societies. It comes from the myth that a dead evergreen tree sprang back to life. This evergreen tree was supposed to represent Nimrod coming back to life through Tammuz. Trees were decorated by the Romans during the Saturnalia. In Scandinavia, gifts were given under a fir tree. These gifts were given by their god Odin. Many other cultures, such as the Druids, have decorating of trees and the giving of gifts under trees as if they came from a pagan god. In America, people put gifts under a tree from an invisible person named Santa Claus.

We quoted this in the last chapter, but I will quote it again. In Deut. 12:2-4, God said, “Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. 3 Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their

Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. 4 You must not worship the Lord your God in their way.” God informed us not to worship Him under trees. It looks too much like the worship of other gods.

What about the exchanging of gifts? People exchange gifts on Christmas and say that it is to remember the greatest gift, Jesus. This is also a perversion of the story of the wise men. The Magi brought gifts to Jesus. No one exchanged gifts with each other. The pagan history of Christmas is where the giving of gifts to other people on December 25th comes from.

There is a great cry today among conservatives to return to the way of life lived by the forefathers of America. Did you know that the forefathers of America did not keep Christmas? In fact, Christmas was not a federal holiday until 1870. In the 1600s, Christmas was actually outlawed in many colonies. Why? In England, Christmas was nothing but a drunken party. It had nothing to do with Jesus. The early settlers wanted to worship God in purity. This is why some of them were called Puritans. They wanted pure worship of God undefiled by worship practices of other religions. There is a famous painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware. Did you know that he crossed the Delaware on December 24th? Yes, on Christmas Eve! They did not keep Christmas, so December 24th was just another day for them. They crossed the Delaware and defeated the Hessians at the battle of Trenton. The Hessians were German mercenaries hired by British to fight the colonists. They were keeping Christmas and getting drunk. Washington and his men won the battle.

You can clearly see that the keeping of Christmas is not only un-biblical, but it originates with the worship of other gods.

Easter

Easter, like Christmas, is not found in the Bible. In the King James Version of the Bible, Acts 12:4 uses the word Easter. However, the Greek word is *pascha*, and it refers to the Passover feast. It is translated as Passover every other time in the Bible. This is simply a mistranslation in the King James Version. Jesus and the early disciples kept Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matthew 26:17-30, Acts 12:1-3, Acts 20:6, I Cor. 5:6-8). Interestingly enough, the word Easter is not found in modern translations. So where does the celebration of Easter come from?

The name Easter comes from the pagan goddess Ishtar, who was the queen of heaven. Ishtar is identified as Ashtaroth in the Bible. This was one of the goddesses that lead Solomon astray. “For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did that which was evil in the LORD’s sight, and didn’t go fully after the LORD, as David his father did” (I Kings 11:4-6, WEB).

What about the Easter bunny? There is no connection between Christ and a bunny in the Bible. “The hare, the symbol of fertility in ancient Egypt, a symbol that was kept later in Europe... Its place has been taken by the Easter rabbit” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1991 ed., Vol. 4, p. 333). Furthermore, a bunny never lays eggs. There is not even a connection between a chicken and a bunny! In *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*, James Bonwick, writes, “The mystic egg of Babylon, hatching the Venus Ishtar, fell from heaven to the Euphrates. Dyed eggs were sacred Easter offerings in Egypt, as they are still in China and Europe. Easter, or spring, was the season of birth, terrestrial and celestial.” Eggs are not used as a symbol of Christ in the Bible or for any other holy purpose.

The celebration of Lent also comes from pagan origins. Johannes Cassinus, who wrote in the fifth century, said that Lent was not among the earliest observances of the church (*First Conference Abbot Theonas*, Chapter 30). The forty days of Lent comes from

the forty days of weeping for Tammuz (Alexander Hislops, *The Two Bablyons*). Weeping for Tammuz is called an Abomination in Ezekiel 8:14. In the next few verses, the Lord speaks about how the sunrise services done in honor of the sun god are an abomination. Sunrise services on Easter come from this practice. The hot cross cakes cooked by some groups, especially the Catholic Church, actually come from the ancient practice of baking cakes to the queen of heaven. In Jeremiah 7:18, the Lord rebuked the Israelites for following this practice.

How did Easter creep into the Church? The disciple of the Apostle John was Polycarp. Polycarp was the Bishop over the church in the East (Asia Minor or Turkey today). The Churches in the East celebrated Passover while the churches in Rome were starting to keep Easter. The Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th Edition notes that, “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 festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed. Thus the Passover, with a new conception added to it of Christ as the true Paschal Lamb and the first fruits from the dead, continued to be observed... Generally speaking, the Western churches kept Easter on the first day of the week, while the Eastern churches followed the Jewish rule... St Polycarp, the disciple of St John the Evangelist and bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome in 159 AD to confer with Anicetus, the bishop of that see, on the subject; and urged the tradition, which he had received from the apostle, of observing the fourteenth day” (828). Polycarp had to go to Rome to correct the Roman churches who were blending Christianity with paganism. It seemed that He was successful in getting the Pope to realize that God wants us to keep the Passover.

This issue was revisited about forty years later by Polycarp’s disciple, Polycrates. “This issue arose about forty years later (197 AD). The question was discussed in a very different spirit between Victor, bishop of Rome, and Polycrates, metropolitan of proconsular Asia. That province was the only portion of Christen-

dom, which still adhered to the Jewish usage, and Victor demanded that all should adopt the usage prevailing at Rome. This Polycrates firmly refused to agree to, and urged many weighty reasons to the contrary, whereupon Victor proceeded to excommunicate Polycrates and the Christians who continued the Eastern usage” (Page 828).

The believers who kept Passover on the fourteenth of Nissan were excommunicated from the church of Rome. This became known as the quartodeciman controversy, quartodeciman meaning the fourteenth. In the second century following Christ, the disciples taught by the original twelve apostles were keeping Passover. Those in Rome kept Easter. Over the years, the different Popes have used the force of the Roman Empire to slaughter the Christians who celebrated Passover so as to wipe them out. This is so that there would be no opposition. The truth has been suppressed. This is one reason why so few Christians keep Passover to this day.

Some people think that Christ resurrected on a Sunday and they claim Easter originates with that event. Jesus never asked us to remember His resurrection. He asked us to remember His death. His resurrection power is supposed to be manifested in our daily lives. As aforementioned, the name Easter was used thousands of years before Christ for a pagan celebration.

Most Christians have a tendency to assume that Christ was crucified on a Friday and resurrected on a Sunday morning. Jesus said He was going to be in the grave three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40-42). The Jewish culture had twelve hours of day and twelve hours of night (24 hours). This means that Christ would be in the grave 72 hours. Friday afternoon through Sunday morning is not three days and three nights. Christ died about the ninth hour on the fourteenth day of the first month on the Hebrew Calendar. This would have been about three p.m. in the afternoon (Luke 23:44-46). Remember, days end and begin at sunset in the Bible (see Gen. 1:8). The Jewish people were concerned about getting Christ off of the cross before the special Sabbath began

(John 19:31). In the Greek language, the phrase “special Sabbath” is *megas sabbaton*, or great Sabbath. This is the Annual Sabbath of the First Day of Unleavened Bread, which is on the fifteenth day of the first month of the Hebrew Calendar. Christ was not buried before the weekly Sabbath. He was buried before this special or high Sabbath.

Since Christ died around three p.m., this means He would have resurrected around three p.m. Christ died on a Wednesday around three p.m. and resurrected three days and three nights later on a Saturday afternoon around three p.m. When the disciples arrived at the tomb Christ was already gone. John 20:1 even says that Mary went to the tomb while it was still dark outside. In other words, she went to the tomb when the weekly Sabbath ended at sunset on Saturday. This means it would be impossible for Christ to have resurrected on a Sunday morning! All the gospel accounts explain that when they got to the tomb, Christ was already gone! Christ did not resurrect on a Sunday at sunrise.

The celebration of Easter comes from mixing the worship of the True God with the pagan religion of Astarte or Ishtar (from which Easter is named). Christ and His disciples kept Passover, and we should do the same. Easter was not celebrated by the early founders of this country. In fact, it was not an American tradition until the 1870s.

How Should You Live With This Understanding?

We have gone over the history of Christmas and Easter. Even after reading this, some may say, “Well, this is just the day that we honor the Lord on” or “That’s the only time we can get together with family” or “I have the fondest memories of that time of the year”. Others may even say, “We can choose what these days mean to us...” or “God knows I am honoring Him...” The problem is that we are focused on self in American society. We focus on what everything means to us personally. Too many times we do not focus on what it means to the Lord. Go to your spouse sometime and tell him or her that you want to change your anniversary date to the anniversary date of someone you dated in high school. How well do you think they will receive that? Not very well! This is what we expect of the Lord, though. We expect Him to be approving of whatever we want with little regard to how He feels. He died for us. We should think about how He feels. We have to read the Word to see how He views mixing His holy things with another religion. It saddens and grieves Him.

Some have said that Paul approves of keeping Christmas and Easter based on Romans 14:5-6. We have reviewed many other verses in the rest of the Bible where God and even Paul clearly disapprove of these practices. What does this passage really mean? In Romans 14:5-6, Paul wrote, “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.” The first key to understanding these verses is to understand the audience he is addressing. He is writing to the Romans and he is applying these verses specifically to Roman practices. Secondly, he is not addressing which days God considers to be holy, but what days **men** esteem higher than others. God is the one who set aside the Feast days, not man. Third, the Greek word Paul uses for day, *hemera*, refers to any common day. Thus, he is addressing common days, not holy days like the Feasts. The Greek word for holy, *hagios*, is not even

found in this chapter (Romans 14). This issue has nothing to do with the days that we should consider holy for worship of God, but days for common activities. The Romans considered some days to be good days to farm and other days to be good days to fish, but they dedicated these daily activities to other gods and goddesses. Paul wants people to live their everyday common life to serve the Lord. If a person is a fisherman by trade, then they have to fish to provide a living. They just need to make sure that they are fishing to honor Jesus. He is addressing this specific Roman cultural activity for every day activities that have nothing to do with worship of God. Paul clearly told the Galatians that they should not go back to worship of days from other religions.

Paul would not declare new Feast days or approve other Feast Days. Imagine if in the Kingdom of God everyone got to keep their own Feast days? What a mess that would be. We see no such idea put forth in the Bible. If a nation does not keep God's Feasts in the Kingdom, they will miss out on God's blessing (Zech. 14:16-19). Paul said in I Corinthians 11:1 to imitate him as he imitates Christ. Paul's example in the Bible shows us that he continued to keep and reverence the Feast Days even *after* his conversion to Christianity (for a few examples: Acts 13, Acts 17, 18, Acts 20:16, Acts 27:9, and I Cor.16:8). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul says to let no one judge them **for keeping** the Sabbath, Feast Days, and New Moon Celebrations (Col. 2:16). All of the early churches kept the Feast Days.

There is nothing wrong with wanting pleasant memories with your family. We can have these pleasant memories on the Lord's Feast Days. They are the days that remember the most precious thing in the Universe: the sacrifice of the Son of God. The amazing and unique thing about the Lord's Feasts is that they are not shared with another religion. There is no confusion or competition. Why not celebrate these days instead of days that are filled with symbolism from other religions? In Psalm 127:1, the Bible reads, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." The Lord did not build the houses of Christmas and

Easter. The foundation is not the Lord. They will not be celebrated when the Lord returns. I have been celebrating the Feasts for 7 years. During this same time, I have not kept Christmas or Easter. I have experienced a joy on the Feast Days that I never found in 21 years of Christmas or Easter. Why is this? The Feasts are solely focused on the Lord. There are no symbols taken from other religions. They are purely devoted to Him.

How are we to interact with others during these times of the year? We set ourselves apart by not having a tree up in our homes, not having the other Christmas decorations, and not giving out gifts. We abstain from Easter Egg hunts, sunrise services, and making hot cross cakes and other activities that originate with paganism. There is nothing wrong with spending time with your family for a Christmas dinner. Simply do not participate in the giving of gifts and singing of carols. This sends the message to your family that you love them, but that you simply have set yourself apart from keeping that celebration. You will get asked questions about this. You can always have this booklet handy and do some personal research. Some people will mistreat you because of this; always pray for their eyes to be opened. The best time to get gifts is during the Lord's Feasts. In Deut. 24:22-27, the Lord spoke about a 2nd tithe. This 2nd tithe is to be saved up and spent on ourselves and even others to help them keep the Feasts. Although 2nd tithe is supposed to be spent towards keeping the Feasts, you can use 2nd tithe to buy a gift for others during this time. You want others to see what has value to you. The Feasts of the Lord have value to you and your family. We can do this at a time that completely honors God. Giving gifts during the Feasts does not mix worship of God with the worship of other religions. We love other people and we want them to come to this same understanding. We do not mistreat them; we simply live out the Word in front of them and be as kind as possible about it.

God wants us to be set apart, even in what we celebrate. It has been said that we "elevate what we celebrate". Let's celebrate the pure things of God and elevate purity in His presence. Instead of Christmas and Easter, the Lord intended for us to keep His Feasts.

Meet the Author

Kelly McDonald Jr. is an ordained Evangelist at Hungry Hearts Ministries in Jackson, TN. For 21 years, Kelly attended Trinity Baptist Church in Bemis, TN, where he was saved in 1992. While at Trinity, a small independent Baptist church, Kelly learned boldness for the Kingdom of God and that being a Christian is an all or nothing experience. In June 2006, Kelly was called to his first ministry, going door to door in the Bemis community and inviting people to church. In September 2006, Kelly was called to begin a Christian men's group at his then college, Lambuth University. In February 2007, Kelly was called to preach. Less than a month later, he became introduced to Hungry Hearts Ministries.

Since becoming a member of Hungry Hearts, Kelly has taken on many roles to further the ministry's work, from going door-to-door to pass out booklets, preaching, administering the prison ministry, teaching Bible Studies, and starting churches. Due to his service in the ministry, he was ordained a Deacon during the Feast of Pentecost on May 31st, 2009. His spiritual growth and desire to serve God led to his ordination as an Evangelist during the Feast of Pentecost on May 25th, 2012.

Kelly has written for a local Christian magazine, *The Christian to Christian Connection*, and for the international Sabbatarian magazine, *The Sabbath Sentinel*. He currently writes for and serves as the Editor for the Ministry's magazine, *Pursuit*. Kelly has written five books on how to live a holy life. Kelly graduated *summa cum laude* from Lambuth University in Jackson, TN in 2009. He earned a Bachelor of Science with a double major in Political Science and Sociology with a minor in Legal Studies. As a Torah Observant/Spirit Filled minister, Kelly has spoken at several different congregations in four different states, and is available to speak at your church upon request.

There are two traditions known as Christmas and Easter. Many people say that they have fond memories of these times of the year. In this booklet, we will examine the history of these celebrations and whether or not Christians should keep them today.



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