

# The True Meaning of Lent

What is Lent? Why is it so widely practiced by “Christians” of this world? Is it because the Bible commands it? Did Christ or any of His apostles observe Lent? What about the first-century Church? What does the Bible teach about Lent?

BY DAVID C. PACK

Unlike New Year’s, Christmas, Halloween, St. Valentine’s Day and other pagan holidays that are celebrated by the secular, non-religious world, the Lenten season is observed by dedicated religious believers.

On Ash Wednesday, many solemnly mark their foreheads with ash. Then for the next 40 days they “fast” by abstaining from certain foods or physical pleasures until Easter. This is done to supposedly imitate Jesus Christ’s 40-day fast in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-2). Some give up smoking. Others give up chewing gum. Still others give up overeating or cursing. People vow to give up anything, as long as it prepares them for Easter.

People who observe Lent may be religious, dedicated and sincere—but they are sincerely wrong.

Let’s examine Lent, its practices and customs, its historic and religious origins, and its true meaning from the Bible’s perspective, not from the “traditions of men” (Mark 7:7-9).

## Examining Lent’s Purpose

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “the real aim of Lent is, above all else, to prepare men for the celebration of the death and Resurrection of Christ...the better the preparation the more effective the celebration will be. One can effectively relive the mystery only with purified mind and heart. The purpose of Lent is to provide that purification by weaning men from sin and selfishness through self-denial and prayer, by

creating in them the desire to do God’s will and to make His kingdom come by making it come first of all in their hearts.”

On the surface, this belief sounds sincere. However, it does not agree with the Bible, God’s Holy Word, the only source of true spiritual knowledge and understanding (John 17:17). God, through the apostle Paul, commands Christians to “continue you in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them; and that from a child you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:14-17).

First, understand that the “celebration of the death and Resurrection of Christ” to which the preceding quote refers is so-called “Good Friday” and “Easter Sunday”—holidays deeply rooted in ancient paganism. They were instituted by mainstream Christianity in order to counterfeit and replace the Passover season. Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread were observed by Christ, the original apostles and the New Testament Church—including gentiles. God commands His people to observe them today (I Cor. 5:7-8). (Read our booklets *The True Origin of Easter* and *Christ’s Resurrection Was Not on Sunday* to learn more.)

Second, the Bible says that we are purified—cleansed, set apart and

made pure in God’s sight—by the shed blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:11-14, 22; 13:12). This, along with faith (Acts 15:9) and humbly submitting to and obeying God (James 4:7-10) through His truth and prayer (John 17:17; I Tim. 4:5), makes us clean before God. No amount of fasting, abstaining from physical pleasures or any other form of self-denial can purify us.

Third, you cannot, of and by yourself, create within you “the desire to do God’s will.” True, God has given mankind free moral agency. But the carnal, natural mind cannot—will not—submit to God. “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit...Because the carnal mind is enmity [hostile] against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:5, 7).

Only through a converted mind, actively led by the Holy Spirit, can God work “in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

And fourth, “to make His kingdom come by making it come first of all in their hearts” is a false tradition taught by this world’s brand of Christianity. It is not taught in the Bible. God is not setting up His Kingdom in the hearts of men. (Request our article “Seven Proofs God’s Kingdom Is Not Here Yet” to understand more.)

So where did Lent originate? How did it come to be so widely observed by mainstream Christianity?

## Approved by Official State Religion

Believe it or not, Lent was never observed by Christ or His apostles. He commanded His disciples to “Go you

therefore, and teach all nations...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus never commanded them to observe Lent or Easter. He did, however, command them to keep Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. In fact, during His last Passover on Earth, Christ gave detailed instructions on how to observe the Passover service. He also instituted new Passover symbols (John 13:1-17).

Notice what Alexander Hislop wrote in his book *The Two Babylons*: “The festival, of which we read in Church history, under the name of Easter, in the third and fourth centuries, was quite a different festival from that now observed in the Romish Church, and at that time was not known by any such name as Easter...That festival [Passover] was not idolatrous, and it was preceded by no Lent. ‘It ought to be known,’ said Cassianus, the monk of Marseilles, writing in the fifth century, and contrasting the primitive [New Testament] Church with the Church of his day, ‘that the observance of the forty days had no existence, so long as the perfection of that primitive Church remained inviolate.’”

Lent was not observed by the first-century Church! It was first addressed by the church at Rome during the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, when Emperor Constantine officially recognized that church as the Roman Empire’s state religion. Any other form of Christianity that held to doctrines contrary to the Roman church was considered an enemy of the state. (To learn more about true Church history, read our book *Where Is the True Church? – and Its Incredible History!*) In AD 360, the Council of Laodicea officially commanded Lent to be observed.

Originally, people did not observe Lent for more than a week. Some kept it for one or two days. Others kept it for 40 consecutive hours, falsely believing that only 40 hours had elapsed between Christ’s death and resurrection.

Eventually, it became a 40-day period of fasting or abstaining from certain foods. “The emphasis was not so much on the fasting as on the spiritual renewal that the preparation for Easter demanded. It was simply a period marked by

fasting, but not necessarily one in which the faithful fasted every day. However, as time went on, more and more emphasis was laid upon fasting...During the early centuries (from the fifth century on especially) the observance of the fast was very strict. Only one meal a day, toward evening was allowed: flesh meat and fish, and in most places even eggs and dairy products, were absolutely forbidden. Meat was not even allowed on Sundays” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

From the ninth century onward, Lent’s strict rules were relaxed. Greater emphasis was given to performing “penitential works” than to fasting and abstinence. According to the apostolic constitution *Poenitemini* of Pope Paul IV (Feb. 17, 1966), “abstinence is to be observed on Ash Wednesday and on all Fridays of the year that do not fall on holy days of obligation, and fasting as well as abstinence is to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

Today, Lent is used for “fasting from sin and from vice...forsaking sin and sinful ways.” It is a season “for penance, which means sorrow for sin and conversion to God.” This tradition teaches that fasting and employing self-discipline during Lent will give a worshipper the “control over himself that he needs to purify his heart and renew his life.”

However, the Bible clearly shows that self-control—temperance—comes from having God’s Holy Spirit working in the life of a converted mind (Gal. 5:16, 17, 22). Fasting—of and by itself—cannot produce godly self-control.

Paul warned against using self-denial as a tool to rely on your own will. He called it “will worship.” “Wherefore if you be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh” (Col. 2:20-23).

God did not design fasting as a tool for penance, “beating yourself up” or

developing willpower: “Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh?” (Isa. 58:5-7).

God’s people humble themselves through fasting in order to draw closer to Him—so that they can learn to think and act like Him—so that they can live His way of life in all things. Notice what the prophet Jeremiah wrote: “Thus says the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says the LORD” (9:23-24). Fasting (and prayer) helps Christians draw closer to God.

### **Lent’s Ancient Roots**

Coming from the Anglo-Saxon *Lencten*, meaning “spring,” Lent originated in the ancient Babylonian mystery religion. “The forty days’ abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshippers of the Babylonian goddess...Among the Pagans this Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz” (*The Two Babylons*).

Tammuz was the false Messiah of the Babylonians—a satanic counterfeit of Jesus Christ!

The Feast of Tammuz was usually celebrated in June (also called the “month of Tammuz”). Lent was held 40 days before the feast, “celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing.” This is why Lent means “spring”; it took place from spring to early summer.

The Bible records ancient Judah worshipping this false Messiah: “Then He brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD’s house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz” (Ezek. 8:14-15). This was a great abomination in God’s eyes!

But why did the church at Rome institute such a pagan holiday?

“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” (*The Two Babylons*).

The Roman system replaced Passover with Easter, moving the pagan Feast of Tammuz to early spring, “Christianizing” it. Lent moved with it.

“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” (*The Two Babylons*).

Before giving up personal sins and vices during Lent, the pagans held a wild, “anything goes” celebration to make sure that they got in their share of debaucheries and perversities—what the world celebrates as Mardi Gras today.

### **Abomination Masked as Christianity**

God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). He never instituted Lent, a pagan observance connecting debauchery to the supposed resurrection of a false Messiah.

God commands His people to follow Him—not the traditions of men. God’s ways are higher, better than man’s (Isa. 55:8-9). Men cannot determine for themselves right from wrong or how to properly worship God. Why? Because “the heart [mind] is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer.

17:9), and “the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (10:23). God designed us and gave us life. He knows how we are supposed to worship Him.

To be a Christian and properly serve God, you must live “by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4), recognizing that His Holy Scriptures “cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

God commands Christians to flee from the pagan traditions and customs of this world, currently led and deceived by Satan the devil (II Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9).

Lent may *seem* like a sincere, heartfelt religious observance. But it is deeply rooted in pagan ideas that counterfeit God’s plan.

God hates *all* pagan observances (Jer. 10:2-3; Lev. 18:3, 30; Deut. 7:1-5, 16). They cannot be “Christianized” or made clean by men. That includes Lent.

Now you know the true meaning of Lent. □

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## HOW TO CONTACT US

The Restored Church of God  
1000 Ambassador Drive  
Wadsworth, OH 44281  
USA

The Restored Church of God  
P.O. Box 4064  
St. Catharines, ON L2R 7S3  
CANADA

Phone: (330) 334-2266  
Fax: (330) 334-6513

rcg.org  
e-mail: info@rcg.org