

EASTER-A DOCTRINAL STUDY

1. Easter is another one of those rather confusing holidays, especially for children.
2. It is a mixture of:
 - a. folk-lore, legend, traditions, and historic events
 - b. fertility rites of ancient pagan deities
 - c. festivals celebrating the beginning of Spring
 - d. the Hebrew feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits
 - e. the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:3, 4)
3. However, the real significance of “Easter” to the Christian is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ as the validation of His finished work on the cross of Calvary. (Acts 13:29-39; 17:30-32; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23) Pertinent Biblical doctrines include the following: redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, and resurrection.
4. There are many pre-Christian traditions and customs associated with “Easter” which come from pagan origins, especially the ancient festivals of springtime.
5. Therefore, “Resurrection Day” or “Resurrection Sunday” is to be preferred over the word “Easter” when referring to this unique event.
6. The resurrection of Jesus Christ actually took place on the “Day of First Fruits,” the third feast of the seven major feasts of Israel.
7. The exact origin of the name “Easter” is unknown; however, it may have come from “Eostre,” “Eastre,” or “Ostara,” a Teutonic goddess of springtime, or from the name of their Spring festival called “Eostur.”
 - a. During this pagan festival sacrifices were given in honor of this goddess by the Saxons.
 - b. The emphasis of this feast or festival was fertility and new birth or rebirth, symbolized by eggs and rabbits.
 - c. The Teutonic goddess probably has even more ancient origins, dating at least to the chief goddess, “Ishtar,” of the Babylonians and the Assyrians and her counterpart, “Astarte,” a Phoenician goddess.
 - d. The name appeared in different forms in every culture of the ancient Semitic world. Ishtar was the goddess associated with the evening star and was considered the great mother goddess of fertility and the “*queen of heaven.*” (Jer. 7:18; 44:17-19, 25) She is depicted as riding on a lion in the ninth century BC Assyrian relief stone. (cf. Rev. 13:1-10; 17:1-18; Dan. 7:4; and 1 Pet. 5:8)
8. Other than the “cross of Christ” (1 Cor. 1:17; Col. 1:20; 2:14), there are only two symbols usually associated with “Holy Week:” the **palm branches** associated with

Palm Sunday and the **lily** associated with **Resurrection Sunday**.

a. Palm branches, palm tree:

- (1) תָּמָר - “tamar,” (Heb. noun from verb, תָּמַר), meaning: to stand erect; also used in its noun form as a woman’s name, Tamar; daughter-in-law of Judah (Gen. 38:6), daughter of David (2 Sam. 13:1), daughter of Absalom (2 Sam. 14:27)
- (2) φοινίξ - “phoinix” (Greek noun) meaning:
 - (a) palm tree, palm branch (John 12:13; Rev. 7:9)
 - (b) the color purple or crimson, and the name given to the ancient Phoenicians.
 - (c) a legendary bird, supposed to have lived in Arabia. It lived for 500 years and then consumed itself with fire, only to be reborn out of its own ashes. This legend was also part of the Assyrian culture.
 - (d) the Phoenix represented the sun in ancient Egyptian religion. It died at night and was reborn in the morning.
 - (e) it became a symbol of immortality and resurrection in early Christian tradition.
- (3) Characteristics:
 - (a) beautiful,
 - (b) straight,
 - (c) tall, 90 feet or more,
 - (d) large leaves, feathery, and up to 9 feet long,
 - (e) reaches maturity in about 30 years,
 - (f) lives up to 200 years,
 - (g) has deep tap roots which always indicate locations of water. (Ex. 15:27),
 - (h) prolific producers of edible dates – 300 to 400 pounds a year,
 - (i) has a variety of other uses including; the making of a strong drink, medicine, and perfume.
- (4) Symbolic meaning of the palm tree:
 - (a) The leaves are shaped like a crown representing royalty.
 - (b) These trees always signify rest, shade, and refreshment to weary travelers. (Ex. 15:27)
 - (c) The palm tree and its dates represent prosperity, especially for the righteous. (Psalm 92:12)
 - (d) It is a symbol of victory, especially over death in resurrection. (Rev. 7:9)
 - (e) It is considered a godly tree and is used in celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. (Levit. 23:40)

b. The lily:

- (1) שׁוֹשַׁן - “shushan,” (Heb. noun meaning: lily (Song of Solomon 2:1, 2, 16; Hosea 14:5)

- (2) κρίνον - “krinon” (Greek noun) meaning: lily (Matt. 6:28; Luke 12:27)
- (3) Characteristics:
 - (a) There are three species of the “sword lily” which grow everywhere among the standing corn and wheat.
 - (b) They are pink/purple to blackish/violet in color.
- (4) Symbolic meaning of the lily:
 - (a) It is a symbol of purity and nobility representing the impeccability and royalty of Jesus Christ.
 - (b) It is the symbol of beauty and fragrance representing believers in Jesus Christ.
 - (c) It is a testimony to God’s grace and His fatherly care for His children. (Matt. 6:28-30; Song of Sol. 2:2)

9. People in many parts of the world celebrate before the “Easter” season with carnivals, masquerades, and feasts. These celebrations reach their peak of gaiety on Shrove Tuesday, more than (6) weeks before Easter. This is the last day of such world-famous festivals as Mardi Gras in New Orleans, which usually runs from January 6th to Shrove Tuesday.

10. The days leading up to “Holy Week” and Resurrection Sunday begin with Shrove Tuesday.

- a. **Shrove Tuesday** - the day before the beginning of Lent. Shrove comes from the Old English word, “*shrive*,” meaning to write or prescribe, to do penance, to confess one’s sins.
- b. **Ash Wednesday** - this is the day after Shrove Tuesday and it begins a solemn (40) day period, excluding Sundays, of fasting and prayer called Lent.
- c. **Lent** - “Lent” from Old English “*lengten*” and Middle English “*lente*” means springtime. Lent recalls Christ’s 40-day fast in the wilderness. It is often a time of Christian fasting. (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13)
- d. **Holy Week** - the last week of Lent, which honors the last week of Christ’s life on Earth prior to His resurrection.
- e. **Palm Sunday** -
 - (1) This is the first day of “Holy Week,” named for the palms that people spread before Jesus as He entered Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. (John 12:13-15)
 - (2) Jesus came as a “King of Peace.” (Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19; with Luke 2:14; John 14:27)
 - (3) According to Exodus 12:3-6 the Israelites were to select the Passover lamb five days before the actual Passover. This would coincide with Palm Sunday.
- f. **Maundy Thursday** -
 - (1) Some Christians recall the last supper and the time of the washing of the disciples’ feet by Jesus. (John 13:1-15)
 - (2) Maundy comes originally from the Latin word, “*mandatum*,” meaning mandate or command. The Middle English is “*maunder*.”

- (3) It refers to the “*new commandment*” Jesus gave to His disciples “...*that they love one another...*” (John 13:34)
- (4) It is the day on which Christians often observe the institution of the Eucharist, the Lord’s table, part of the last supper, the Passover meal.

g. **Good Friday** -

- (1) Most Christians observe this as the day of crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (2) However, because of the “*Sabbaths*” mentioned in Matthew 28:1 and the prophecy in Matthew 12:40, related to the “*three days and three nights*” that Jesus would be in the ground, it is doubtful that Christ was crucified on Friday.

h. **Holy Saturday** - Some Christians celebrate this day in anticipation of the resurrection on Sunday.

i. **“Easter”**, **“Resurrection Sunday,”** or **“Resurrection Day”** -

- (1) Almost all Christians are united in celebrating this first day of the week as the day of resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-10; John 20:1-8)
- (2) While there has always been debate over the day and date of celebration each year, the Biblical admonition for the “*first fruits of the harvest*” is on the day after the Sabbath which follows Passover. (Levit. 23:10, 11)

11. To determine an accurate chronology of the events of Holy Week, the following passages must be considered:

- a. “...*three days and three nights...*” (Matt. 12:40 with Jonah 1:17)
- b. “...*raised up the third day...*” (Matt. 16:21)
- c. “...*after three days rise again.*” (Mark 8:31)
- d. “...*it is the third day since these things happened.*” (Luke 24:21)
- e. “*Now after Sabbaths...*” (Matt. 28:1)
- f. “...*on the morrow after the Sabbath...*” (Levit. 23:10, 11)
- g. The women bought and prepared spices “*when the Sabbath was over,*” to anoint the body of Jesus. (Mark 16:1, 2; Luke 23:54-24:1; John 19:31)

12. There is no Biblical command to celebrate the day or the date of Christ’s resurrection.

- a. The command from our Lord is to celebrate and proclaim the **event** of His death until He returns for us. (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20)
- b. The apostle Paul restates this command in 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

13. The significance of Holy Week is that Jesus Christ fulfilled completely and finally, in His first advent, the first three feasts of the seven feasts of Israel:

- a. Jesus Christ is our **Passover** (Matt. 26:26, 27; John 1:29, 36; 1 Cor. 5:7, 8; Heb. 9:14; Rev. 5:6, 12)
- b. He is the **Unleavened Bread** (Matt. 26:26; John 6:35, 48-51ff)
- c. He is the **First Fruits** (1 Cor. 15:20-23; cf. James 1:18)