

Newsletter March 2013

In our December 2011 newsletter, we discussed the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and later in an April 2012 newsletter we discussed the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. Both are miraculous events unparalleled in human history and represent central doctrines of the Christian faith upon which all of mankind's hope of redemption from sin and the wrath of God rest. Both events have developed into annual observances by most of Christendom. In another newsletter of December 2012 we took occasion to discuss the corrupted winter holiday commonly known as Christmas, which the world today closely associates with the Incarnation of Christ. In this newsletter we shall discuss the pagan holiday known as Easter, which is closely associated by the world with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In doing so, we shall expand upon edited excerpts taken from *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity*, Book II, Chapter 13.4.

Christians actually celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the first day of every week as they meet together inasmuch as Jesus arose from the tomb on the first day (Mt.28:1; Mk16:2,9; Jn.20:1). Best evidence would indicate that Jesus was born in late September or early October or before the year 4 BC of our modern Gregorian calendar. The year is based upon certain historical knowledge of the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC (cf. Mt.2:19). We find that Jesus' preaching ministry did not get underway until after his baptism by John the Baptist (cf. Mt.3:13). John began his ministry of baptism as early as 26 AD or as late as 30 AD, depending upon how the "fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" is construed historically (cf. Lu.3:1-3, 21-23). Luke only gave Jesus' approximate age at his baptism as 30 (Lu.3:23), while his actual age could have been nearer 34. Jesus' ministry spanned about 3 ½ years, which is evidenced by the recording of three separate Passovers and various other festivals that took place during that period (cf. Jn.2:13,23 6:4, and 11:55). That would place the time of Jesus' death and resurrection somewhere between AD 29 and AD 34. An exact date cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.

We do know from Scripture that Jesus' resurrection occurred on the first day of the week immediately after a Jewish Passover celebration and the High Sabbath day that followed it (Jn.19:31). From that information, a commemoration date for his resurrection can be determined relative to Passover each year. Jewish months were 29 to 30 days long closely matching the moon phases. The first day of each month of the Hebrew calendar was determined by observing the first visible crescent following a completely dark moon thus signifying a new moon. The month of Nisan marked the beginning of each calendar year in accordance with Exodus 12:2. It is evident that twelve solar months falls short of adding up to an astronomical year by about 11 days, thus seasons would drift from year to year relative to that basic calendar. Every two or three years an additional month (Adar I) would be added as required at the end of the year to correct the yearly seasonal cycle. Due to astronomical anomalies, observations could vary slightly for the beginning of each month but Passover would always have fallen mid-month on the day before the High Sabbath at or very near a full moon. Today, Passover has been standardized by the modern nation of Israel to begin on Nisan 15 of the Hebrew calendar.

In A.D. 325, the Roman church at the first council of Nicaea (cf. Book III, page 158) established that Sunday should always be celebrated as the day of the resurrection even if the actual date should fall on another day of the week. Our present (Gregorian) calendar established in A.D. 1582 does not synchronize with the earlier Julian calendar in use at the time of the council. All of this complicates the computation of the resurrection date such that a consistently accurate annual date is difficult to determine. In general, the commemoration today falls on the first Sunday after a lapse of fourteen days following the first new moon that immediately follows the spring equinox. Rather than basing the calculation on the true astronomical equinox, the equinox has been fixed ecclesiastically by the Roman Church as always occurring on March 21 to simplify the calculation.

We find that the memorial date for Jesus' resurrection varies year to year from as early as March 22 to as late as April 15.

For many centuries, the yearly celebration of the resurrection of Christ has been infiltrated by ancient paganism much as we discussed concerning the Incarnation and Christmas in our December 2012 newsletter. In Genesis 10:8-10 we read of a man named Nimrod who was descended from one of Noah's sons named Ham. Ham begat a son named Cush who according to legend married a woman named Semiramis. Cush in turn begat Nimrod (Ge.10:8; 1Chr.1:10) whom the Bible describes as becoming a mighty one and a mighty hunter (Ge.10:8,9). The Bible says no more about the life of Nimrod. Nevertheless, according to mythology, when Cush died, Nimrod supposedly married his own mother, Semiramis, and became king. An enemy murdered Nimrod and his body parts were scattered abroad. All were recovered except for his reproductive organs. Queen Semiramis claimed that Nimrod had been taken to the sun and was now to be referred to as Baal, the sun god (cf. Jud. 2:13). Semiramis also taught her subjects that she was the daughter of the moon, her mother, and of the sun, her father. She claimed to have come down out of heaven in a large moon egg into the river Euphrates at the time of a full moon following a spring equinox. At that time, she also took upon herself the name Ishtar, the goddess of war, love, sex, and fertility.

When Semiramis later became pregnant, she claimed that the rays of the sun god had caused her to conceive. The son born to her from that pregnancy was Tammuz, (also called Damuzi). Tammuz was in time killed by a wild boar. Semiramis then proclaimed a forty-day period of mourning each year preceding the anniversary of the death of Tammuz. The worship of Tammuz was centered on two yearly festivals — one celebrating his birth to the goddess Ishtar, and the other mourning his death at the hands of demons in the form of the wild boar. Every year thereafter on the first Sunday after a full moon that followed a spring equinox Ishtar Sunday was celebrated in commemoration of Tammuz's supposed resurrection and ascension to the sun. This ceremony apparently made use of sacred rabbits and eggs as potent symbols of fertility and new birth. From this early religion, many variations spread to various cultures throughout the world, where Ishtar became known by diverse other names.

Eastre (*Eostre*, or *Easter*) was one of various names given to the Teutonic (German, British, Scandinavian) pagan goddess of fertility, and she was similar to the Phoenician goddess Astarte, which was one of the counterparts of the Chaldean goddess. She was also called the "queen of heaven," and was related to Diana of the Ephesians (cf. Ac.19:24–35). Eastre and her counterparts were also referred to by many other names, including "Ishtar," from which we actually get the pronunciation "Easter." She was also known as "Isis," "Innana," "Osiris," "Isi," "Iswara," "Cybele," and "Ostara" the goddess of dawn. The English word "east" is derived from the word Eastre, which was also used to designate the spring season of each year. Sunrise celebrations, focusing on Eastre or her counterparts, were held each spring to ensure the continued growth of crops and the renewal of the earth's grasses and flowers. Pagan prayers were offered up to these goddesses in the hopes of an abundant future harvest. (In Book III, Chapter 17.4, we mentioned a few of these ancient goddesses in connection with the pagan worship of the seven cities of Asia Minor in which the seven churches of Revelation were located at the end of the first century A.D.).

The ancient pagan religion of Semiramis is found in the modern Easter celebration by most of the secular world today. It is important to note here that the word "Easter" is not found anywhere in the Bible except at one point in the Authorized King James translation. In Acts 12:4, the Greek word *pasha* was deliberately mistranslated "Easter" at the insistence of a church bishop in England in or about the year A.D. 1611. Exactly why "Easter" made its way into the translation is unknown, but some have suggested that the context of this passage is such that it was actually Herod who was mentioned as planning to participate in the pagan celebration of Easter, not Jews or Christians (cf. Ac.12:1). Nevertheless, *pasha* in this verse directly refers to the Jewish Passover, not a pagan

celebration, and it should have been so translated as is found in the NASB, the NIV, and various other English Bible translations. The word “Easter” is not in any way of Christian origin. The pagan celebration of Easter was introduced into the corrupted Roman church as a part of an overall effort to merge various pagan festivals into Christianity just as the Yule celebration and Saturnalia was merged into Christmas. The festival of Easter was always celebrated at the time of the spring equinox, which was near the time of the Jewish Passover. This timing readily facilitated the merger.

Most people today, Christians included, seem to be unaware of the pagan origin of Easter and its total incompatibility with Christianity. We commonly hear the word “Easter” being used in church services as if it were synonymous with the Christian resurrection commemoration. In so doing, we unconsciously place the celebration of spring and a mythical fertility goddess on a par with the resurrection of Christ. While there can be a general allegory made between the new life we have in Christ as a result of his resurrection from the dead and new life springing from the earth as green plants after a long winter, we carry that analogy too far when we celebrate Easter as being equivalent with the resurrection of Christ. Liberal churches, and even a large number of our more conservative churches, celebrate Easter with Easter egg hunts on the church lawn on the very day that we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Eggs were commonly exchanged as amulets representing Ishtar’s giant moon egg by early worshipers of Eastre and consumed in much the same way that many do today. This pagan activity is commonly excused as harmless fun arranged for the children while in fact we are instilling in them a strong taste for ancient pagan worship that diverts their (and our) attention from the resurrection of Christ.

Along with the egg, rabbits are also worshiped in the modern Easter celebration, because of their amazing fertility in multiplying, just as did the ancient Druids (cf. Book III, page 302) and the ancient Babylonians before them. The mythical goddess Ishtar (Easter) considered rabbits to be sacred because Tammuz had been so fond of them and because of their amazing ability to procreate. We compound pagan error by telling young children that the “Easter Bunny” has provided baskets of colored eggs and candy for them on Easter morning. Colored eggs and even the more modern plastic eggs are symbols of fertility. That strong sexual connotation in the celebration of Easter is not incidental but relates directly to the mythical goddess of fertility from which the practice apparently originated. It has also been common for many centuries for Christians to attend sunrise worship services in commemoration of the early morning when it was discovered that Jesus was no longer in the tomb, but had arisen from the dead (cf. Lu.24:1). Often seating is arranged such that worshipers can observe the exact moment that the sun rises. This service unwittingly associates those worshipers with the goddess Eastre, or Ostara, the ancient goddess of dawn.

As biblically reformed Christians we must resist acknowledging a mythical pagan goddess and her son Tammuz on the very day that we should be celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The word “Easter” is now so deeply entrenched and identified with the resurrection day commemoration that it would be difficult to consistently use another term for the day and still be understood by the average person. Such is the depth of the corruption that Satan has perpetuated. Many conservative pastors and preachers attempt to avoid the use of the word Easter from the pulpit by referring directly to the resurrection of Christ in Scripture or by using the somewhat less objectionable term “Resurrection Sunday.” (Sunday is actually named after the sun god). Biblical reform leading to a comprehensively reformed Christianity requires us to make sharp distinctions between ancient mythology and biblical Christianity. Having done so, we must then act appropriately upon that knowledge as we live before the face of the true and living God.

© Arthur J. Smith, March 2013