

The Great Deception

By Rav Levi bar Ido / B'nai Avraham

Everyone who has done their homework knows the PAGAN origin of the holiday called "Easter." The English word "Easter" long antedates "Christianity". Originally it referred to the celebration of the spring sun, and new life in the springtime. The ancient Teutonic goddess of spring was named "Eostre." This mythical figure is said to have been the goddess of the sunrise and the spring. She is the Teutonic goddess of the dawn. The direction of the sunrise, East, is named for her. In Norse mythology, the name is spelled Eostare. Another considered the Norse/Saxon goddess of spring is Ostara. Eastre is believed to be an ancient word for spring. This mother goddess was variously known as Astarte, Ishtar, Ashtoreth, Cybele, Demeter, Ceres, Aphrodite, Venus, and Freya. Easter is a modern form of the ancient goddess Ishtar, Astarte, Eostre, Ostera, another name for Semiramis. The ancient pronunciation of the name of this goddess was just like the way we pronounce "Easter," today!

- *"Astarte was the most important goddess of the pagan Semites. She was the goddess of love, fertility, and maternity for the Phoenicians, Canaanites, Aramaeans, South Arabs, and even the Egyptians. Her name was Ishtar (hence the name Easter) in Babylonia and Assyria, where she was also the goddess of war. Some Old Testament stories call her Ashtoreth and describe the construction of her altar by King Solomon and its destruction by King Josiah. Astarte was identified with the planet Venus. The Greeks called her Aphrodite, and the Romans knew her as Venus."-World Book, Vol. 1, p.782.*

In Syria, Astarte was the Great Mother goddess and queen of prostitutes. Her worship culminated at the vernal equinox. This is about March 21 of each year when the day and night is of equal length; we today call it the first day of spring. The well-known historian, Will Durant, explains how the celebration of her lover, Adonis, was celebrated by the pagans on that day by sexual orgies:

- *"Religious prostitution flourished, for in Syria, as throughout western Asia, the fertility of the soil was symbolized in a Great Mother, or goddess, whose sexual commerce with her lover gave the hint to all the reproductive processes and energies of nature; and the sacrifice of virginity at the temples was not only an offering to Astarte, but a participation with her in that annual self-abandonment which, it was hoped, would offer an irresistible suggestion to the earth, and insure the increase of plants, animals, and men. About the time of the vernal equinox, the festival of the Syrian Astarte, like that of Cybele in Phrygia, was celebrated at Hierapolis with a fervor bordering upon madness. The noise of flutes and drums mingled with the wailing of the women for Astarte's dead lord, Adoni; eunuch priests danced wildly, and slashed themselves with knives... Then in the dark of the night, the priests brought a mystic illumination to the scene, opened the tomb of the young god, and announced triumphantly that Adoni, the Lord, had risen from the dead. Touching the lips of the worshipers with balm, the priests whispered to them the promise that they, too, would some day rise from the grave."-Will Durant, History of Civilization, Vol. 1, pp.296-297.*

The Yisraelites referred to Astarte as "Ashtoreth." In the Scriptures, the prophets of YHWH denounced the worship of Ashtoreth, but many of the people worshiped her and her consort, Baal, the sun "god". This worship was done amid groves of trees, on the summits of mountains. Here they worshiped sacred stones, practiced divination, and engaged in orgies as part of their worship of Ashtoreth and Baal. Because the myth of Astarte included the idea of a resurrected sun "god", the sacred grove worship was carried on at daybreak as the sun was coming up.

The northern kingdom of Yisrael was destroyed because of such idolatry. Later, king Yosiyah of Yehudah marched through it and tore down the altars to Baal, "and them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets." He "defiled Topheth, . . . that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech"; and he smashed the altars that Solomon had built for Chemosh, Milcom and Astarte." (2 Kings 23:2, 4, 10, 13). Ishtar in Sumeria and Babylonia: Ishtar was the love "goddess" of the Babylonians. Her worship came down from earliest times in Sumeria, where her lover was Tammuz. She was the "goddess" of mothers and prostitutes, and of love and war.

- *"Though her worshipers repeatedly addressed her as 'The Virgin,' 'The Holy Virgin,' and 'The Virgin Mother,' this merely meant that her amours were free from all taint of wedlock."- **Will Durant, History of Civilization, Vol. 1, p. 235.***
- *Essentially it (the myth of Demeter and Persephone) was the same myth as that of Isis and Osiris in Egypt, Tammuz and Ishtar in Babylonia, Astarte and Adonis in Syria, Cybele and Attis in Phrygia. The cult of motherhood survived through classical times to take new life in the worship of Mary the Mother of God."- **Will Durant, History of Civilization, Vol.2, p.178.***

Ishtar was said to be the daughter of Sin, the “moon-god”. Her lover was Tammuz, the “sun-god”. She was called the "Queen of Heaven" by her worshipers and their priests. According to the ancient myth, when Tammuz was slain by a wild animal, Ishtar raises him to life. Because of this, a yearly spring festival was held in honor of Ishtar, the “mother goddess.”

- *"[This is the] myth of Ishtar and Tammuz. In the Sumerian form of the tale, Tammuz is Ishtar's young brother; in the Babylonia form, he is sometimes her lover, sometimes her son; both forms seem to have entered into the myths of Venus and Adonis, Demeter and Persephone, and a hundred scattered legends of death and resurrection . . . To the Babylonians it was sacred history faithfully believed and annually commemorated by mourning and wailing for the dead Tammuz, followed by riotous rejoicing over his resurrection."-**Ibid, pp.238, 239.***

Venus (also called Aphrodite) was equivalent to the earth-fertility and love “goddess” of the other Near Eastern nations. According to some stories, her son was Aeneas, the ancestor of the Romans; according to others, Cupid. In Rome, every month was dedicated to a “god”, and April belonged to Venus. She was worshiped as the Mother “goddess” of their race, since they were supposed to be descended from her through Aeneas. Later, they dedicated their days to “gods”, and borrowed from the Persians the sacred Sun-day, the first day of the week, and worshiped the Persian sun “god”, Mithra, on that day. Mithra's birthday was December 25 and was later christened and adopted as "Christmas" by the Roman church.

Because Mithra was always shown with a solar halo around his head, portraits and statues of “Christ” (and shortly, Mary and the saints) with halos around their heads became abundant. Because worshipers of Ishtar presented her with two fertility symbols -- eggs and bunny rabbits, -- these became part of the Christian Easter service”. Because sunrise on Sunday morning at the beginning of spring was, besides December 25th, the holiest day in the Mithraic calendar, the practice of Easter sunrise services continued on into pagan Christianity. Because Mithra was worshiped on the first day of the week, which the Persians and Romans called the sun-day, Sunday sacredness -- which is nowhere to be found in the Scriptures -- came into the “Christian church”. Because Mithra the sun, "died and rose to life" each year on December 25 (when the sun became lowest in the sky), the birth of “Christ” began to be celebrated on that date (although it is reasonably clear from facts in the Scriptures that He was born in the fall of the year -- the taxation census took place near the end of summer or early fall).

Historian Alexander Hislop says of this festival:

- *"Then look at Easter. What means the term Easter itself? It is not a Christian name. It bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the **QUEEN OF HEAVEN**, whose name, as pronounced by the people of Nineveh, was evidently identical with that now in common use in this country. That name, as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar (**The Two Babylons, p.103.**)*

Alexander Hislop continues, showing now this ancient PAGAN festival crept into the “Church” centuries after the time of the original apostles. He writes:

- *"To conciliate the pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals AMALGAMATED, and, by a complicated but skillful adjustment of the calendar, it was found no difficult matter, in general, to get Paganism and Christianity -- NOW FAR SUNK IN IDOLATRY -- in this as in so many other things, to shake hands" (p.105).*

James George Frazer in his epic book *The Golden Bough* wrote:

- *"When we reflect how often the Church has skillfully contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith ON THE OLD STOCK OF PAGANISM, we must surmise that the EASTER celebration of the dead and risen Christ was GRAFTED UPON a similar celebration of the dead and risen ADONIS, which . . . was celebrated in Syria at the same season" (p.345).*

Alan W. Watts, in *Easter, Its Story and Meaning*, was amazed by the similarities between the Catholic Easter and the spring rites of ancient pagan religions:

- *"The points of resemblance between the Christ story, on the one hand, and the MYTH AND RITUAL OF ANCIENT AND 'PAGAN' CULTS, on the other, IS AT TIMES STARTLING ENOUGH TO LOOK LIKE A CONSPIRACY" (P.22).*

Eusebius, the early church historian who lived in the fourth century, relates that Bishop Sixtus of Rome was the first not to observe the Passover, and began observing Easter Sunday in its place (between C.E. 116-126). This was during the reign of Emperor Hadrian (C.E. 117-138), who adopted a Roman policy of radical repression of Jewish rites and customs.

Early Nazarenes observed the Passover, up until 135 C.E. and the Roman conquest of Jerusalem, when the headquarters Nazarenes was finally discontinued, and Jews were banished from the city. The new Greek bishops appointed by the Romans to oversee the new Gentile "Christian church" in Jerusalem, observed the Roman "Easter," thus provoking the controversy into sharp focus after 135 C.E. By this time the "Easter" tradition was strong enough to challenge the Passover.

About 154 C.E. Polycarp, who had observed the Passover with the apostle Yochanan and other of the original apostles, traveled to Rome to discuss the growing controversy arising between the church at Rome, and those observing the pagan Easter, claiming Messiah arose from the dead on that day, and the churches in the East which observed the apostolic tradition of Passover. The meeting with Anicetus ended in a deadlock, neither persuading the other to change.

Later, in the days of Victor of Rome (189-199 C.E.), the dispute became very severe, as Victor sought to force his views on the other bishops in the East. Polycrates, the leader of the Asian bishops at this time, wrote to Victor, in reply to his blustering and threats:

- *"We for our part keep the day scrupulously, without addition or subtraction. For in Asia great luminaries sleep who shall rise again on the day of the Lord's advent, when He is coming with glory from heaven and shall search out all His saints -- such as Philip, one of the twelve apostles . . . Again there is John, who leant back on the Lord's breast, and who became a sacrificing priest wearing the mitre, a martyr, and a teacher; he too sleeps in Ephesus. Then in Smyrna there is Polycarp, bishop and martyr . . . and Thraxas, the bishop and martyr from Eumenia, who also sleeps in Smyrna. Need I mention Sagaris, bishop and martyr, who sleeps in Laodicea, or blessed Papirius, or Melito the eunuch . . . ALL OF THESE KEPT THE FOURTEENTH DAY OF THE MONTH AS THE BEGINNING OF THE PASCHAL FESTIVAL, IN ACCORD- AND WITH THE GOSPEL, NOT DEVIATING IN THE LEAST BUT FOLLOWING THE RULE OF THE FAITH. Last of all, I too, Polycrates, the least of you all, act according to the tradition of my family, some members of which I have actually followed; for seven of them were bishops and I am the eighth, and my family have always kept the DAY WHEN THE PEOPLE PUT AWAY THE LEAVEN. So I, my friends, after spending sixty-five years in the Master's service and conversing with Christians from all*

parts of the world, and going carefully through all Holy Scripture, AM NOT SCARED OF THREATS. Better people than I have said: "We must obey Elohim rather than men" (Eusebius, The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine, p.231).

Upon receiving this letter from Polycrates, Victor was furious, and immediately published circulars excommunicating the Asian bishops, who refused to adopt the Easter Sunday tradition, and EXCOMMUNICATED ALL THE ASSEMBLIES OF ASIA! He was scarcely restrained from implementing his plan by cooler heads.

The controversy continued simmering and boiling in "Christendom", until the fourth century, when Emperor Constantine called the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E. to settle, among other matters, the "Easter question" once and for all. At this time, the Roman Empire had become anti-Jewish. Constantine, himself, hated the Jews, and since he controlled the bishops at the Council, with the authority and influence of his power, the Council decreed:

- *"All the brethren in the East who formerly celebrated Easter [sic, he should have said 'Passover'] with the Jews, will henceforth keep it at the SAME TIME AS THE ROMANS, WITH US . . ."*

Constantine himself, deploring the division in the "church", which he wanted to make the state religion of the Roman Empire, exhorted all the bishops at the Council of Nicea to embrace "*the practice which is observed at once in the city of Rome, and in Africa, throughout Italy, and in Egypt*" (Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath to Sunday, p.204).

J.B. Lightfoot asserts that Rome and Alexandria [symbolical of Babylon and Egypt -- the two countries which Elohim called His servants to come OUT of!] both adopted Easter-Sunday in order to avoid even resembling the Jews. He wrote:

- *"In the Paschal controversy of the second century, the bishops of Jerusalem, Caesarea, Tyre and Ptolemais ranged themselves not with Asia Minor, which regulated the Easter festival by Jewish Passover, but with Rome and Alexandria, thus avoiding even the semblance of Judaism" (The Apostolic Fathers, 1885, II, part I, p.88).*

The pagan Emperor Constantine sought to establish a new WORLD RELIGION totally free from all Jewish influence! He stated, regarding Easter:

- *"It appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin . . . Let us therefore have NOTHING IN COMMON with the detestable Jewish crowd. . . ." (Eusebius, Life of Constantine, NPNF, I, p.524-525).*

Thus the truth of Elohim was buried in an avalanche of paganism. The truth of the Scriptures was replaced by pagan superstition. Passover was replaced by Easter, the spring festival of the goddess of fertility and fecundity. The pagan whore-goddess Semiramis, called "Easter," had her celebration engrafted onto the universal Roman Catholic Church!

Writes Will Durant, in The Story of Civilization: Caesar and Christ,

- *"Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it. . . . the Greek mysteries passed down into the impressive mystery of the Mass. Other PAGAN CULTURES CONTRIBUTED TO THE SYNCRETIST RESULT. From Egypt came the idea of a divine Trinity . . . from Egypt the adoration of the Mother and Child The Mithraic ritual so closely resembled the eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass that Christian fathers charged the Devil with INVENTING THESE SIMILARITIES to mislead frail minds. Christianity was the LAST GREAT CREATION OF THE ANCIENT PAGAN WORLD" (Vol.III, p.595).*

Leavened Doctrines

The apostle Shaul wrote that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (1 Cor.5:6-7). The "leaven" of Easter began to pollute and contaminate the Assemblies, leading the way for a host of auxiliary doctrines, dogmas, and pagan practices to infiltrate the set apart ones, also.

Alexander Hislop describes how the pagan forty-day "fast" of Lent, and Easter, were both incorporated into "Church" doctrine by the Roman Catholic Church, with the abbot Dionysius the Little as the chief instrument in the change-over. Hislop explains:

- *"This change of the calendar in regard to Easter was attended with momentous consequences. It brought into the Church the GROSSEST CORRUPTION and the RANKEST SUPERSTITION in connection with the abstinence of Lent. Let any one only read the ATROCITIES that were commemorated during the 'sacred fast' or Pagan Lent, as described by Arnobius and Clemens Alexandrinus, and surely he must blush for the Christianity of those who, WITH THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF ALL THESE ABOMINATIONS, 'went down to Egypt for help' to stir up the languid devotion of the DEGENERATE CHURCH, and who could find no more excellent way to 'revive' it, than by borrowing from so polluted a source; the ABSURDITIES and ABOMINATIONS connected with which the early Christian writers had held up to scorn. That Christians should ever THINK of introducing the Pagan abstinence of Lent was a sign of evil; it showed how LOW THEY HAD SUNK, and it was also a CAUSE OF EVIL; it inevitably led to DEEPER DEGRADATION. Originally, even in Rome, Lent, with the preceding REVELRIES OF THE CARNIVAL, was entirely unknown But at last, when the worship of ASTARTE was rising into the ascendant, steps were taken to get the whole CHALDEAN LENT of six weeks, or forty days, made imperative on all within the Roman Empire of the West" (ibid., p.106-107).*

Hislop points out how Lent became mandated by a council of the church held at Aurelia about 519 C.E. This Council decreed that Lent should be solemnly observed before Easter:

- *"The difference, in point of time, betwixt the Christian PASCH [Passover], as observed in Britain by the native Christians, and the PAGAN EASTER ENFORCED BY ROME, at the time of enforcement, was a whole month; and it was ONLY BY VIOLENCE AND BLOODSHED, AT LAST, THAT THE FESTIVAL OF THE ANGLO-SAXON OR CHALDEAN GODDESS CAME TO SUPERCEDE that which had been held in honor of Christ. Such is the history of Easter. The popular observances that still attend the period of its celebration amply confirm the testimony of history as to its Babylonian character. The hot cross buns of Good Friday, and the dyed eggs of Pasch or Easter Sunday, figured in the Chaldean rites just as they do now. The 'buns' known too by that identical name, were used in the worship of the QUEEN OF HEAVEN, THE GODDESS EASTER, as early as the days of Cecrops, the founder of Athens -- that is, 1500 years before the Christian era" (ibid., p.107-108).*

Nowhere in Scripture do we find the people of Elohim ever observing Easter. In fact, Elohim commands very plainly, "Learn NOT the way of the heathen" (Jer.10:1). Yahshua never observed "Easter." Nor did He command His apostles to ever observe it! The one place the word "Easter" is found in the Renewed Covenant, it is a mistranslation of the Greek word *Pascha*, meaning "Passover" (Acts 12:4), as all the more accurate translations show.

A children's book about the holiday, **Easter Parade: Welcome Sweet Spring Time! by Steve Englehart, p. 4**, states:

- *"When the Puritans came to North America, they regarded the celebration of Easter—and the celebration of Christmas—with suspicion. They knew that pagans had celebrated the return of spring long before Christians celebrated Easter...for the first two hundred years of European life in North America, only a few states, mostly in the South, paid much attention to Easter." Not until after the Civil War did Americans begin celebrating this holiday: "Easter first became an American tradition in the 1870s" (p. 5).*

Remarkable! The original 13 colonies of America did not observe Easter within an entire century of its founding.

APOSTASY!

The evidence seems to clearly indicate that, in order to drum up enthusiasm among its lethargic, and lukewarm membership, the “church” imitates the Catholic Church during the early centuries, BRINGING IN PAGAN PRACTICES to stimulate an artificial form of excitement, passion, and interest in the “Church” and its activities! As the “Church” suffers a serious decline in income, due to loss of more members who are beginning to leave its ranks in droves, it will seek to hold on to those who remain by appealing to the fleshly desires of human nature, with the same techniques, reasonings, and sophistries of the apostate Roman Catholic Church.

. I must surely ask the question, “Does Elohim no longer command His people to come out of Babylonian religious practices and beliefs, stemming from ancient paganism?”

I acknowledge and honor YHWH's authority when I obey His Torah and encourage others to do so. I declare my independence from YHWH when I set aside His Torah and refuse to keep it. I set myself up as a rival “god” when, having set aside His Torah, I establish in its place a counterfeit and then require others to keep it in place of the Torah that Elohim gave to Yisrael!

"Whom ye obey, his servants ye are." (Rom. 6:16).