

Truth or Tradition – Week 3 – Easter Traditions – Bible Study Helps

Title: Easter Traditions: Separating Truth from Pagan Worship

Sermon Summary: This sermon examines the historical and biblical origins of Easter traditions, revealing their roots in ancient Babylonian goddess worship rather than Christian practice. The sermon traces Easter back to Ishtar (also called Ashtaroth and the Queen of Heaven), the Babylonian goddess of fertility worshiped alongside Baal. He explains how Constantine's Council of Nicaea in 325 AD merged pagan Roman festivals with Christianity, creating what became modern Easter celebrations. The message challenges believers to examine their traditions in light of Scripture, arguing that God calls His people to separate from worldly practices and worship Him alone. The pastor emphasizes that while Jesus Christ's resurrection should be celebrated, believers must be careful not to mix pagan symbols and practices (eggs, rabbits, 40-day fasts) with genuine Christian worship. The call is for Christians to replace worldly traditions with biblical practices that truly honor Christ and lead others to salvation.

Key Points:

- Easter originates from Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of fertility, not from Christian tradition
- The word "Easter" appears once in Acts 12:4 (KJV), referring to the pagan festival Herod was celebrating, not the resurrection
- Constantine's Council of Nicaea (325 AD) officially merged pagan worship practices with Christianity
- Easter traditions (eggs, rabbits, ham, 40-day fasts) all trace back to pagan goddess worship in Babylon
- God repeatedly condemned Israel for worshiping Ashtaroth (Ishtar) and commanded them to put away false gods
- Modern versions of the Bible incorrectly change "Easter" to "Passover" in Acts 12:4, obscuring the historical truth
- The Roman Catholic system represents the continuation of Babylonian mystery religion (Revelation 17-18)
- Christians should celebrate Christ's resurrection weekly, not just annually with pagan-rooted traditions
- Believers must work out their own salvation and decide what honors God versus what perpetuates worldly traditions
- The goal should be raising children in pure devotion to Christ without the confusion of mixed pagan practices

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Scripture Reference:

- Matthew 21:1-16 (Jesus' triumphal entry and cleansing of the temple)
- Acts 12:1-5 (Herod's intention to wait until after Easter)
- Judges 2:11-13 (Israel forsaking God to serve Baal and Ashtaroth)
- Jeremiah 44:15-17 (Worship of the Queen of Heaven)
- Revelation 17:3-6, 18:24 (Mystery Babylon and the woman drunk with martyrs' blood)
- 1 Samuel 7:3 (Samuel's call to put away strange gods and Ashtaroth)
- Genesis 11:1-2, 14:1 (Babylon/Shinar and its spread)

Stories:

- Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, followed by His cleansing of the temple when He overturned the money changers' tables
- The testimony of someone who grew up confused about Easter traditions, mixing the crucified Jesus with Easter kites, buns, and festivities, unable to understand the connection
- The historical account of how religious leaders would reject people's Passover lambs and sell them approved ones at inflated prices, along with money changers exploiting worshipers
- The Babylonian myth of Semiramis (Nimrod's wife) claiming her pregnancy came from sun rays after Nimrod's death, giving birth to Tammuz
- The legend of Ishtar/Easter emerging from a giant egg in the Euphrates River on Sunday after the spring equinox full moon
- The historical practice during pagan Easter worship of sacrificing three-month-old children and dyeing eggs in their blood
- America's founding Puritans dismissing Easter as a pagan holiday, with widespread observance only occurring after the Civil War

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Discipleship Questions

How does the practice of mixing pagan traditions with Christian worship affect our witness to unbelievers and the spiritual formation of our children?

In what ways might we be unknowingly participating in traditions that cause us to 'forsake the Lord' as the Israelites did when they worshiped Ashtoreth?

Why do you think the King James Bible translators chose to use the word 'Easter' in Acts 12:4 instead of 'Passover,' and what does this reveal about the religious climate of that time?

How can we distinguish between celebrating Christ's resurrection and participating in traditions rooted in goddess worship and fertility rituals?

What does it mean practically to 'put away the strange gods and Ashtoreth' in our modern context, as Samuel instructed in 1 Samuel 7:3?

Why might American Puritans have dismissed Easter as a pagan holiday, and what can we learn from their convictions about separation from worldly practices?

How does the connection between Constantine's Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and the establishment of Easter traditions challenge our understanding of church history?

In what ways does prioritizing cultural acceptance and appearing 'cool' to reach the lost compromise the biblical mandate to keep Christ high and exalted?

What steps can families take to replace worldly holiday traditions with biblical practices that genuinely point children to Jesus Christ without hypocrisy?

How should believers respond when they discover that long-held traditions have roots in practices God explicitly condemned in Scripture?

Small Group Guide: Easter Traditions - Truth or Tradition?

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

Icebreaker Question: What are some Easter traditions you grew up with? How did they shape your understanding of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Key Scripture Passages

- **Matthew 21:1-17** - Jesus' triumphal entry and cleansing of the temple
- **Acts 12:1-5** - The only mention of "Easter" in the King James Bible
- **Judges 2:11-13** - Israel's forsaking of God to worship Baal and Ashtoreth
- **Jeremiah 44:15-17** - Worship of the "queen of heaven"
- **1 Samuel 7:3** - Samuel's call to put away false gods

Key Takeaways

1. The Origin of Easter

- The word "Easter" comes from Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of fertility
- Also known as Ashtoreth (Hebrew), Queen of Heaven, Semiramis, and other names
- Easter traditions trace back to pagan Babylon, not biblical Christianity
- Constantine officially merged pagan Easter worship with Christianity in 325 AD at the Council of Nicaea

2. Biblical vs. Worldly Celebration

- God's people were repeatedly condemned for forsaking Him to worship Ashtoreth/Ishtar
- The Bible never commands us to celebrate Easter as a special day
- Early Christians celebrated the resurrection every Sunday (weekly Resurrection Sunday)
- American Puritans rejected Easter as a pagan holiday until after the Civil War

3. The Danger of Mixed Worship

- Mixing worldly traditions with biblical truth confuses children and new believers
- God desires pure, unmixed worship
- Traditions can lead people away from wholly loving God

- We must be willing to examine and change what contradicts Scripture

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Message

1. **What was your initial reaction to learning about the pagan origins of Easter traditions?** Were you surprised, skeptical, convicted, or something else?
2. **Read Matthew 21:12-13.** How does Jesus' response to the money changers in the temple relate to how we should view worldly traditions mixed with Christian worship?
3. **In Acts 12:4, why do you think the King James Bible uses "Easter" while modern versions use "Passover"?** What does this tell us about what was happening in that historical moment?
4. **Children growing up with mixed messages become confused.** How might celebrating Easter traditions alongside teaching about Christ's resurrection create confusion or hypocrisy?

Going Deeper

5. **Read Judges 2:11-13 and 1 Samuel 7:3.** What pattern do you see in how God's people fell into idolatry? How might this pattern apply to Christians today?
6. **"In order to worship Ashtoreth, you have to forsake the Lord."** Can we truly honor Christ while participating in traditions rooted in pagan goddess worship? Why or why not?
7. **How do you respond to the argument: "But we're not worshipping a goddess—we're celebrating Jesus"?** Is it possible to "redeem" pagan practices by giving them Christian meaning?
8. **During the Reformation, believers recognized the Roman church as the "whore of Babylon."** How has the modern church lost this discernment?

Personal Reflection

9. **What traditions have you participated in without knowing their origins?** How does learning the truth change your perspective?
10. **The sermon challenged: "Why not replace worldly things with biblical things?"** What would this look like practically in your family?
11. **What's the difference between legalism and genuine conviction from the Holy Spirit?** How can we pursue holiness without becoming judgmental Pharisees?
12. **Read 1 Corinthians 10:31 - "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."** Can participating in Easter egg hunts, Easter baskets, and other traditions glorify God? Why or why not?

Practical Application

This Week's Challenge

Choose ONE of the following action steps:

Option 1: Family Discussion

- Sit down with your family and discuss what you learned about Easter traditions
- Ask: "How can we celebrate Christ's resurrection in a way that honors Him without mixing in worldly traditions?"
- Brainstorm biblical alternatives that focus solely on Jesus

Option 2: Scripture Study

- Study the biblical Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12, Leviticus 23)
- Research how early Christians celebrated the resurrection (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2)
- Consider how you can make every Sunday a "Resurrection Sunday"

Option 3: Personal Inventory

- List all the Easter traditions you currently practice
- Research the origin of each one
- Prayerfully ask God what He wants you to keep, modify, or eliminate
- Make decisions based on Scripture, not tradition or convenience

Option 4: Evangelism Focus

- Instead of inviting people to an "Easter service," invite them to learn about Christ's resurrection from the Bible
- Prepare your testimony and the gospel message
- Use this season as an opportunity to point people to Christ, not traditions

Accountability Questions

1. **What specific tradition is God convicting you about?**
2. **What obstacles (family pressure, fear of being "weird," loss of fun traditions) are preventing you from obeying God in this area?**
3. **How will you explain changes to your children or extended family members who may not understand?**
4. **What are you willing to sacrifice to worship God more purely?**

Key Quotes from the Sermon

"We don't want to do anything pagan, but what do you do when you find out most of what is happening all around you is a part of a systematic devilish plan to make the world anti-Christian?"

"Once you know it, it changes you. You're unsettled at doing anything other than bringing Jesus Christ glory."

"Why wouldn't we then do more things that would bring Jesus Christ glory?"

"We don't bring Jesus Christ down to their level. We preach him high and exalted. And they got to get to him."

"Do you really want to follow traditions that lead you and others away from God?"

Closing Reflection

Read Romans 12:1-2 *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."*

Final Question: Are you willing to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" even when it means abandoning cherished traditions?

Prayer Points

- Pray for wisdom and courage to obey God's Word over tradition
- Pray for unity in families as these discussions take place
- Pray for discernment to recognize worldly influences in our worship
- Pray for opportunities to share the true gospel during this season
- Pray for strength to live set apart for God's glory

For Next Week

- Be prepared to share what God revealed to you this week
- Discuss any changes you've made and how family/friends responded

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- Share creative ways you're focusing on Christ's resurrection without pagan traditions
- Encourage one another in pursuing holiness

Remember: The goal isn't perfection or legalism—it's to love God with all your heart and worship Him in spirit and in truth. Be patient with yourself and others as the Holy Spirit does His sanctifying work.

5-Day Devotional: Truth Over Tradition

Day 1: Examining Our Worship

Reading: Matthew 21:12-17

Devotional: When Jesus entered the temple, He didn't find pure worship—He found religious commerce masquerading as devotion. The religious leaders had created a system that looked spiritual but was far from God's heart. Today, ask yourself: What traditions have I accepted without examining them against Scripture? Jesus didn't tolerate mixture in His Father's house, and He calls us to the same standard. True worship flows from hearts wholly devoted to Him, not from cultural customs we've inherited. Like Jesus turning over the money changers' tables, we may need to overturn some things in our own lives. Are you willing to let God search your heart and show you what needs to change? Authentic worship requires authentic examination.

Day 2: Forsaking False Gods

Reading: Judges 2:11-19

Devotional: Israel's cycle of sin always began the same way: "They forsook the LORD." The Israelites didn't set out to abandon God completely—they simply added other practices alongside their worship of Him. This mixture provoked God's anger because He demands exclusive devotion. We face the same temptation today when we blend worldly traditions with biblical Christianity. The danger isn't always blatant paganism; it's the subtle integration of practices that draw our hearts away from wholehearted devotion to Christ. God's remedy was clear: "Put away the strange gods and serve the LORD only" (1 Samuel 7:3). What competing loyalties have crept into your spiritual life? True freedom comes when we eliminate anything that divides our affection for God.

Day 3: The Queen of Heaven Deception

Reading: Jeremiah 44:15-23

Devotional: The people's response to Jeremiah is shocking: "We will not listen to you!" They attributed their prosperity to worshiping the queen of heaven, refusing God's correction. This reveals how deeply deception can take root when we justify wrong practices by our circumstances. The Israelites genuinely believed their idolatry was helping them, blinding them to God's truth. Today, we can similarly rationalize traditions because "everyone does it" or "it seems harmless." But God sees what we cannot—how these practices steal glory from Him and confuse the next generation about true worship. Are you defending certain practices because they're comfortable rather than because they're biblical? Ask God for courage to hear His truth, even when it challenges long-held traditions.

Day 4: Sanctified and Set Apart

Reading: 1 Samuel 7:3-6

Devotional: Samuel's message was simple but radical: "Return to the LORD with all your hearts." Notice the requirement—not partial devotion, but complete surrender. The Israelites responded by putting away their false gods and serving the Lord only. This act of separation preceded God's deliverance and blessing. Sanctification means being set apart for God's purposes, and it requires intentional choices. We cannot casually drift into holiness while clinging to worldly practices. Today's culture pressures us to blend in, to not be "too extreme" in our faith. But God has always called His people to be different, to be a light in darkness. What would it look like for you to return to the Lord with all your heart? Holiness isn't legalism—it's loving God enough to let go of everything that competes with Him.

Day 5: Raising the Next Generation

Reading: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Devotional: God's instruction to Israel was clear: teach your children diligently about Him in every moment of daily life. The danger of mixing worldly traditions with biblical truth is especially acute for children, who cannot distinguish between cultural customs and scriptural commands. When we celebrate with practices rooted in paganism while claiming to honor Christ, we create confusion about what truly matters. Children deserve to grow up in homes where Jesus is exalted above all else, where every tradition points them to their Savior. This doesn't mean joyless living—it means joy rooted in Christ alone. What legacy are you creating? Will your children remember a home that compromised with the world, or one that courageously followed Christ? The most loving thing we can do is model wholehearted devotion to Jesus, teaching them that He alone is worthy of our worship and celebration.

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." - John 17:17