

TRUTH SERIES

VOLUME 1



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DEALING WITH THE TRADITIONS



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Thanks to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Thanks to Him who never let us be deceived, and offers us daily the opportunity to know His true freedom.

This book is dedicated to all people who are tired of the lies and fantasies of the religious rituals and seek the simplicity of life and of the intimacy with Christ.

“Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free... So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed’” (Jn. 8: 31-32; 36).

Introduction

There are certain traditions acquired by mankind for centuries, but today few of us question them. However, we begin to worry about them when they fail to have more meaning in our lives; instead, they start to bother us, because they gain the weight of a dead ritual that we are often obliged to abide lest to stay on the sidelines of society. Some people react and decide to escape the traditional in order to find the true contact with God. Only thus they know the freedom, the simplicity and the truth of Christ.

I'm talking specifically about Christmas, Easter and death, because who does not know the truth of the gospel begins to worry about those who die in a sick way; for themselves, they acquire rituals and customs that will not contribute in anything to salvation of this soul, since salvation depends on the individual free will exercised in life.

This book aims to clarify the origin of the traditions mentioned above and give biblical understanding so that each one decides from himself what wants to do. The understanding is the key to liberation from all the chains in our lives. Only what is written in the bible is valid for us.

Before we enter the subjects, we must first understand the Jewish calendar because, biblically speaking, everything started with the choice of God by the Hebrews.

The passage of years was generally marked by reference to the months, the agricultural seasons and the main festivals.

The year, in Hebrew, is *shānâ*. The verb *shannah* literally means '*to repeat [what was taught]*'; it was called so because of the change or succession of the seasons and was composed of twelve lunar months (354 days). Every three years one month was added (by the repetition of the last month) to take the difference between the twelve lunar months and the solar year. For Jews, the festival that celebrates the beginning of the year is based on the religious and the civil calendar. The civil calendar started when autumn began (seventh month or *Tishri* – *Ex. 23: 16; Ex. 34: 22*). While they dwelt in Egypt, the Hebrews may have been adapted to the solar year of 12 months, each with thirty days with the addition of five extra days, totaling 365 days. But at the time of their departure from there, the Lord marked the beginning of the year (religious calendar) based in the event of Passover (*Pesach*), when the *Destroyer* passed over the houses, killing all the firstborn of Egypt (*Pesach* means "*to pass over*" – *Ex. 12: 2; 13: 23; 27*). Thus, the first month was set in the spring (*Nisan* or *Aviv* – *Ex. 12: 2*) and the Jewish calendar became to have twelve lunar months.

The month started when the crescent of the new moon (*Num. 28: 14; Isa. 66: 23; 2 Chr. 8: 13; Num. 28: 11*) was first seen at sunset. The month (*yerah* or *yare'ach* = *moon*) had twenty-nine to thirty days, and since the lunar year was shorter by about eleven days than the solar year, it was necessary to insert periodically, as explained above, a thirteenth month so that the *New Year's Day* didn't happen before the spring (March-April).

We can notice two different names for each month: one, pre-Babylonian exile, and other, post-exile. The month of *Aviv*, appointed by God to start the *New Year*, coinciding with the spring or Passover, also referred to the period of the beginning of the wheat harvest, so the name *Aviv* (*Abib*) means '*wheat ripening*' (*Ex. 13: 4; Ex. 23: 15*). Its name post-exile became to be *Nisan* = *beginning, opening*. The other names that remain from the pre-exile period are: *Ziv* (*1 Kin. 6: 1; 37*, the second month, which means '*splendor of the flowers*'), *Ethanim* (*1 Kin. 8: 2*, the seventh, which means '*constant rain*') and *Bul* (*1 Kin. 6: 38*, the eighth, which means '*changeable, growth*').

May God give you understanding of why many customs need to be abandoned by those who really want to know Him and serve Him in holiness.

I wish you the peace of the Lord!

Tânia Cristina

Notes:

- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [] or parenthesis (), in *italics*, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995)
- NIV = New International Version (it will be used in brackets in some verses to facilitate the readers' understanding).

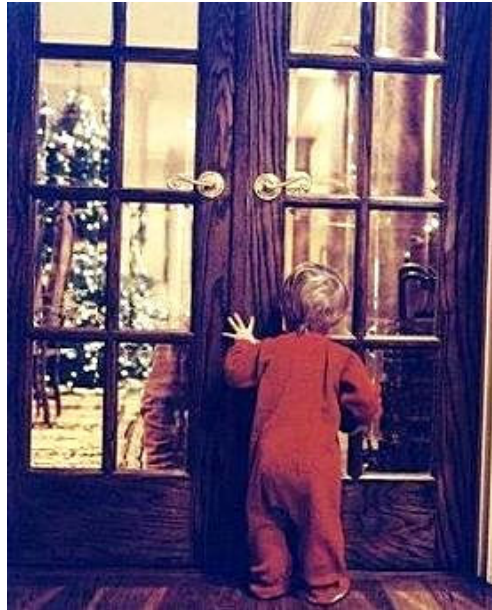
Month	Name pre-exile	Name post-exile	Modern Calendar	Season	Feast (day of the month)
1	Aviv (wheat ripening)	Nisan (beginning, opening)	Mar-April	Spring	14° Passover 15°-21° Unleavened bread 16° Firstfruits
2	Ziv (splendor of the flowers)	Iyar	April-May	Beginning of Harvest (Barley and wheat)	
3		Sivan	May-June	Green figs	6° Pentecost (Feast of weeks; Harvest)
4		Tammuz (hidden, son of life)	June-July	Grape harvest	
5		Av	July-August	Olive harvest	
6		Elul (scream or harvest of life)	August-Sep.	Dates and ripened figs of summer	
7	Ethanim (constant rain)	Tishri	Sep.-Oct.	First rains	1° Trumpets 10° Atonement 15°-21° Tabernacles 22° Closing assembly
8	Bul (changeable, growth)	Heshvan	Oct.-Nov.	Plowing and late figs (Autumn-Winter)	
9		Kislev (confidence, boldness)	Nov.-Dec.	sowing	25° Dedication * (Hanukkah; feast of lights)
10		Tevet	Dec.-Jan.	Rain (snow in high places)	
11		Shevat	Jan.-Feb.	Flower of mulberry and citrus harvest	
12		Adar (amplitude, width, ornament, glory)	Feb.-March	Citrus harvest	14°-15° Purim*

* Not determined by God. Purim: by Mordecai and Esther (Est. 9: 21-22; 26-29). Hanukkah (1 Maccabees 4: 52-53; Jn. 10: 22): by men during the 'quiet period of God' (From 400 BC to the Birth of Christ).

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CHRISTMAS



What the bible says:

First, let us remember some of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah:

- *Isa. 7: 14*: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.”

The prophecy was fulfilled when Joseph was visited by the angel of God in a dream, and Mary received the Annunciation of the angel:

- *Matt 1: 18-23*: “Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel’, which means, ‘God is with us.’”

- *Lk. 1: 26-38*: “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel said

to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word’. Then the angel departed from her.”

Other prophecies say:

- *Isa. 9: 1-7*: “But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish [*the prophet referred to the kingdom of Judah under threat from the Assyrian yoke*]. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

- *Isa. 11: 1-2*: “A shoot [*a son, David*] shall come out from the stump of Jesse [*father of David*], and a branch [*Jesus*] shall grow out of his roots [*it means ‘from their descendants, from their family tree’*]. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might [*NIV, power*], the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord” [*confirming His anointing as Messiah, who would come from the house of David*].

- *Isa. 42:1*: “Here is my servant [*referring to Jesus*], whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”

- *Jer. 23: 5-6*: “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’”

- *Jer. 30: 21*: “Their prince [*referring to Jesus*], shall be one of their own [*Judah and Israel*], their ruler shall come from their midst; I will bring him near, and he shall approach me, for who would otherwise dare to approach me? says the Lord.”

- *Ezek. 37: 24*: “My servant David [*referring to Jesus*], shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes.”

- *Mic. 5: 2*: “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.”

- *Jn. 7: 42*: “Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?”

All of them were fulfilled when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judah, a town in the hill country of Judah called Ephrathah (different from Bethlehem, another city in the

tribe of Zebulun), site of the ancestors of King David, where the Messiah would come from. The texts are in:

- *Lk. 2: 1-14*: “In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’”

- *Matt. 2: 1-6*: “In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

- *Matt. 2: 9-11*: “When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

Origin of the tradition and symbols linked to it:

Christmas is one of the most important feasts of the Christianity, along with Easter and Pentecost. It celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, although there is no confirmation in favor of this date (December, 25th) as the date of His true birth. *Natal* comes from the Latin *natālis*, derived from the verb *nascor*, *nascēris*, *natus sum*, *nasci*, meaning: *to be born, be placed in the world*. In English, the word for *Christmas* comes from the Latin words: *Cristes maesse* (in English: *Christ's Mass*). The feast is celebrated on December 25th, usually to the various Christian denominations, date that was established in the fourth century by the Western Church (The first Christmas celebration in Rome was probably in the year 336 AD) and since the fifth century, by the Eastern Church. In Rome, December 25th was the date on which the Romans commemorated the beginning of winter or the winter solstice, the Roman festival dedicated to *the birth of the Sun god Invictus* (the *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*, the ‘*Birthday of the Unconquerable Sun*’). Solstice refers to the time when the sun goes through its greatest boreal (north) and

southern declination, and during which it ceases to move away from the equator. The *Saturnalia*, festival in honor to the god *Saturn*, was celebrated from 17th to 22nd December; it was a time of joy and exchanging gifts. The title 'Invictus' was also applied to other three deities: El Gabal (the sun god of Heliogabalus our Elagabalus, in Syria); the Persian God Mythras and also Mars. The 25th of December was also taken as the birth of the mysterious Persian god, *Mithra*, *the Sun of Virtue*, probably also known by the Romans as *Mithras*, the god who was present in flesh and blood of the bull, and when consumed, granted *salvation* to those who took part in the sacrificial meal. So, instead of forbidding the pagan festivals, the 'Romanism' gave them a new meaning: a 'Christian language', an 'adaptation' to what already existed. In other words: the '*birth of the Sun god Invincible*' (*Invictus*), came to acquire a Christian character; in fact, a failed attempt to convert pagans. Because of its non-biblical source, this festival was banned in Great-Britain and some American colonies in the seventeenth century. But old habits soon returned, and some new ones were added. Christmas returned to be a great religious holiday.

The birth of Jesus took place around two years before the death of King Herod the Great, who died around 4 B.C. So, the most correct year for the birth of Jesus would be 6 B.C, not the year 'zero' as it is counted by *Anno Domini* (*Year of the Lord, in Latin*), first introduced in Western Europe in the eighth century. Thereafter, the separation was made between the events before and after Christ (B.C. and A.D., the latter also called CE – Common Era). According to the bible, Herod the Great, before die, ordered to kill the boys in Bethlehem up to two years old, according to the time the star appeared to the Magi (*Matt. 2: 16*).

This murder of Herod, which included no more than a few dozen children because of Bethlehem's small size, is not recorded in other historical writings. Flavius Josephus only mentions his cruelty to all men (*Anti. xvii 8.1*). 'Two years old' does not necessarily mean that Jesus was two years old at the time, but it does show that Herod did not want to risk losing his throne to a child. The age he determined for the children to die was a safety measure on his part.

Also according to the bible, before the birth of Jesus, Octavian Caesar Augustus decreed that all inhabitants of the empire would be counted, each in his hometown (*Lk. 2: 1-14*). According to Luke, this first census was ordered when the consul Publius Sulpicius Quirinius was governor of Syria, the Roman imperial province. In truth, he was only a military commander (a 'legate'. A legate commanded the legion. He was normally a man of aristocratic ancestry in his 30/35 years old) in operations in the province of Syria (10-7 BC), under the direct orders of the Roman Emperor (Caesar), and was appointed to lead the war against the Homanadensians, while the civil administration of the province was in the hands of the governor Gaius Sentius Saturninus. Homanadensians were warriors of the mountain tribes of Cilicia, Southern Asia Minor, modern Turkey, where the city of Tarsus was (birthplace of Paul), and who opposed the rule of Rome. It is known that the governors of the province of Syria during the latter part of the government of King Herod were Gaius Sentius Saturninus (9-6 BC) and his successor, Publius Quinctilius Varus (6-4 AC). Publius Sulpicius Quirinius was only governor of the province of Syria in 6 AD (6-12 AD), after the banishment of Herod Archelaus (son of Herod the Great) as tetrarch of Judea and Samaria, and died in exile in the same year. Then, indeed, Quirinius himself conducted a census in Syria and Israel (the census mentioned by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus and by Gamaliel in *Acts 5: 37*). This census (the second one) had the purpose of taxation and so there was resistance by the Galileans led by Judas Gaulonitis (Gaulanitis was located in Transjordan, under the tetrarchy of Philip), or Judas of Gamala (or Gamla, meaning in

Aramaic, ‘the camel’, for it was a city built in a steep hill in the shape of a camel hump), or Judas of Galilee (*Acts 5: 37*, ‘*Judas the Galilean*’), who founded the party of zealots. That’s why the census to which Luke refers in *Lk 2: 1*, of which Joseph and Mary took part, was held in fact when Publius Quinctilius Varus was the governor of Syria (6-4 AC), and Quirinius just a legate. Flavius Josephus also mentions in his works that there was a Jewish revolt after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, during the government of Varus, who reacted and crucified two thousand Jewish rebels. So, the historians say that Luke may have confused by writing the name of Quirinius, instead of Quinctilius, by referring to the census at the time of Jesus’ birth (*Lk 2: 1*). Or, perhaps, the performance of Quirinius was historically more prominent that moment, and therefore, his name was placed in the Gospel. Another possibility would be that at that moment Quirinius was also in the military command of the other Roman provinces and had orders from the Emperor himself to carry out the census.

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem – distant ninety-three miles one from each other – should have been very exhausting for Mary, who was in an advanced state of pregnancy. While they were in Bethlehem Mary gave birth to her firstborn (*Matt. 1: 25; Lk. 2: 7; Mk. 6: 3*). She wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place available for them at the inn. Mary needed a calm and isolated place for childbirth.

Here I want to make a comment about the fact of Mary having wrapped the baby Jesus.

The birth of a child, in the Middle East in particular, obeyed certain standards and had meaning. Wrapping the newborn with strips of cloths was a common practice in Ancient times, showing that he was well cared for. First, the umbilical cord was cut and the child was washed with water to remove from his body the amniotic fluid and blood present at birth. The baby was then rubbed with a small amount of salt and olive oil to help clean and disinfect the skin. Some desert tribes rubbed salt on the skin of the newborn child so that he could bear heat better. Therefore, it means protection, strengthening, resistance to adverse conditions. Another meaning of this practice, equally important for Jews, is that salt was added to each offering on the altar of sacrifice in the Tabernacle and in the Temple. Most likely, Israelite mothers saw this custom in relation to their babies as a symbolic way of offering their children to the service of the Lord; a way to dedicate them to God.

After that, the baby was wrapped in long strips of linen or cotton, which helped to provide him comfort; the tight bands would replicate the feeling of the comfort of the womb. On some occasions the bands were marked in some way to find out whose baby it was. Some scholars say they were embroidered with symbols of the child’s ancestry. The baby Jesus was wrapped in bands of cloth according to the custom of that time.

Mary then laid the baby in a manger (*Lk. 2: 7*). The mangers were actually made of stone instead of wood because of the abundance of stone in Israel. These mangers were of various sizes and were generally 6 to 8 inches deep.



Houses in Jesus' day were generally built of stone or bricks dried in the sun, and since wood was a scarce resource, it was reserved for the roof, doors, furniture and

household items. The roof was commonly made of a thick layer of clay spread over a reed cover supported by beams. It was not as hardened as today, which contain concrete, so the houses did not have much difficulty being opened by the ceiling, as happened with the paralytic of Capernaum who was brought to Jesus to be healed. It was enough to remove the beams and straw from the roof. A few houses had an extra room on the upper floor that was called “the prophet’s room”, in reference to the Shunammite woman, who built a room for the prophet Elisha in her house, and which in Jesus’ time was called an ‘inn’ (in Greek: κατάλυμα katalymati or kataluma, Strong #g2646, meaning a lodging-place, guest chamber), because there the Jews received and housed a guest. The ‘inn’ was a room for guests in a family home or a public shelter, and not a large building with several individual rooms as it is today, so it is said that Jesus was born in a stable (or grotto), for there was no place for them in the inn; no acquaintance of them or any family in Bethlehem at that time welcomed Joseph, Mary and Jesus. At that time, the inn or stable was, in general, a part attached to the house.



The bible says that shepherds were in the fields keeping watch over their flock on night that Jesus was born. The Jewish month of *Kislev*, corresponding nearly to the

second half of November and first half of December was a cold and rainy month. The next month is *Tevet*, when the coldest temperatures of the year occur, with occasional snow in the highlands, making it impossible for someone to stand outside of a house due to the low temperature. Yet, we read in *Lk. 2: 8*: “In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.” Therefore, they lived outdoors and kept watch over their flocks at night near the place where Jesus was born. As these facts would be impossible for a period of harsh winter, it is likely that Jesus could not have been born on the day that Christmas is celebrated, but in autumn (from September-August to November-December). The flocks usually left for the fields in March and came back in early November, another proof that the birth of Jesus didn’t occur in winter (around December). In the gospel of Luke (*Lk. 1: 5*) it’s written that Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist was from the division of Abijah (the 8th division of priests – *1 Chr. 24: 10*), who performed his duties around June-July (15 days a year, for there were 24 shifts of priests). Elizabeth should have gotten pregnant then, in the month of *Tammuz*. Mary was visited by the angel six months later (*Lk. 1: 26*), around December-January (month of *Tevet*). As a normal pregnancy lasts nine months, Jesus should have been born around September-October (month of *Ethanim*).

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, some wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, to Herod, guided by a star that, according to the description of Matthew (*Matt. 2: 1-11*), announced the birth of the Messiah and led them to where He was.

The magi (*Greek, Magoi = Magician*) who came from East to Jerusalem (*Matt. 2: 1-3; 9-12*) were not kings. This was, probably, a kind of information that was given around the third century by Tertullian, of Carthage, in Africa, saying they were kings. He must have been inspired by *Ps. 68: 28-29*, “Summon your might, O God; show your strength, O God, as you have done for us before. Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings bear gifts to you.” However, *Ps. 68* is not considered, at first, a Messianic Psalm, the same way that *Ps. 72: 9-11*, although it also talks about gifts to the righteous king. Thus, the magi were astrologer priests, perhaps followers of Zoroaster or Zarathustra, born in Media-Persia in the seventh century B.C., who deified the stars and formed sorcerers. They were considered wise, and therefore, counselors of kings, as were the wise men who were beside Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian king), at the time of the prophet Daniel. These magi who came to visit Jesus could have come from Babylon, Mesopotamia or Persia (Iran’s region). In *Matt. 2: 1* is written, “In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, **wise men** from the East came to Jerusalem.” Therefore, how many were and their names (Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar) were not revealed in the canonical Gospels. It’s been deduced they were three wise men because of the three types of gifts. Likewise, the bible does not mention what kind of animals the sorcerers came ridden on, which could indicate, quite possibly, their correct origin. Another very important factor in the case of the magi and the star has to do with the existence of a large community of Jewish root in ancient Babylon, which, undoubtedly, would have allowed the knowledge of the Messianic prophecies of the Jews and their subsequent association of symbolisms with the celestial phenomena that were occurring.

Part of the Jewish community remained in these places (Babylon, Mesopotamia or Persia) after the return of some exiles with Ezra (458 BC) and Nehemiah to Jerusalem (445 BC) for the reconstruction of the temple and the city walls. In *Ezra 7: 9*, the Bible itself reports Ezra’s travel time from Babylon to Jerusalem: 4 months (from 1st to 5th month), that is, from the citadel of Susa to the Holy City, which is equivalent to a distance of about 994,19 miles. That meant a journey of 6.21 to 8.08 miles per day at most, traveling in caravans, with women and children and luggage (As it was with the

patriarchs in the OT). We can extrapolate this reasoning to the wise men, saying that their journey to Bethlehem must have taken 3-4 months and was quite synchronized with the birth of Jesus, because by knowing the astronomical phenomena related to the birth of the Messiah of Israel, they were very interested in seeing the newborn King of the Jews as soon as possible, even more than His own people, to be able to bear witness about it, and strengthen their faith.

I am writing this because of a thought that occurred to me as I was watching several movies about the birth of Jesus and comparing with the tradition about the twelve days since they took to find Mary, Joseph and Jesus and give Him their presents, or other movies that report two years for the magi to find Jesus. The two evangelists describing the fact are Matthew and Luke, with different chronological reports from one another.

What we know is that in the region of Bethlehem there was and there is still several caves of limestone that have served as shelter for men and animals. It was in such caves that Jesus may have been born, for they would also be used as a shelter for animals such as cattle, donkeys and even sheep; therefore, would not be so strange the presence of a manger there. Other historians, on the other hand, prefer the idea of a stable made of wood, not a cave of limestone, where there would be a manger along with the animals.



My question itself doesn't revolve around the place of Jesus' birth, but the moment that the wise men gave Him the presents, because to me it doesn't seem very likely the delay of twelve days after the birth of the Lord for them to see Him; on the contrary, they should have seen Him on the same night of His birth, as well as the shepherds, for the astronomical phenomenon of the star was at its height. Thus, God would fulfill the promise concerning His Son, who would bring redemption for the great and the small, the powerful and the humble, Jews and Gentiles alike. The moment soon after His birth was more than suitable for this meeting, symbolizing the meeting of all humanity with a single King, priest and Savior.

Many scholars of this issue remain believing in the twelve days described in the tradition, claiming that Mary and Joseph went out from there to a house where they stayed after the birth of Jesus. This is based on the fact of the description of *Matt. 2: 11*, "On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." The controversy revolves around the word 'house', but if we go to Lexicon Strong's Concordance, which uses King James Version, we can see

that the word 'house' in Greek is 'oikia' (οἰκία – Strong #g 3614) or 'oikian' (οἰκίαν), meaning: property, residence (abstractly), but usually (concretely) an abode (literally or figuratively); by implication, a family (especially domestics), a house, household. The Bible of study of Greek Lexicon describes the word 'oikia' as a house, an inhabited edifice, a dwelling, a house, the inmates of a house (referring to the domestics), the family, property, wealth, goods. From all this, two words caught my attention: a 'dwelling' and an 'abode.' Was not the cave 'the dwelling' or 'the abode' (described in Lexicon Strong's Concordance) where that family was? And, as I said before, was the inn or stable not a part attached to the house? Therefore, what we have heard about the tradition of the twelve days, actually, may not be so sure. Even worse is the hypothesis of the two-year delay for the magi to deliver their gifts to Jesus. Even because the bible writes in *Matt. 2: 1-2*: "In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is **the child who has been born** king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.'" In Portuguese (ARA) the phrase is "Where is **the newborn** king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

Medicine considers a newborn child to be up to 1 month old; baby, between 2nd and 18th month (1 year and six months) and child, from 18th month to 12 years old. Therefore, if the magi speak 'newborn', Jesus could not have been two years old. In addition to that in *Mt 2: 11* ("On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh."), the word 'child' in our translation, in Greek it is written as 'paidion' (παιδίον – Strong #G3813), a neuter diminutive of 'pais'; a little child, an infant, little one; a childling (of either sex), i.e. (properly), an infant, or (by extension) a half-grown boy or girl; figuratively, an immature Christian.

What we do know for sure is that Matthew and Luke wrote verses that complement each other on the issue of how long Joseph, Mary and Jesus stayed in Israel. They took him to be circumcised at eight days old (*Lk. 2: 21; Lev. 12: 3*) according to the Law of Moses, and when the time came for their purification (40 days, *Lev 12: 4-5*), they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord in the temple, where Mary and Joseph offered a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons (*Lk. 2: 22-24; Lev. 12: 8*). Thus, Mary and Joseph would only have stayed in Bethlehem until completing the 40 days of purification (*Lk. 2: 22 cf. Lev. 12: 2-4*). Then Matthew reports the escape to Egypt, where they stayed for about 2 years, until the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC (*Matt. 2: 13-23*). When they returned, they went to live in Nazareth of Galilee, where the bible says (*Matt. 2: 23b*): "He will be called a Nazarene."

Here, many confuse the word 'Nazarene' with 'Nazirite'. A Nazarene is born or lives in Nazareth, in Galilee. Its name (Nazareth) is possibly derived from the Aramaic term naṣ̣rath, 'watchtower'. Another derivation suggested is from neṣ̣er, which means, sprout, which could identify Jesus with the 'Righteous Branch or Root of David,' as the prophets called the Messiah of Israel. The temperate climate of that region makes the flowers bloom and the fruit appear in abundance. Perhaps, that is why the name neṣ̣er, 'sprout.' Or else, they are referring to the prophecy of Isa. 9: 1-2: "But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined." Nazirite, in turn, comes from the Hebrew nāzīr (vine), derived from nāzar: to separate, to consecrate, to abstain; compared with the word

nezer: diadem, crown of God, sometimes identified with the long hair of Nazirites, consecrated to God, like Samson and Samuel, for example, and most likely John the Baptist.

The real nature of the star of Bethlehem is still uncertain. It is not known whether there was a conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter and/or Venus in the constellation of Pisces, as astrologers believed regarding the time of the Messiah's birth (Keller suggested a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in the constellation of Pisces around 7 BC). All the more reason to discard the hypothesis that the magi only got to see Jesus when He was already two years old, for they may have seen the heavenly signs manifest before the Messiah's birth, but with this event the astronomical phenomenon would reach the its apex and disappear; it would not last for two years after Jesus was born. The star was really something supernatural from God to announce the birth of Jesus fulfilling OT prophecy (*Num. 24: 17*), as many supernatural events also happened at His death, at the time of the crucifixion and resurrection. Even more absurd is the hypothesis of an intermittent star in the sky, which would first appear to the shepherds two years later to the magi.

Another thing that concerns us here are the kinds of gifts given to Jesus by the wise men, as if confirming once again their knowledge on Jewish prophetic writings and their belief in a single God who came into the world to save mankind, whether Jews or Gentiles. They brought Him gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Gold was one of the three metals most commonly used; it was obtained more rarely, and it often appears after the silver and is mentioned along with it in large quantities in the payment of taxes (*2 Kin. 18: 14; 1 Kin. 9: 10-14*); it was also used in important commercial transactions. In the bible, in most cases, it refers to the things that were placed in the tabernacle or in the temple, precious spoils of war or taxes to be paid to an empire. So it gives us the idea of something very precious, something more directly set apart for God or very important to a nation, as a ransom, for example. Or something related to royalty. In Solomon's time, for example, silver was of little value; only gold was accepted in the royal palace (*1 Kin. 10: 21*).

Incense is mentioned in some biblical passages of the Old Testament in relation to the priesthood (it provoked the wrath of God when it was offered to other gods):

- *Ex. 30: 1; 6-9*: "You shall make an altar on which to offer incense; you shall make it of acacia wood ... You shall place it in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, in front of the mercy seat that is over the covenant, where I will meet with you. Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening, he shall offer it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. You shall not offer unholy incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; and you shall not pour a drink offering on it."

- *Ex. 30: 34-38*: "The Lord said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (an equal part of each), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy; and you shall beat some of it into powder, and put part of it before the covenant in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you; it shall be for you most holy. When you make incense according to this composition, you shall not make it for yourselves; it shall be regarded by you as holy to the Lord. Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from the people."

- *2 Chr. 29: 11*: "My sons [*king Hezekiah was saying to the Levites and to the priests, by opening the temple again, which had been closed during the reign of his father Ahaz because of the Assyrian yoke*], do not now be negligent, for the Lord has

chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to him, and to be his ministers and make offerings to him.”

- *Ps. 141: 2*: “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.”

- *Isa. 65: 3*: “a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks.”

- *Jer. 44: 8*: “Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, making offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to settle? Will you be cut off and become an object of cursing and ridicule among all the nations of the earth?”

In its turn, the NT refers to incense in another manner:

- *Rev. 5: 8*: “When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”

- *Rev. 8: 3-4*: “Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.”

Myrrh is a shrub that grows in desert regions, especially in Africa (native to Somalia and eastern parts of Ethiopia) and the Middle East. It is also the name given to the oily resin of reddish-brown color obtained from the dried sap of this tree (*Commiphora myrrh* or *Balsamodendron myrrh*). The word originates from the Hebrew, *maror* or *murr*, which means *bitter*, so it's bitter and often used in the bible as a synonym for *gall* or “*poison*.” In *Prov. 31: 6-7* it is written: “Give strong drink to one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.” The strong drink (in Hebrew, *shekhār*) refers to the wine of high alcohol content mixed with myrrh given by Jewish women to the sentenced to cross so that they could withstand the punishment and suffering, because it acts as an anesthetic. In *Ps 69: 21*, prophetic psalm of David, there is another reference to the myrrh: “They gave me poison [NIV, gall] for food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” It was also used to prepare Esther for six months, and after this, more six months with other ointments and perfumes to take her to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes, *Est. 2: 12-13*). Myrrh was a perfumed ointment used by royalty to perfume the clothes of marriage. It was also used as a seductive perfume. Thus, myrrh symbolizes: deliverance, healing, purification, life changing and relief from the pains of the soul.

Therefore, we can think that the wise men brought gifts to Jesus confirming that He was the Messiah; in other words, His divine nature and His redemptive mission as Savior of the world: the gold, symbolizing a tribute to the *King of kings*, the precious of mankind given to the Lord. As for the incense, it comes to confirm the position of Jesus as *high priest* and as our intercessor, since for us incense symbolizes the prayers of the saints. In the third place, the Magi gave Him *myrrh*, as a prophetic act of His suffering for humanity (His atoning death on the cross).

Symbols and traditions of Christmas:

• Christmas Tree

People often set up Christmas trees to decorate homes and other places. In Ancient times in Rome, the Romans hung masks of *Bacchus* (god of wine) on pine trees to celebrate a festival called *Saturnalia*, which coincided with our Christmas. The feast

was in honor of the god *Saturn* and connected to the licentiousness and orgy; so the participation of *Bacchus*, the god of wine. For Christians, it is believed that the tradition of the Christmas tree began in 1530 AD in Germany, with the priest Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD), author of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. While walking through the forest at night, Luther was struck by the beauty of pine trees covered by snow, and looking at the sky through them, he saw it intensely starry as brilliants on the treetops. He was marveled at that very pretty sight. He tore a branch and took it to his home. He used various materials he had at his disposal as cotton, bright papers, candles and other decorations, to show his family the beautiful scene he had witnessed in the forest. To him, the sky on the night of Christ's birth should have been like this. This tradition was brought to America by some Germans during the colonial period.

• Nativity Scene (The cradle of Christ)

The Manger Scene shows the birth of Jesus. The Catholic tradition says that it came in 1223, created by St. Francis of Assisi to celebrate Christmas in a way as realistic as possible, at the request of the lord of Greccio, a district of Italy. With the permission of the Pope, St. Francis made a manger of straw, with an image of the Child Jesus, the Virgin Mary and Joseph, along with a living ox and a living donkey and several other animals. In this scenario, the Christmas Mass was celebrated. Thereafter, this representation has quickly spread throughout Italy and across Europe.

• Panettone or Panettoni (Fruit Cake)

Panettone (in Italian) is a traditional food of the Christmas season and is from Milan origin, at the north of Italy. Several legends try to explain its origin. The word *panettone* has its origin in the Milan word '*panattón*', of controversial origin and meaning. An ancient legend says that the fruitcake (Panettoni) was created by a baker named Toni who fell in love with a girl, and trying to impress her father, he created a new recipe of bread filled with candied fruit. Over the years, this bread was called '*pan di Toni*', that is, the '*bread of Toni*', which is currently called panettone. Nobody is sure that this legend occurred during the Christmas season.

• Santa Claus

The character was inspired by a bishop of Myra (city in Turkey), named Nicholas Taumaturg, who lived in the fourth century. The bishop used to help poor people at Christmas time, leaving bags of coins near the chimneys of houses. He was canonized (St. Nicholas) by the Catholic Church because of the miracles attributed to him later. The association of his image with Christmas originated in Germany and soon spread around the world. In the U.S.A, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Spain, he was named *Santa Claus*. In Brazil, he is known as *Papai Noel* (literally, '*Christmas Daddy*'), and in Portugal, (*Papai Natal* – *with the same meaning*). In Germany he is called *Nikolaus* (*Weihnachtsmann: Christmas man*). In Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, he is called *Papa Noel* (the same meaning of Brazil and Portugal, like a father of Christmas). In France he is known as *Père Noel* (*Père = Father*). In England his name is *Father Christmas* and in Italy, *Babbo Natale* (*Babbo = Dad*).

Until the end of nineteenth century, Santa Claus was depicted with winter clothing in brown and a wreath of holly on his head. But in 1881, an advertising campaign for Coca-Cola showed him with winter clothing in red and white (the colors of coke) and a red cap with white pompon. With the success of the advertising campaign, the new

image of Santa Claus has spread quickly around the world. The current look of Santa Claus was the work of cartoonist Thomas Nast in 1886. In some places in Europe, he remains represented with the bishop's vestments, with an Episcopal miter instead of the traditional red cap.

One of the people who helped to spread his legend was Clement Clark Moore, a professor of Greek literature from New York. In 1822 he released the poem: *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, written for his six children. In this poem, Moore said that Santa Claus travelled in a sleigh pulled by reindeers. The case of the chimney is one of the most curious in the legend of Santa Claus. Some say that this is due to the fact that several people had the habit of cleaning chimneys in the New Year to allow the good fortune to enter the house during the rest of the year. In the poem, many traditions were sought from various sources and the true explanation of the chimney came from Finland (Lapland, especially from the city of Royaniemi). Its ancient inhabitants, the Laponians, lived in small tents similar to igloos (ice houses of the Eskimo of the Arctic) and were covered with reindeer skin. The entrance to this 'house' was a hole in the roof. Santa Claus' reindeers are the only reindeers in the world that can fly, helping him to deliver gifts to children around the world on Christmas Eve. The number of reindeers is controversial. Initially, eight reindeers pulling the traditional sleigh; then, nine, because a reindeer called Rudolph, with a shiny red nose and that helps to guide the other reindeers during storms. And from that year on, the number of reindeers became nine, unlike the traditional sleighs, pulled by eight reindeers. This legend was established in 1939.

Unfortunately, the advertising creation of Santa Claus, distorting the humanitarian attitude of Nicholas Taumaturg, ended up enlivening other pagan Celtic and Druid traditions, making Santa Claus ornaments similar to gnomes. For those who don't know, gnome is a legendary creature, a dwarf, who supposedly guards the treasures underground.

Conclusion

The worldly view and religiosity turned impure an event that for the Lord was created with holiness and simplicity, making it sinful in His sight. Symbols or embellishments or trading with holy things don't bring joy or the 'spirit' of Christmas or the awareness of what it represents to a Christian, but the sincerity of heart and the reverence for the things of God. Following traditions, simply because they are to be followed, is of no value to us or to the Lord. However, abolishing the Christmas from our agenda with the excuse that it was created by men as a pagan feast is but a disguise for the lack of love and for the cooling of the sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit, generated by the sin of the flesh. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, an extremely important fact because it is related to the chance of salvation granted by God the Father to man by His mercy. If Jesus left us the ordinance of the Supper to remind us of His death, why should He oppose us to commemorate His birth? Whoever died is because he was born. If in the OT the feast of Purim was instituted by men like Esther and Mordecai and recorded in the bible by God's permission to remind His own people of His deliverances and miraculous deeds, why, then, we Christians could not celebrate Christmas in a holy way, with praise, reverence and worship to Him who has stripped Himself of His glory and dwelt among us to give us eternal life? The bible says: "All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build up" (*1 Cor. 10: 23*), and "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything" (*1*

Cor. 6: 12). The important thing is to know how to differentiate what is good for us or not; what matters is the intention with which we do things. We will not be able to change the date set for Christmas or the names of the months of the year given in honor of pagan gods, but we can still ask the Lord to sanctify us and revive in our hearts the love and the covenant with Him. In this way, the celebration of Christmas ceases to be something mystical, mechanical, cold or ignored and becomes a revival of the gift of love, communion with God and our fellowmen, a revival of the conscience of what salvation brought by Jesus is. And an adornment on our table or in our house during the Christmas season no longer has an idolatrous purpose (gnomes or Santa Claus, for example), but becomes the outward expression of the inner joy of belonging to God and manifesting His character on earth. Lights, glittering balls, drops of water, stars, small paper packages with golden ribbons, etc., colorful ornaments only demonstrate that we are aware that those days make a difference for us in relation to the other days of the year; that it is a time to reflect on many things and change our attitude.

“The living, the living, they thank you, as I do this day; fathers make known to children your faithfulness. The Lord will save me, and we will sing to stringed instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of the Lord” (*Isa. 38: 19-20*).

What boring Christmas this is!...

*T*here's no Christmas tree, no Santa Claus, no Christmas Carol, no sound of horns, no fireworks, no gifts, no boots on the fireplace, no snow, no reindeer, no toys, no beautiful new car, no pudding, no turkey, no flashing lights, no Shopping Center, no champagne, not even a new sequinned dress; no French perfume, no bells, no party, no sleigh rides, no photographs, no nuts, no Secret Santa, no candles, no cookies.....

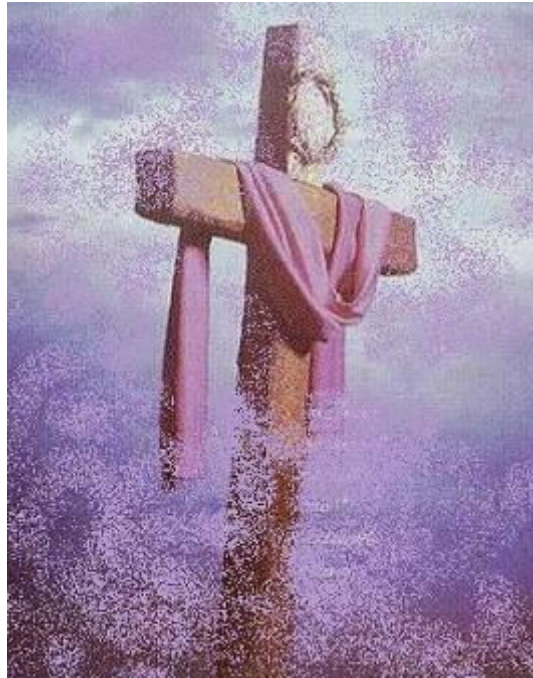


*O*nly a stable, poverty, cows, donkeys, smell of hay and animals, human silence, sheep bleating around, a starry sky, shepherds watching their flock in the distance, a bright star moving, simple and rustic clothes, a man, a woman, a baby, a warm manger, submission, simplicity, humility, respect, gratitude, unity, joy, peace, reverence, protection, love, cosiness, rest, security, care, mercy, kindness, patience, gentleness, much light, renewal, newness, revelation, a choir of angels, praise, joy, purity, beauty, grace, salvation, holiness, majesty, a single purpose: to bring us life.

What a Christmas!!!

Merry Christmas and a Holy and Happy New Year

EASTER



What the bible says:

The Latin word for 'Easter' is *Pascae*. In ancient Greece, this term is also found as *Paska*. However, its most remote origin is among the Hebrews, where the word *Pesach* appears. *Pesach*, in Hebrew, means "to pass over" (*English, Passover*), because in Egypt the *Destroyer* (the "angel of the abyss" or "the angel of death") passed over the houses marked with lamb's blood and didn't touch them:

- *Ex. 12: 1-28* (When God established the Passover before taking His people out of Egypt): "The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 'This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the Lord. **12** For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. **13** The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will *pass over* you,

and *no plague* shall *destroy* you when I strike the land of Egypt. This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a solemn assembly and on the seventh day a solemn assembly; no work shall be done on those days; only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared by you. You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance. In the first month, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day, you shall eat unleavened bread. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether an alien or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.’ Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, ‘Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. **23** For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the *destroyer* to enter your houses to strike you down. You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. When you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this observance?’ **27** you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.’ And the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites went and did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron.”

• *Deut. 16: 3-8*: “You must not eat with it anything leavened. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it – the bread of affliction – because you came out of the land of Egypt in great haste, so that all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt. No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days; and none of the meat of what you slaughter on the evening of the first day shall remain until morning. You are not permitted to offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you. But at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name, only there shall you offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, the time of day when you departed from Egypt. You shall cook it and eat it at the place that the Lord your God will choose; the next morning you may go back to your tents. For six days you shall continue to eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly for the Lord your God, when you shall do no work.”

The unleavened bread means sanctification, dominion of the Spirit over the flesh and human wickedness (= yeast). God’s Word says that the Passover lamb could not be sacrificed inside the cities, but outside them, in a place God would choose (*Deut. 16: 3-8 cf. Heb. 13: 10-13*). Similarly, Jesus was not crucified inside the city walls, but outside them. The bible also says that the lamb should be sacrificed in the afternoon, before sunset; it was when Jesus died (3:00 p.m.) and was taken from the cross (before 6:00 p.m.): “At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (*Mk. 15:*

34). The lamb could not have any bone broken (*Ex. 12: 46; Num. 9: 12; Ps. 34: 20; Jn. 19: 36*), as Jesus had none of His bones broken.

Paul also makes reference to the parallelism between the leaven of the flesh and the purity of our spirit that was recreated by God in the new birth:

- *1 Cor. 5: 7-8*: “Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

John the Baptist confirmed the mystery of the former prophecies concerning the salvation coming from the Messiah:

- *Jn. 1: 29*: “The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” Thus, Jesus was sacrificed to save and deliver us from all sin. So, God the Father has appointed His death on the very day of Jewish Passover to create the parallel between the old covenant, in the blood of the slaughtered lamb, and the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Himself that was slain.

Other texts say:

- *Matt. 12: 40*: “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.”

- *Mk. 10: 45*: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

- *Jn. 3: 16*: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

- *Jn. 6: 54*: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.”

- *1 Jn. 4: 10*: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

- *1 Jn. 4: 9*: “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.”

- *Heb. 10: 12-13*: “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, ‘he sat down at the right hand of God’, and since then has been waiting ‘until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.’”

Luke, like all evangelists, describes the episode of the Last Supper:

- *Lk. 22: 15-20 (Matt. 26: 26-28; Mk. 14: 22-24; 1 Cor. 11: 23-26)*: “He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”

In *Matt. 26: 26-30* the bible repeats: “While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

In all the texts above, the Lord speaks of His body and His blood (the bread and wine). Probably, He also followed the Jewish Passover ritual of the OT (*Matt. 26: 17; Mk. 14: 12; Lk. 22: 7*).

As we saw in *Ex. 12: 1-28*, the only orders described in relation to food were the unleavened bread, bitter herbs and the lamb roasted over the fire. Jesus took an unleavened bread and a cup (the wine, symbolizing His blood to be shed, repeating the same act of the priest Melchizedek with Abraham in the OT – *Gen. 14: 14*; so, the bible says in *Heb. 7: 17* that Jesus is a priest of the order of Melchizedek).

There, at the Last Supper (after the Jewish Supper of the Paschal Lamb), He was showing materially to His disciples what was to happen in the spiritual ambit. He was teaching them to keep always their covenant with the Father, and a simple remembrance of His death (The bread symbolizing His body, and the wine symbolizing His blood). The communal supper in the NT (or agape, love-feast, described in the book of Acts of the Apostles and created by the disciples) replaced, symbolically, the sacrifice of fellowship offerings that was done in the temple (*1 Cor. 11: 17-34* – here, the bible describes a liturgical act of Paul in the church of Corinth, soon after an ordinary Communal meal. That's why he reprimands the carnal behavior of those people, such as gluttony and drunkenness). Besides, in the book of Acts of apostles, 'break the bread' was a Hebrew expression meaning 'to share a meal' (*Acts 2: 42-47; Acts 20: 7*). The Fellowship Offering or peace offering (*Lev. 3: 1-17*) was of any animal without flaw from the flock or of a variety of bread. Its purpose was a voluntary act of worship and thanksgiving and communion (That's why it was accompanied by a communal meal). As it was written above, the communal supper in the NT ('to break the bread') replaced, symbolically, the sacrifice of fellowship offerings that was made in the temple, since the burnt offering and the guilt offering and the sin offering had already been done by Jesus on the cross permanently. This supper was different from the supper performed by Jesus (The liturgical act of *1 Cor. 11: 23-26*), that is, a remembrance of His death as the symbol of the New Covenant of God with His people.

In relation to the Day of Rest kept by Christians, an explanation for keeping the Sunday (literally, "The Day of the Lord") may refer to the prophecies about Jesus to resurrect on the third day [Despite other explanations based on Roman paganism of the Sun god Invincible (Invictus)]. As the Jewish Passover in that year happened on Friday (for the divine foreknowledge), the third day was Sunday.

In biblical times, days were counted as follows: any hour of the day was considered as the whole day, that is, it was common to name successive days, not literally counting 24 hours. Thus, Jesus died on Friday (1st day), Saturday was the 2nd day and Sunday was the 3rd day.

- *Matt. 16: 21 (Matt. 17: 9-13; Matt. 17: 22-23; Matt. 20: 17-19)*: "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

- *Hos. 6: 1-2*: "Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him."

- *Mk. 16: 9*: "Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons."

- *Lk. 24: 1-12*: "But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were

terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened."

Moreover, the first day of the week would show that Jesus was the initiator of a new era for mankind.

Origin of the traditions and symbols associated with Easter:

Easter is one of the most important dates among the Western cultures and celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. The date of Easter was set at the first Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. Thus, the Christian Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring in the northern hemisphere (autumn in the southern hemisphere): the date occurs between 22nd March and 25th April. The problem was the coincidence of the date of Easter with the pagan festivals of the early spring. Especially the churches of Asia believed that should be followed the date of the lamb sacrifice on the 14th day of Nisan, which would be the exact date of Jesus' death.

Historians have found information that lead to the conclusion that *a feast of passage* was celebrated among the European peoples for thousands of years ago. Mainly in the Mediterranean region, some societies, including the Greek, celebrated the passage from winter to spring, during the month of March. Generally, this festival was held on the first full moon of the season of flowers. Among the peoples of Ancient times, the end of winter and the beginning of spring were extremely important, because it was linked to higher chances of survival due to the harsh winter that afflicted Europe, hampering food production.

The Story of the Easter Bunny and the eggs:

- The figure of the rabbit is symbolically related to this commemorative day, because this animal represents fertility. Rabbit reproduces quickly and in large quantities. Among the peoples of Ancient times, fertility was synonymous of preservation of the species and better conditions of life, in an age where the mortality rate was very high. In ancient Egypt, for example, the rabbit represented the birth and the hope of new lives. In Ukraine, hundreds of years before the Christian era, eggs painted with motifs of nature (*péssanka*) were exchanged, commemorating the arrival of spring. The Persians, Romans, Armenians and Jews (perhaps for the idolatrous connection with Asherah in Canaan) had the habit of giving and receiving colored eggs at this time. The Chinese and the peoples of the Mediterranean also had a habit of giving eggs to each other to celebrate this season of the year. To make them colorful, they cooked them with beets. But the eggs were not to be eaten. It was just a gift that symbolized the beginning of life. An important ritual occurred at the spring equinox when the participants painted and decorated eggs and hid and buried them in holes in the fields. Equinox is the point of Earth's orbit in which there is equal length of day and night, what happens on 21st March and 23rd September.

Christians made use of the image of the egg to celebrate Easter, when the Council of Nicea held in 325 A.D established the cult to the date. At the time, they painted eggs (usually chicken's, goose's or quail's) with images of religious figures like Jesus and His mother, Mary. In England of the tenth century, the eggs were even more sophisticated. King Edward I (900-924 A.D) used to present the royalty and his subjects with eggs bathed in gold and decorated with precious stones. The tradition of honoring this season continued during the Middle Ages among pagan peoples of Europe. In the eighteenth century, French confectioners had the idea of making chocolate eggs. The figure of the Easter Bunny was brought to America by German immigrants between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

The terms for Passover: *Easter*, in English, and *Ostern*, in German, seem to have no etymological relationship with the *Pesach* (Jewish Passover). The most accepted hypothesis relate the terms to *Eostremonat*, name of an ancient Germanic month, or *Eostre*, a Germanic goddess associated with spring and that was honored every year in the month of *Eostremonat*. Another oldest name for *Eostre* is *Ostera*, the goddess of spring, who was symbolized by a woman holding an egg in her hand and watched a rabbit, representing fertility, jumping happily around her feet. Everything speaks in favor of the hypothesis of to be about the same entity worshiped by the Canaanites who inhabited the Promised Land and which was later a tie of idolatry to Israel. It concerns to the consort of *Baal*, the Canaanite god of fertility, which, in each locality, acquired a different name due to the action he performed, including having power over the forces of nature and the atmospheric phenomena. He was worshiped in the 'High places' like the mountains, for example. In Tyre, a city of Phoenicia, to the north of Israel, he was called *Baal-Melcart*. *Baal* means "Lord, possessor, husband." He was also known as *Baal-zebul*, or *Beelzebul* (lord or master, the prince), the god of life, whom God's people ridiculed, calling him *Baalzebub* (the lord of the flies). His consort was *Asherah*, goddess of fertility, love and war, also known by the Canaanites and Phoenicians as *Queen of Heaven*, *Ashtoreth* or *Astarte*. Her image was usually made and worshiped as 'Post-idol' or 'Asherah Pole'. She took other names in many countries: *Isis*, *Queen of Heaven and Mother of God* (Egyptians), *Ishtar* (Babylonians), *Diana* (Romans), *Artemis* (Greeks) and *Nina* (Assyrians, giving her name to the city of *Nineveh*). The Hebrew word to *Nineveh* (*Nin^eweh*), in Greek: *Nineue*, is a translation of the Assyrian *Ninua*, in Old Babylonian *Ninuwa*, which in turn is the transliteration of the more ancient Sumerian name, *Nina*, the name of the goddess *Ishtar*, the protective deity of that city and whose name was written with a sign representing a fish in a womb. God, using the prophet Jeremiah referred to her:

- *Jer. 7: 18*: "The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the *queen of heaven*; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger."

- *Jer. 44: 25-28*: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: You and your wives have accomplished in deeds what you declared in words, saying, 'We are determined to perform the vows that we have made, to make offerings to the *queen of heaven* and to pour out libations to her.' By all means, keep your vows and make your libations! Therefore hear the word of the Lord, all you Judeans who live in the land of Egypt: Lo, I swear by my great name, says the Lord, that my name shall no longer be pronounced on the lips of any of the people of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, 'As the Lord God lives.' I am going to watch over them for harm and not for good; all the people of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall perish by the sword and by famine, until not one is left. And those who escape the sword shall return from the land

of Egypt to the land of Judah, few in number; and all the remnant of Judah, who have come to the land of Egypt to settle, shall know whose words will stand, mine or theirs!"

Other texts say:

- *Lev. 26: 1*: "You shall make for yourselves no idols and erect no carved images or pillars, and you shall not place figured stones in your land, to worship at them; for I am the Lord your God." When we worship an image, who receives worship in the spiritual world is a demon.

- *Deut. 16: 21-22*: "You shall not plant any tree as a sacred pole beside the altar that you make for the Lord your God; nor shall you set up a stone pillar – things that the Lord your God hates."

Asherah or *Ishtar* had some rituals of sexual nature, since she was the goddess of fertility; other rituals had to do with libations and other bodily offerings (The cultic prostitutes of pagan temples, so condemned by God in the Scriptures).

Therefore, it is suggested by some historians that many of the current symbols associated with Easter (especially the chocolate eggs, colored eggs and the Easter Bunny) are cultural remnants of the festival of spring in honor of the pagan goddess of fertility, and then were incorporated by the Christian celebrations of Easter.

Here, we will make a stop to clarify some points regarding the Catholic Church, since the current symbols associated with Easter is related to the pagan goddess of fertility and that Catholics worship with the name of *Mary or Our Lady*:

The Catholic Church is not the Church that was established and built by the apostles upon the work of Christ. The Catholic Church, unlike what happened in the Early Church described in the book of Acts, doesn't have its origins in the teachings of Jesus or His disciples. In the New Testament there is no mention about the Popes, the worship of Mary, her assumption, or Mary as co-redeemer and mediator; neither, has to do with the petition to those called the saints (canonized by the Catholic Church), apostolic succession, the ordinances of the church functioning as sacraments, infant baptism, confession of sins to a priest, purgatory, indulgences, nor the equal authority of church tradition and the Scriptures. The same thing is for all the feasts that it celebrates such as: the day of each 'saint', Corpus Christi etc. **Sacrament** is the sacred sign instituted by Jesus Christ (according to Catholic doctrine) to grant divine salvation to those who, as receiving Him, make a profession of faith (a public confession of any faith). There are seven sacraments: baptism, chrism (confirmation of baptism), the Eucharist, penance or confession, the order (gives the power to exercise ecclesiastical functions), marriage and extreme unction (to those who are dying). However, the bible says that it's not necessary to do any of this to achieve salvation, just believe in Jesus and declare Him as the one Lord in our lives (*Rom. 10: 9-10*): "because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved." **Indulgence** means to give the sinner the means to get rid of the punitive consequences of his sins, that is, the ecclesiastical authorities granted indulgences to reduce very long and severe penances for those who had committed grave sins; so they would receive God's forgiveness. This started to happen from the third century. In the sixth century serious canonical penances were replaced by lighter penances such as prayers, alms and fasts, and until the tenth century they consisted of pious donations, pilgrimages and other good works. Then, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, they began to be related no longer to penance, but to remission of the temporal penalty due to sin, that is, to free or shorten the sinner's lifespan in purgatory, before he went to hell. In the Middle Ages documents issued by ecclesiastical authorities divulged indulgences of hundreds or even thousands of years.

Some Councils have tried to limit this time to just 40 days to correct this abuse [the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and the Council of Ravenna in 1317]. Unfortunately, in the late Middle Ages the abuses grew, to the point where they were freely sold by ‘forgiving professionals’ who stated: ‘As soon as the gold in the casket rings the rescued soul to heaven springs.’ In 1517, Pope Leo X granted indulgences to those who, with their alms, helped to rebuild St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Johann Tetzel (1465-1519), a Catholic preacher and friar of the order of St. Dominic (the Dominicans) did quite aggressive marketing on this topic, literally selling indulgences in exchange for money, very much, which received the papal punishment and was contradicted by Martin Luther (wrote 95 theses), stating that indulgences would not take souls directly to heaven, nor would they pay their price to deliver them from purgatory, for salvation was granted by faith in Jesus Christ, although he did not deny the right of the Church or the Pope to grant pardons or penances. Luther also challenged the equal authority of Church tradition and Scripture, i.e., it was the Bible, not the Pope or the Church, that would be the most reliable source of knowledge of God’s revealed truth.

So, what is the true origin of the Catholic Church?

Up to 304 A.D, in the reign of the Emperor Diocletian (‘The Great Persecution’), Christianity (Christ’s disciples were called Christians for the first time in Antioch – *Acts 11: 26*) was banned by the Roman Empire, and Christians were terribly persecuted. Peter, persecuted by the Romans that worshiped various gods, was crucified and buried in a region near Rome, known today as Vatican. Before dying, he chose Lino as his successor, which is interpreted by some scholars as the second Pope of the Catholic Church. This is not true, since the leadership of Peter was given by Jesus Himself and his recognition was by the other apostles (*Matt. 16: 18-19; Lk. 22: 32; Jn. 21: 15-23; Acts 1: 15-26; Acts 2: 14*). Apparently, John was the apostle who died last, in 98 or 100 A.D, during the reign of Trajan (98-117 A.D).

In the fourth century the Emperor Constantine was converted formally to Christianity, not as an act of religious faith, but as a coup of political skill, seeing in the growth of Christianity a way to facilitate the expansion of the Roman Empire. He legalized Christianity by the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D, and later in 325 A.D, he summoned the Council of Nicea, as an attempt to unify Christianity. The Council of Nicea, in Asia Minor, headed by him, was composed of the bishops who were appointed by the Emperor and others who were appointed by religious leaders of various communities. What remained of the Early Christian Church (founded by Jesus), Constantine joined to his followers and began to call it the Roman Apostolic Catholic Church. *Catholic*, in Greek, means *universal*, because the intention of the Roman Empire was to dominate the whole Earth; *Apostolic*, because it was organized by the apostles of Constantine, not by the disciples of Christ; *Roman*, because it incorporated the customs and rituals of pagan Romans and started to serve the interests of the Roman State. Thus, all the cults and dogmas of the Roman Apostolic Catholic Church are an adaptation of beliefs, customs and legends of the pagan rituals. Some churches didn’t accept the fourth council, the Chalcedon in AD 451 (defending the dyophysitism, the divine and human nature of Jesus in a distinct manner within Him), and formed the so-called Monophysite churches, that is, those that conceived Jesus Christ in an only nature, the divine one, not the divine and the human coexisting within Him. Later, the term Monophysitism became almost the same thing that Miaphysitism, i.e., the line of thinking that accepts an incarnate nature of Christ in a union without divisions of the human and divine natures. This stance resulted in constant conflict between East and West, as well as attempts of reconciliation, but in 1054 AD the great division occurred: in the East, the Oriental Orthodox Churches (those that accept monophysitism), and in

the West, the Roman Apostolic Catholic Church. The Oriental Orthodox Churches are: Coptic Orthodox Church (Egypt), Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Ethiopia), Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, Jacobite Syrian Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (Indian Orthodox Church) and Eritrean Orthodox Church (East of Africa). The Eastern churches that support dyophysitism, namely, which accept the Council of Chalcedon are called 'Eastern Orthodox Churches.'

Only in the sixteenth century appears the Protestant Reformation with the father Martin Luther and part of Europe adopts it: Lutheran Church (Germany), Anglican (England), Reformed churches in Switzerland, France, Holland and the Presbyterians (Scotland, Ireland and then the United States, Brazil and so on). In other words, Constantine allowed and promoted the 'Christianization' of completely pagans and totally non-biblical beliefs, which gained a new Christian identity. This we saw in relation to the tolerance with all symbols of Christmas and Easter, including adopting a pagan date for the birth of Christ.

Other examples:

1) The cult of Isis, the 'Goddess-Mother' of Egypt and this religion, were absorbed into Christianity by replacing Isis for *Mary*. Many of the titles that were used to Isis, as "Queen of Heaven" and "Mother of God" have been linked to Mary. To Mary was given an exalted position in the Christian faith, far beyond what the bible assigns to her as a mere servant of God who accepted the mission of giving birth to His only begotten Son to live in flesh among us. This was done in order to attract worshipers of Isis to a faith that, otherwise, they would not embrace. In fact, many temples to Isis were converted into temples dedicated to Mary. When a graven image or a human figure starts to be venerated and revered as a god who receives the worship is actually a representative of darkness; in the case of Mary, a higher caste of demons: a Ruler – *Col. 1: 16; Eph. 1: 21*). It is the same that was worshiped during the several ages of mankind, with the names of: *Queen of Heaven, Asherah, Astarte or Ashtoreth* (goddess of fertility, love and war of the Canaanites and Phoenicians); *Isis or Queen of Heaven* (Egyptians), *Ishtar* (Babylonians); *Diana* (Roman), *Artemis* (Greek) and *Nina* (Assyrians, giving her name to the city of Nineveh and whose name was written with a sign representing a fish in a womb); *Eostre*, ancient Germanic goddess, related to the spring; *Ostera*, oldest name of *Eostre*. The same way the Ruler has received all these names, depending on the location where he operated, *Mary (Our Lady)* also received several names, that is, the same Ruler began to be worshiped by Christians in later eras, depending on location and the supernatural deeds he performed: Our Lady of Aparecida, Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Penha, Our Lady of Grace, Our Lady of Good Delivery; Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Good Voyage, etc. Therefore, the entity they worship is not the sweet and kind young mother of Jesus.

2) Mithraism was a religion in the Roman Empire from the first to the fourth century A.D, very popular, especially among soldiers and several Roman emperors, until Constantine replaced it by Christianity. One of the main characteristics of Mithraism was a sacrificial meal, which involved eating the meat and drinking the blood of a bull. *Mithras*, the god of Mithraism, was present in the flesh and blood of the bull, and when consumed, he granted *salvation* to those who took part in the sacrificial meal. This religion also had seven 'sacraments', which makes it undeniably similar to Roman Catholicism. Constantine and his successors found an easy substitute for the sacrificial meal of Mithraism in concept of the Lord's Supper (Christian Communion, known today as Eucharist in the Catholic Mass). Unfortunately, some early Christians

had previously linked the mysticism to the Lord's Supper, rejecting the biblical concept of a simple remembrance of the death and the blood shed by Christ.

3) Most Roman emperors (and citizens) were henotheistic, i.e., they believed in the existence of many gods, but gave special attention to a particular god, considering him as the supreme and above the other gods. For example, the Roman god Jupiter (to Greeks, Zeus), the ruler of the gods, the god of the sky that was exhibited in the atmospheric phenomena. Roman sailors were often worshipers of Neptune, god of the oceans. When the Catholic Church absorbed Roman paganism, it simply replaced the multitude of gods worshiped in the temple (called the *Roman Pantheon*) by the Catholic saints. Likewise for the Romans there was a god of love, peace, war, strength, wisdom, marriage etc., similarly, the Catholic Church had a saint responsible for each of these categories (as we talk about Mary). Many Roman cities had a specific god to it; also, the Catholic Church provided 'patron saints' to the cities.

4) The supremacy of the Roman bishop (the papacy) was created with the support of Roman emperors. Rome was the center of government for the Roman Empire; therefore, Constantine and his successors gave support to the bishop of Rome as the supreme ruler of the Church. By centralizing the government and religious state in the same place there would be unity for the Empire. When its fall occurred, the bishops took upon themselves the title that previously belonged to the Roman emperors: the Maximus Pontiff (Pope).

Thus, the Catholic Church Christianized the pagan religions and 'Paganized' Christianity, making itself attractive to the people of Roman Empire and becoming the supreme religion in the Roman world for centuries. By acting in this ecumenical manner, mixing the simplicity and purity of the Scriptures with the worldly things and idolatry, it apostatized of faith in the true gospel of Jesus Christ and the true proclamation of God's word. So Paul wrote to Timothy, "For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths." (2 Tim. 4: 3-4)

What about the codfish or white meat on Good Friday (Holy Friday)?

If Jesus came to show us a spiritual realm, why would we have to create obstacles to this? What does the meat of animals have to with the torn flesh of Jesus on the cross to break our curses? Like in Mithraism, would we be 'eating' Jesus alive if we put a piece of beef in the mouth? In the Old Testament, didn't God give order to the priests to sacrifice the lamb? Were not bulls sacrificed to redeem the sins of priests? And didn't the priests eat it? Are they, by any chance, white meat animals? Would creating the tradition of eating only white meat be a way to redeem ourselves from the other abominations we continue to commit?

Thus, for us Christians, Passover simply celebrates the death and resurrection of Jesus, freeing us from the bondage of sin, and there is no need for symbols or rituals for it.

About the origin of the Catholic Church, another subject to be commented is about *the eternity of God* (The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in unity). The eternity of God leads us to confirm that He doesn't need mother or any intermediary to make us come to Him:

- Gen. 1: 1: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth."
- Gen. 1: 2: "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

• *Gen. 1: 26*: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’”

• *Gen. 2: 7*: “then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.”

• *Deut. 32: 39-41*: “See now that *I, even I, am he*; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and swear: As I live forever, when I whet my flashing sword, and my hand takes hold on judgment; I will take vengeance on my adversaries, and will repay those who hate me.”

• *Ps. 33: 6; 9*: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth... For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”

• *Ps. 90: 2-4*: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn us back to dust, and say, ‘Turn back, you mortals.’ For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.”

• *Ps. 102: 12; 25-27*: “But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever; your name endures to all generations... Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end.”

• *Isa. 45: 12*: “I made the earth, and created humankind upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host.”

• *Isa. 45: 18*: “For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!); I am the Lord, and there is no other.”

• *Mic. 5: 2*: “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days [NIV: ‘from ancient times’ or ‘from days of eternity’].”

• *Job 38: 4-7*: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?”

• *Jn. 1: 1-14*: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

- *Rom. 1: 20a*: “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.”

- *Col. 1: 15-17*: “He [*Jesus; the Son*] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

- *2 Pet. 3: 8*: “But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.”

- *Rev. 10: 6*: “and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it: ‘There will be no more delay...’”

About the *Trinity*, that is, about the perfect Unity between Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit, we can say:

- *Matt. 3: 16-17*: “And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’”

- *Mk. 1: 9-11*: “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’”

- *Lk. 3: 21-22*: “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’”

- *Jn. 1: 18*: “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”

- *Jn. 5: 43-44*: “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from *the one who alone is God*?”

- *Jn. 17: 3*: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

- *Jn. 6: 44*: “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day” cf. *Jn. 6: 65*: “And he said, ‘For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.’”

- *Jn. 14: 6*: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

- *Jn. 10: 35-36*: “If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’ (*Ps 82: 6*) – and the scripture cannot be annulled – can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son?’”

- *Jn. 10: 30*: “The Father and I are one.”

- *Jn. 17: 11; 20-21*: “And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one... I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be

one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

- *1 Jn. 5: 6-12*: “This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. There are three that testify [* in heaven: The Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three that testify on earth – * this excerpt is written only in some manuscripts of the Vulgate]: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

After all these verses do you still doubt that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that His intimacy with the Father is so great that the two are only one God? He said no one can come to Him unless it is granted by the Father. At the same time no one can come to the Father except through Him. Do you want more unity than this?

About who intercedes for us, we can read:

- *Rom. 8: 26-27*: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

- *Rom. 8: 33-34*: “Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.”

- *1 Tim. 2: 3-5*: “This [*prayers, supplications, intercessions and thanksgiving made for everyone*] is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human.”

- *Heb. 4: 16*: “Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

- *Heb. 7: 25*: “Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

Thus, neither Mary nor anyone else can be our intercessor.

The bible tells us that man is more or less than six thousand years on earth (the man, Adam, according to the biblical view, not the so-called ‘prehistoric’ by worldly view). Even if it was so, if God is eternal, we can imagine that as a spiritual being (2 *Cor. 3: 17*: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”), He is sovereign and rules over all. He created all things. If only God is eternal and no human being on earth can live forever, how then, Mary, who was born around 20 B.C, could spiritually be His mother? She was just His mother as a vessel of flesh, lending her womb so that Jesus was born on earth according to the will of the Father. *God (as a spiritual being that He is) needs no mother.*

Mary is not a person connected to the Trinity, therefore, to divinity. She had a spirit like that of every human being while she was alive on earth, and her destiny was the same as that of any living being. No other being should be worshiped (or venerated, no matter the Greek word used as an argument) but God:

- Ex. 20: 1-3: “Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.”
- Isa. 42: 8: “I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.”
- Isa. 45: 6: “so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other.”
- Matt. 4: 10: “Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”
- Lk. 4: 8: “Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”
- Rev. 19: 10: “Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’”
- Rev. 22: 9: “but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’”

The bible says that Jesus was submissive to His parents, since He depended on them as a child He was (*Lk. 2: 51*, when Mary and Joseph found Him in the temple, at His twelve years, arguing with the scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees). However, after being baptized by John the Baptist and taking on His spiritual identity as the Son of God, beginning His ministry as the Savior of the world, Jesus began to show that there was a distinction between the natural authority of Mary as His carnal mother and His spiritual authority over her, because He knew that she would be used by men in the future as an object of idolatry. He said:

- *Jn. 2: 4*: “And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? [*NIV: Dear woman, why do you involve me?*] My hour has not yet come.’” In other words: they were not there by mutual agreement. The motivation of each one was different (At the wedding in Cana).
- *Lk. 8: 19-21*: “Then his mother and his brothers [*Mk. 6: 3*] came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.’ But he said to them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it’ [*Matt. 12: 50: ‘For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’*].”
- *Lk. 11: 27-28*: “While he was saying this [*Satan’s strategy: Lk. 11: 24-26*], a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!’ But he said, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!’”

In second place, the bible says in all the passages above (*Rom. 8: 26-27*; *Rom. 8: 33-34*; *1 Tim. 2: 5*; *Heb. 7: 25*) that the Holy Spirit is our intercessor, not Mary, nor another servant as Joseph, Peter, Paul, John and others. ‘Saints’, biblically speaking, are those that are cleansed and covered by the blood of Jesus, whose sins are forgiven and walk in His ways, by having the mark of ‘children’, not because they are only creatures of God. And we saw that to be ‘a child of God’ we must declare Him as our only Lord and Savior. The bible also says that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the mediators between us and God the Father.

Jesus is the only one who can perform miracles, not Mary or any other human being wrongly canonized as ‘saint.’ This applies to every human being on earth,

including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Mary, Peter, Paul, John, Joseph (earthly father of Jesus) etc.

Was it not Jesus who performed miracles on the earth through the Holy Spirit? And was it not through the same Spirit that Paul, Peter and the apostles performed miracles? They performed them while they were alive. The bible does not report any miracle by them after they died, not at all. It also never mentioned that Mary, the mother of Jesus, had performed any miracle during her lifetime, nor after.

Actions related to the Ruler '*Queen of Heaven*', worshiped by Catholicism as *Mary or Our Lady*:

- 1) Diseases.
- 2) Spiritual and physical prostitution; moral, material and spiritual corruption.
- 3) Rebellion to authority and power struggle (reversing things and taking to him (the Ruler) the authority that belongs to God).
- 4) Misery, pain and suffering (martyrdom).
- 5) False prophecy.
- 6) Confusion.
- 7) Religiosity.
- 8) Fear of death.
- 9) Uncontrolled emotions [influence of the Authority called *Jezebel*, referring to the wife of King Ahab of Israel, idolatrous woman who worshiped the same Ruler described above (*Post-idol or Asherah Pole* – 1 Kin. 18: 19; 1 Kin. 16: 31-33), and whose demons under her authority are sent to emotionally torment men]. It is a symbol of immorality, carnality, lust, false prophecy and all sort of emotional disarray.

To complete the reasoning, let's talk a bit a feature of the Ruler '*Queen of Heaven*' reported above, which is pain and suffering (martyrdom), and also the characteristic of some Roman emperors in particular to show us the effect of Romanism as something spiritually condemned by God because they supported the martyrdom. During the reign of Emperor Domitian, for example, his action against the Christian churches of Asia Minor was extremely destructive, making martyrs, like Antipas or Antipater, who is described in *Rev. 2: 12-13*: "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword: 'I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas [*abbreviation of Antipater* – *martyr of the church of Pergamum, who, according to tradition, was roasted on a bronze receptacle during the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD)*] my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives". About Nero and Caligula we have no need to mention. Although since 64 AD (when Nero ordered to torture Christians in Rome) there was persecution to Christianity, they were irregular. The *organized persecutions against Christians* emerge from Trajan on. *Marcus Ulpius Nerva Trajan* was a Roman Emperor from 98 to 117 AD. In 112 AD he established the procedures against the Christians. The Christians were accused of superstition and hatred to mankind. If they were Roman citizens they were beheaded; and if not, they could be thrown to wild beasts or sent to work in mines. After him, the *main persecutions* were ordered by the emperors *Marcus Aurelius* (*Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus* – 161-180 AD), *Decius* (*Gaius Messius Quintus Trajan Decius* – 249-251 AD), *Valerian* (*Publius Licinius Valerian* – 253-260 AD) and *Diocletian* (*Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletian* – 284-305 AD).

Thus, by the carnal action of these leaders or by the influence of the Ruler described as *Queen of Heaven*, many martyrs were made. Followers of Jesus and persecuted by Rome, were all martyred: *Simon Peter* died crucified upside down in

Rome around 65 AD; *John Mark* (author of the second gospel) died dragged by horses in Alexandria (Roman Empire) in 70-80 AD; *James (the greater)*, brother of the apostle *John*, son of Zebedee, was beheaded by King Herod Agrippa in 44 AD in Jerusalem; *Philip* (apostle of Jesus) preached the gospel in Palestine, Greece and Asia Minor, where the wife of a Roman proconsul was converted. There, he died crucified and then stoned, in the year 80 AD, at Hierapolis in Phrygia, by order of the proconsul. *Andrew*, Peter's brother, is considered the founder of the Church in Byzantium (Constantinople and now Istanbul), where the Emperor Constantine ruled later by establishing the Roman Catholic Church. He was crucified in Greece (Roman dominion) in an X-shaped cross. *Paul of Tarsus* was beheaded in Rome (for being a Roman citizen, otherwise he would suffer another kind of death). The other apostles were also killed in other places of idolatry, besides Rome:

- *Matthias*: chosen to take the place of *Judas Iscariot*. Died burned at the stake, no one knows where.

- *Luke* (physician and evangelist): died at Thebes in Boeotia (prefecture of Greece) at 84 old; it is not known if he was martyred.

- *Thomas*: was probably the most active of the apostles in the east of Syria, preaching to India, where he died pierced by spears.

- *Bartholomew* (also known as *Nathanael*): preached in India with Thomas, returning to Armenia, Ethiopia and southern Arabia. According to reports, he was skinned alive and died in Albanopolis (modern Derbent, north of Azerbaijan), in Caucasus Mountains (between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea), at the behest of the governor.

- *Judas Thaddaeus* (apostle of Jesus): he devoted himself to preaching the gospel in Judea, Samaria, Mesopotamia (today, region of Iraq) and Persia. Ancient traditions state that he was martyred in Persia, at the behest of the pagan priests of Zoroaster, and was beheaded along with *Simon the Zealot* (apostle of Jesus), who also preached in that region. Simon was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the Sun god.

- *Matthew*: ministered in Persia (now Iran) and Ethiopia. It is not known if he was martyred (stabbed to death in Ethiopia).

- *James, the less* (son of Alphaeus), apostle of Jesus: ministered in Syria, where he probably died stoned.

- *John* (apostle of Jesus): the one that was not martyred. He died of natural death at Ephesus, 98 or 100 AD, when he was 94 years old, after being released from prison in the government of Nerva, Roman emperor. An ancient Latin tradition states that he escaped without getting burned, after having been thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. This would have happened in Rome.

- *James, the Just or the Righteous*, writer of the Epistle of James, first bishop of Jerusalem and half-brother of Jesus (*Mk. 6: 3; Gal. 1: 19*), was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and then stoned; it is unclear whether by traditional Jews.

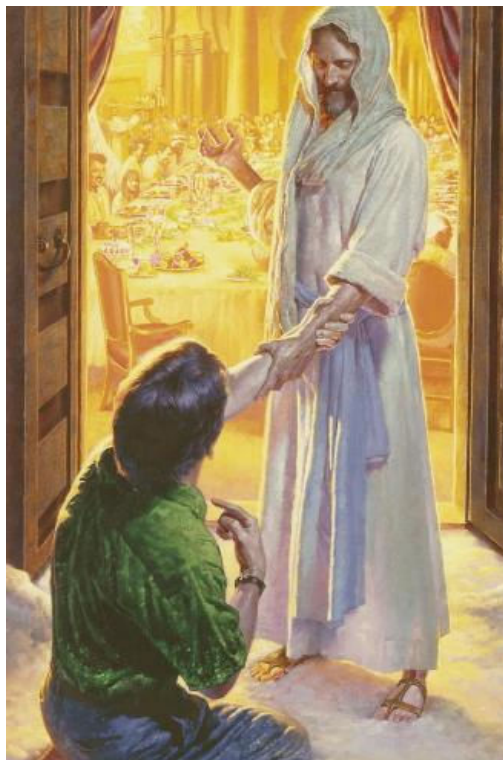
Though information are based on historical reports not fully reliable, we can think that, by the earlier prophecies of Jesus and by the human wickedness, allied with the action of demons, everything occurred this way, considering the other atrocities committed throughout the ages against the truth of God through whoever it is.

What does all this have to do with Easter?

As in the Old Testament the people had a God's deliverance when the Destroyer passed over the houses of the Jews without killing the firstborn, Jesus came in the same way, to bring us deliverance from the Destroyer of our souls, because of our sins. He replaced us, justified us before the Father and bought us back to Him. His blood has replaced the old animal sacrifice so that we could achieve salvation, eternal life and be

forgiven and reconciled to God. His life brings us true fertility and redemption, not rabbits or pagan gods of fertility, much less the sacrifice of other human beings. Our salvation in Christ is already the greatest miracle that we can receive.

DEATH



What the bible and the Christian and pagan traditions of the OT and NT say:

The purpose of this chapter is to give us some guidance about some practices used by certain people when a beloved dies, but often are not exactly biblical orientations. What to do: to bury or cremate? Will prayers and religious services be received by those who have died? Can they intercede for us and perform miracles in our favor? Where do they go? Does their soul remain linked to their bones or bodies already decomposed so long ago? Is it healthy to mourn for years?

First, the bible says:

- *Gen. 2: 7*: “then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.”
- *Gen. 3: 19*: “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”
- *Ps. 103: 14*: “For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.”

This makes us think that the same way man was formed from the earth, he should return to it at the end of his days. I’m saying this because it seems to have been God’s will that the body of His children, when the spirit left them, was returned to earth, that is, they were buried, not cremated. Cremation was not practiced by the Hebrews, but usually a pagan ritual connected to sacrifice to their gods.

We find only one text in Amos about cremation among the Israelites. In *Amos 6: 10* it is written, “And if a relative, one who burns the dead, shall take up the body to bring it out of the house [NIV: And if the relative who comes to carry the bodies out of the house to burn them], and shall say to someone in the innermost parts of the house, ‘Is anyone else with you?’ the answer will come, ‘No.’ Then the relative shall say, ‘Hush! We must not mention the name of the Lord.’”

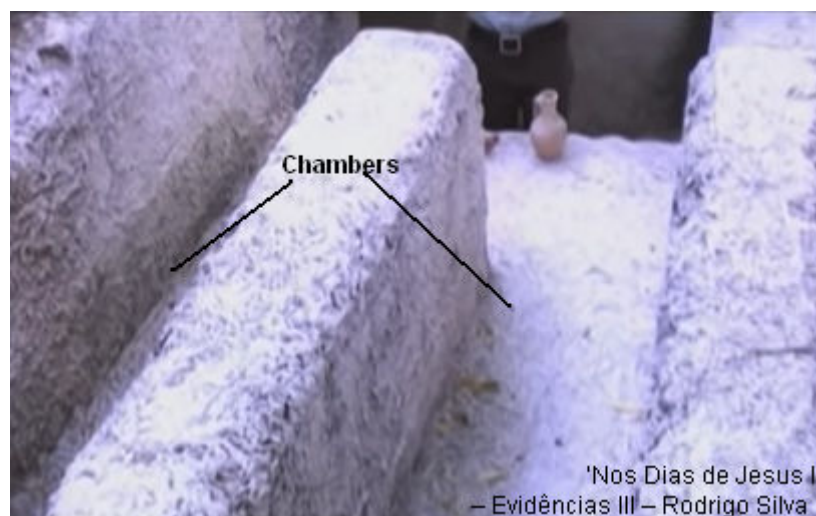
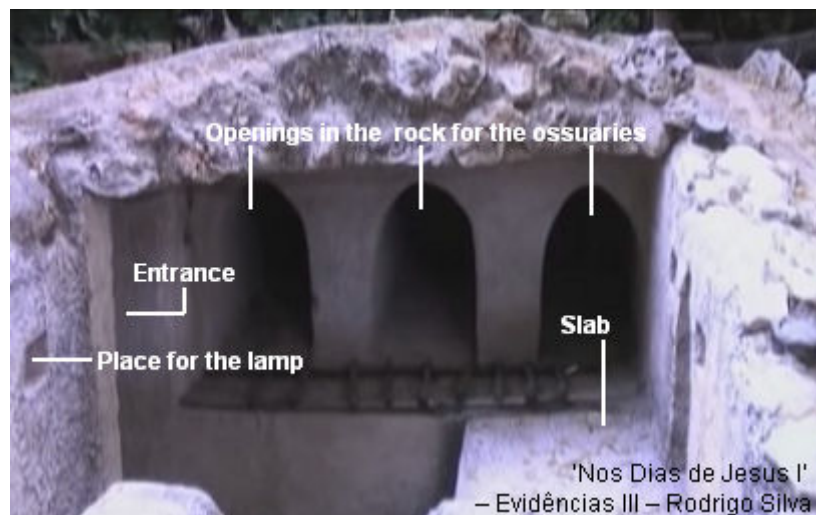
The burial for the Hebrews was the usual way of proceeding to the dead. The reference here to cremation is probably because of the plague, to avoid contamination. It was done in cases of necessity, as happened with Saul and his sons (*1 Sam. 31: 12*), when the men of Jabesh Gilead took their bodies down from the walls of Beth Shan and burned them not to be insulted by the Philistines (“all the valiant men set out, traveled all night long, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan. They came to Jabesh and burned them there”). In the case described by Amos also seems to be because so many would die (*he spoke of the destruction by the Assyrians, because of the sins of Israel*), that a single man could not carry all the bodies to the grave to bury them; therefore, first the corpses were burned, and then the bones were buried. About the fact of not mentioning the name of the Lord means that relatives and friends would be careful to avoid the mention of the Lord’s name for fear of God’s judgment (*Am. 8: 3; Hab. 2: 20; Zeph. 1: 7*).

In the OT, burial was usually done in the family tomb (a cave or a hole dug in the rock) as it was with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah at Machpelah. It was common to cry, tear their own clothes, dress themselves in sackcloth and spread ashes over their heads. The mourning could extend to seven days (*Gen. 50: 10*). The Egyptian embalming or mummification was done as follows: the viscera were removed and preserved separately. The body was dissected and stuffed with salt, upholstered with linen impregnated with aromas and fully wrapped in linen. It usually lasted from 40 to 70 days (*Gen. 50: 3*). In the case of criminals hanged, the burial was immediate (*Deut. 21: 22-23*) to avoid ceremonial defilement. The usual wail with weeping, dishevel their hair and rip their clothes was prohibited only in the case of the high priest and the period of separation – Naziriteship – (*Lev. 10: 6-7; Lev. 21: 10-11; Num. 6: 6-7*). The body was transported in a coffin to the grave, which was usually outside the towns. In the case of executed criminals or enemies, the grave was marked by a heap of stones (*Josh. 7: 26; Josh. 8: 29; Josh. 10: 27; 2 Sam. 18: 17*).

In the NT, the corpse was washed and then anointed (*Mk. 16: 1; Jn. 19: 39; Lk. 23: 56*), wrapped in linen cloths impregnated with spices (*Mk. 14: 8; Jn. 19: 40*). Finally, members were tied up and the face covered with a linen cloth (*Jn. 11: 44; Jn. 20: 7*). Explaining in more detail, the body was placed on a slab, washed thoroughly by the women with water, oil and perfumes, including hair and nails, well brushed. Then the wrapping process began, that is, a set of bands involving the body from the neck down, the members separately, and another group of bands on the head, over which a linen cloth was placed (*Jn. 11: 44; Jn. 20: 7*). This process took 7 to 8 hours and was not done at night. The body, thus prepared, was placed in one of the chambers. After a year or more, the bones were placed in ossuaries and deposited in the openings of the rock. The graves were small, and there weren’t many people in there for the process of placing the strips of cloth. It was also dark, so there was a place on the rock for a lamp. In the case of Jesus, that work was interrupted because of Sabbath. Therefore, the evangelists describe only that Jesus was wrapped in a linen cloth (like a sheet), but not wrapped with linen bands (*Jn. 19: 40; Jn. 20: 4-8; Lk. 23: 53; Mk. 15: 46*).

Weeping, wailing and chest beating are typically oriental. Professional mourners could be employed (*Matt. 9: 23; Mk. 5: 38; Lk. 8: 52*); sometimes flutists were hired. The normal period of mourning was seven days; perhaps, because of this, there is the Catholic custom of performing the “*Requiem Mass*” on the seventh day. The graves were usually outside the towns or villages. They could be simple graves in the earth, or dug into the rocks or caves. A practice when the family graves were filled was to put the bones in small chests of stone known as ossuaries. At the time of Jesus the practice to beautify and adorn the tombs (*Matt. 23: 29*) or to whitewash them (*Matt. 23: 27*) was

common to make them eminent, especially at night, preventing passers-by from touching them accidentally and become unclean.



As we mentioned before, cremation was not practiced by the Hebrews, but usually a pagan ritual connected to sacrifice to their gods, so condemned by God:

- *Lev. 18: 21*: “You shall not give any of your offspring to sacrifice them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.” Molech or Moloch was an Ammonite god worshiped by the sacrifice of children; was also called Milcom or Malcam. Another god was worshiped in the same way in Moab: Chemosh.

Another biblical example where human sacrifice was abhorrent to the Israelites is in (*2 Kin. 3: 4-27*). Moab (land of the descendant of Lot, Abraham’s nephew) paid taxes to the king of Israel. When Ahab (king of Israel) died and, Joram his son, ascended the throne, the king of Moab rebelled; therefore, Joram asked for help to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and they allied with the king of Edom (*2 Kin. 3: 1-7*). After seven days’ march, there was no water for the army and for their cattle. The king of Israel complained, but Jehoshaphat asked for a prophet who he could see in the name of the Lord. One of the servants of Joram told him about Elisha, son of Shaphat, and the three kings came to him. Elisha was angry with the king of Israel, but because of Jehoshaphat, he asked to bring him a harp player. The music brought the power of God upon him, and he prophesied that they should make many holes in the valley and the Lord would fill them with water, not only to quench their thirst and the cattle’s, but He would also deliver Moab into their hands. The next morning the waters came (*2 Kin. 3: 20*) by the way of Edom. The Moabites were expecting to find water tanks and mistook the red glare of the morning sun with blood (*2 Kin. 3: 22*). They thought that the kings had destroyed each other and went to the camp of Israel. There, the Israelites defeated the enemies and pursued them to their cities, which was also destroyed according to the prophecy of Elisha. The king of Moab, seeing that he could not win, took his firstborn son and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall. This attitude made that the Moabites fought with greater intensity and fury, causing the Israelites to withdraw, because they had already achieved their goal: “When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not. Then he took his firstborn son who was to succeed him, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And great wrath came upon Israel, so they withdrew from him and returned to their own land” (*2 Kin. 3: 26-27*).

Two kings of Judah committed a similar act. One of them was Ahaz (732-716 BC), who burned his sons as a sacrifice (*2 Chr. 28: 3 cf. 2 Kin. 16: 3*). The other king was Manasseh (687-642 BC): “He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. He made his son pass through fire; he practiced soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger” (*2 Kin. 21: 5-6*).

The Romans also had a habit of burning the corpses, especially of their emperors, as happened with Julius Caesar, for example.

During the following centuries, cremation continued to be adopted by the Eastern religions, not only as a sacrificial act to some god, but also an ‘exotic’ way of returning the dead to nature. The ashes were thrown into rivers or scattered to the wind, always having very mysticism involved throughout the ritual. One sadistic form of persecution of Christians in the first two centuries after Christ was held by the Roman emperors, in particular by Nero (54-68 AD), who poured pitch on their bodies and set fire on them to illuminate the arena at night. Another evil consequence resulting from Romanism was the persecutions that followed in the so-called ‘holy wars’ where innocent people were burned. In the Middle Ages and in the Modern Age the famous custom of burning ‘witches’ is widely known. They were actually martyrs for the sake of fidelity to the religious principles they defended.

Another common practice was to throw the dead into the river, as was done by the Egyptians in relation to Osiris (his wife was Isis and his son was Horus, represented by

a hawk), king of the kingdom of the dead and the vegetation, associated with annual increase of the Nile and the subsequent rebirth of life. This inspired the funeral ritual in Egypt (to drop his dead in the Nile).

Leaving now the traditions with the matter itself, let's comment on the concept that the Jews had about the place to where the dead should go and where they would remain. Returning to the episode of *Pesach*, it is written:

- *Ex. 12: 12-13*: “For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and *no plague* shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”

- *Ex. 12: 23*: “For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow *the destroyer* to enter your houses to strike you down.”

- *Ex. 12: 27*: “you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.’ And the people bowed down and worshiped.”

- *Ps 78: 49*: “He let loose on them his fierce anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of *destroying angels*.” (cf. *Ex. 8-10* – the ten plagues).

Abaddon (the ‘Destroyer’, of *Rev. 9: 11; Ex. 12: 23*) is the demon released to kill all the firstborn of Egypt.

Abaddon or *Apollyon* was also described in *Rev. 9: 11*. *Abaddon* is the satanic angel of Abyss (Bottomless Pit), whose name in Greek means ‘*Destroyer*.’ In Hebrew, ‘*bhaddôn*’ means ‘*place of destruction*’ and is regularly translated as such in certain versions of the Old Testament, to denote the grave (*region of the dead*). This region was considered by ancient Jews as ‘hell’, in Hebrew, *Sheol*; *Hades* and *Geenna*, in Greek, the latter name from *ge* (Valley) *Hinnom* (Valley of Hinnom), where idolatrous sacrifices were made to the south of Jerusalem. The meaning of ‘Hinnom’ is unknown; some scholars suggest ‘Ben Hinnom’, son of Hinnom, hinting that it is a proper noun (*2 Kin. 23: 10; 2 Chr. 28: 3*). The Jews thought *Sheol* was like a shell where the dead remained and were put on trial. There, could have a separated place for the righteous and the wicked.

The region of the dead was considered by ancient Jews as hell, in Hebrew *Sheol* (Strong #7585: grave, hell, pit, lower world, underworld); *Hades* and *Geenna* (Gehenna) in Greek. The Jews thought *Sheol* was like a shell where the dead remained and were put on trial. There, could have a separated place for the righteous and the wicked. Having or not this interpretation what we know is that in the OT the dead didn't have the chance of getting the salvation coming through Jesus the Messiah, the way we know it today. Perhaps because of this Peter wrote that when Christ died and rose from Hades, the hell, He preached to the ancients chosen, giving them the chance to know His salvation (*1 Pet. 3: 18-19*). The word Hades (Greek: *hadés, ᾅδης* – Strong #g86) comes from ‘*a*’ (as negative particle) and ‘*eido*’; properly, unseen, i.e. ‘Hades’ or the place (state) of departed souls; grave, hell; the habitation of the dead in the underworld until the last judgment. The other Greek word ‘Geenna’ (Greek: *Gehenna, γέεννης* – Strong #g1067), as it was explained before, comes from ‘*ge*’ (Valley) ‘Hinnom’ (Valley of Hinnom), where idolatrous sacrifices were made to the south of Jerusalem or a place underneath the earth, a place of punishment for evil; also used (figuratively) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment; hell. The Greek word Gehenna can be found in the NT in the following verses: *Matt. 5: 22; 29; 30; Matt. 10: 28; Matt. 11: 23; Mk. 9: 43; 45; 47; Lk. 12: 5; Jam. 3: 6*. The word Hades is written in *Lk. 10: 15; Lk. 16:*

23; Rev. 1: 18; Rev. 6: 8; Rev. 20: 14. In 2 Peter 2: 4, in our translation, ‘hell’ (NIV), it’s written the Greek word ‘tartarus’ (tartaróō, τάρταρωσας – Strong #g5020: cast down to hell; the deepest abyss of Hades; to incarcerate in eternal torment). But as for the text of 1 Peter 3: 18-19, he doesn’t write explicitly the word Hades, just suggests: “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit [*NIV, Spirit, with capital letter, which means the Holy Spirit*], in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison [*of the devil, because of their sins*]”. There seems to be a difference between the words Hades and Gehenna, for Hades conveys the idea of ‘the place (state) of departed souls; hell, grave’, whereas Gehenna seems to refer to something stronger than simple grave or physical death. It suggests spiritual death, true hell or eternal punishment, as we saw in the definition.

In the New American Standard Bible Version, the text from 1 Peter 3: 18-20 translated as, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and *made proclamation* to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.”

In fact, Peter was speaking in a context where the expression ‘the spirits in prison’ refers to the people before the Flood and who did not repent through Noah’s preaching, for there, Jesus, before His incarnation, poured out His Spirit on Noah to preach repentance to them.

But there is a second possible interpretation for this text (if we think about the sign of Jonah), for the Greek word used for the verb ‘preach’ (KJV; NIV) or ‘proclamation’ (NRSV; NASB) is ekēryxen, derived from kēryssō (or kerusso – Strong #g 2784), which means: to proclaim a message (from the part of a king, for example); announce (as a public crier, the herald of a king), especially the divine truth (the gospel): preacher, to preach, to proclaim, to publish. This proclamation made by Jesus to the souls of the dead in Hades may have been that the price for their salvation had already been paid, their sin had already been atoned, and all who had died in faith were free from that place of eternal suffering. By rising from the dead [*1 Pet. 3: 19: “made alive in the spirit” or “by the Spirit”*] He proclaimed in that place (Sheol or Hades) His victory over death and said the name of all the righteous who, having died in faith, obtained salvation, were free from God’s judgment. It is as if He were saying to hell and to Satan, ‘this one, that one and the other one have his soul saved because I have already paid the price.’ Thus the dispensation of the OT would be definitely finished and the new dispensation would begin, where men, during their earthly life, knowing the word of Jesus, would exercise their free will and choose salvation, now with conscience. By rising from the dead, Jesus brought with Him the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1: 18: “and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades”) that is, the authority over death and life (keys = authority). He didn’t preach in hell or went back there after His resurrection. The victory and the proclamation occurred in the moment the Holy Spirit came into Him.

Perhaps because of this thought that Jesus uttered the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar:

- Lk. 16: 19-31: “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried

away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house – for I have five brothers – that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

An interesting lesson here is that there is a chasm between heaven and hell, as well as those who are gone and us. It is not allowed the dead to return to tell us anything that exists on the 'other side'. After someone dies, it's no use to do anything else such as interceding for his soul or speak to him, comforting him, because the person had a chance to make his spiritual choice in life. That choice is personal. It is the exercise of free will given by God to each one.

We know that the spirit gives life to the body and belongs to God:

- *Jam. 2: 26*: "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead."

- *Job 12: 10*: "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being."

- *Job 32: 8*: "But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding."

- *Job 33: 4*: "The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life".

- *Ecc. 12: 7*: "and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it."

- *Ps. 146: 4*: "When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing."

- *Isa. 42: 5*: "Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it."

We also know that nobody has the power to determine the day of his own death and that, despite the mysticism surrounding the subject, trying to deceive many people with theories about what happens after that moment, the bible says:

- *Ecc. 9: 10*: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going."

- *Ecc. 8: 8a*: "No one has power over the wind to restrain the wind, or power over the day of death."

There is not reincarnation:

- *Heb. 9: 27-28*: "And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."

- *1 Pet. 3: 18*: "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made

alive in the spirit.” If Jesus died only once for our sins and therefore rose from the dead only once, showing that His resurrection was a sample of what would and will happen at His second coming with those who believe in Him, this means that there is only one life and only one chance for man.

Therefore, there is not reincarnation, for our chance has been given by the first coming of Jesus (salvation of mankind). Our choice is personal and nontransferable and must be done while we are alive (*2 Cor. 6: 1-2; Heb. 3: 7-8; Ps. 146: 4; Ecc. 9: 5; 6: 10; Isa. 38: 18-19*), because when the person departs, the body will sleep in the earth (*Gen 3: 19; 1 Cor. 15: 20; 1 The. 4: 13*), the spirit will return to God (*Ecc. 12: 7; Ps. 146: 4*) and only the souls of those who surrender to Jesus will go up to heaven and will stay there (*Rev. 6: 9-10; Rev. 20: 4; 2 Cor. 5: 8; Phil. 1: 23; 1 The. 5: 10; Lk. 23: 43*) until the second coming of Jesus for the day of the Rapture of His Church (with his/her glorified body) and, then, the judgment of God (*Heb. 9: 27*). Those who have not made their choice for Jesus, that is, those whose names are not found in the Book of Life (*Rev. 13: 8; Rev. 17: 8; Rev. 20: 15; Rev. 21: 27*), remain in some place known to God (*cf. Lk 16: 23*), other than paradise; and on the Day of Judgment, their bodies will rise to eternal damnation:

- *Jn. 5: 27-29*: “and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

- *Jn. 11: 11-13*: “After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.”

- *Dan. 12: 2*: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

- *1 Cor. 15: 20-27*: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died [*NIV: ‘have fallen asleep’; we say ‘died’ because they were buried; God calls ‘death’ ‘to sleep’*]. For since death came through a human being [*Adam*], the resurrection of the dead [*Jesus’ resurrection is the mirror of our eternal resurrection*] has also come through a human being [*Jesus*]; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power [*hierarchy of demons*]. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death [*the devil and the darkness that lead to sin and consequently to the final separation from God*]. For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘All things are put in subjection’, it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him.”

- *1 The. 4: 13-15*: “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died [*NIV, who fall asleep*], so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope [*Those who still don’t know what eternal life is, or the resurrection of the glorified body*]. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died [*NIV, have fallen asleep in Him*]. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died [*NIV, who have fallen asleep*].”

Let’s make a parenthesis here to clear the doubts of some brothers: With the second coming of Jesus, the resurrection of the saints that Paul refers to in *1 Cor. 15: 20-27* and

1 The. 4: 13-15, concerns the glorified body, which will be joined to the saved soul that is in heaven. Many interpret the verses *1 Cor. 15: 20* and *1 The. 4: 13* ('those who have fallen asleep') as if death were a state of unconscious sleep, but the situation Paul was relating here is that the Greeks actually believed in the immortality of the soul but doubted the resurrection of the body (as they were doubting the resurrection of Jesus), so they quarreled with him at the Areopagus at Athens (*Acts 17: 31-34*). Areopagus was a kind of Athenian court, an assembly of magistrates, scholars and men of letters. If Jesus said to the repentant evildoer crucified beside him that he would be with Him in Paradise that very day, and John reports in *Rev 6: 9-10* that the souls of the martyrs cried out for justice, it is because they were conscious in heaven with the Lord. And in *Rev 20: 4* he writes that the souls of those beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus lived and reigned with Christ.

- *Rev. 20: 5*: "(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection."

- *Rev. 20: 11-15*: "Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it [*Jesus*]; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened [*The books where our stories are written and everything good or bad that we did*]. Also another book was opened, the book of life [*where the names of the saved are written*]. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea [*Symbol of the nations*] gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades [*the hell, that's what it means*] were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire" cf. *Dan. 7: 9-10; 26-27*: "As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened... Then the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away (*to take away the dominion of the beast, according to the reasoning of this text by the prophet, that's what it means*), to be consumed and totally destroyed. The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them."

The Sadducees and the resurrection:

- *Mk. 12: 18-27*: "Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, saying, 'Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first married and, when he died, left no children; and the second married the widow and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; none of the seven left children. Last of all the woman herself died. In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had married her.' Jesus said to them, 'Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' 'He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong.'"

The Sadducees were testing Jesus about the resurrection and eternal life, so He told them that God is still (the verb is in the present tense, “*I am*”) the God of the ancestors because who has Him as Lord and Savior has also eternal life. However, for us, we can draw a lesson here that is: even though the marriage is a strong bond, it is not permanent; when one dies, the other is released from the commitment and more than that: no one owns the soul or the spirit of anyone; we are all ‘lent’ by God to each other to accomplish His sovereign project on earth. This is for couples emotionally and spiritually ill who want to own one another, mainly exercising dominion and possession through sex.

- *1 Cor. 7: 39*: “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord.”

Before talking about the resurrection of Christ as a way to show us what will happen to us also, let’s get back to the previous subject about to invoke and talk to the spirit of the dead:

- *Lev. 19: 31*: “Do not turn to mediums [*the divination by invocation of spirits*] or wizards [NIV: spiritists; *this means, fortune tellers or soothsayers, guessing the future*]; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God.”

- *Lev. 20: 6-7*: “If any turn to mediums and wizards [NIV: spiritists], prostituting themselves to them, I will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am the Lord your God.”

- *Lev. 20: 27*: “A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard [NIV: spiritists] shall be put to death; they shall be stoned to death, their blood is upon them.”

- *Isa. 8: 19*: “Now if people say to you, ‘Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter’; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living?”

- *1 Sam. 28: 1-25 (special focus, vv.7-8; 11b; 15a; 16a; 18-19)*: “Then Saul said to his servants, ‘Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, so that I may go to her and inquire of her’. His servants said to him, ‘There is a medium at Endor’ [*In the north of Israel*]. So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes and went there, he and two men with him. They came to the woman by night. And he said, ‘Consult a spirit for me, and bring up for me the one whom I name to you’... ‘Bring up Samuel for me’... [*God allowed this unique experience to His chosen with the purpose of giving him a lesson of life*]...Then Samuel [*he was the prophet who anointed Saul king of Israel*] said to Saul, ‘Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?’ Saul answered, ‘I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more’... Samuel said... ‘Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord, and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you today [*the Philistines, enemies of Israel, were about to attack, and king Saul was afraid*]. Moreover the Lord will give Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me; the Lord will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines’ [*Saul and all his sons, except one, were all killed in the battle of Mount Gilboa, as prophesied by Samuel*].”

This explains the lie and trap in which many fall because of the anguish of not being able to speak with a beloved one that is gone and for not knowing the true comfort of God through the Holy Spirit. They seek ways to communicate with them and think that the occultism (Spiritualism also known as kardecist spiritism, necromancy etc.) may be the solution. Then they get more complicated, for they provoke God to anger, as happened to King Saul (sought a necromancer, which means he who invokes spirits of the dead), in addition to ignore that the one with whom they speak is not the spirit of the deceased person, but an unclean and misleading spirit.

Thus, the traditions of prayers and all types of religious services ordered for the dead have no value for those who stay, much less to whom was gone, because they can no longer communicate with the living. There is nothing to do for their soul or their spirit as for their salvation or as for their well-being, because the choice they made in life is what will count. As for the absolute certainty of what will happen to them, only God has, for His mercy and impartial justice is what will give the verdict on the Day of Judgment. There is no connection at all between their souls and their bodies that were buried or cremated. The flesh came back to earth, the spirit returned to God and the soul, where are the feelings, thoughts and human will, remains waiting for the day of resurrection, in heaven (if the person is Christ's) or in a place that only God knows (if the person is not His). The dead can not take care or intercede for us, nor do the miracles we need, because they are flesh, not God. So, there's no problem about them to feel anything when their bones are exhumed. The only thing with which we should worry about is the violation of graves for illegal purposes.

Let's talk about the resurrection of Christ as a way to show us what will also happen to us when He returns.

- *Lk. 24: 45-47*: "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day (*Hos. 6: 2*), and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations (*Jl. 2: 12-13; 28-32*), beginning from Jerusalem.'"

- *Jn. 21: 1-14*: "After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead."

This text (*Jn. 21: 4-14*) leads us to a question that many of us have done that it is about the appearance of Jesus after His resurrection. On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus showed to His disciples His glorified body. In other words, they saw Him as He is today in glory at the right hand of the Father:

- *Lk. 9: 28-36*: "Now about eight days after these sayings [*The revelation that Peter had about Jesus being the Son of God and the Messiah*] Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray [*Probably the Hermon to the north of Israel*]. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking

to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah' – not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen" [*in Mk. 9: 9 and Matt. 17: 9 the bible says that Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what they had seen until He resurrected, "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead'"*].

Thus, we can think that Jesus was already preparing His disciples for many things to come, not only related to Him but also to all others who were with Him. It was also a way to predict what would happen to us after we 'fall asleep' (after we die, as we know today). In *1 Cor. 15: 35-58*, Paul says that the resurrected at the second coming of Christ will have body, and he is in fact describing our glorified body, as it was with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration and as it was after His resurrection. Paul emphasizes that the spiritual body that we will have is a body, because one can not conceive the human spirit without a body, only that it will be a different body, with atoms and molecules 'reorganized'; therefore, another kind of matter. Paul does not speak of an immaterial body (the spiritual body to which he refers, is not only spirit; it is our soul saved and purified that will be there too). The bible says God is the Spirit ("Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" – *2 Cor. 3: 17*) and that the angels are also spirits, they have no body to inhabit; but in reference to man, since his creation, he was always connected to a body. As for the glorified body of Jesus after His resurrection, which was transformed to the point that neither Mary Magdalene nor the disciples themselves for several times did not recognize Him immediately, it was a body that went through the walls, however, He ate and maintained His human form:

- *John 20: 14-17*: "When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew [NIV, Aramaic], 'Rabboni!' (Which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them', 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

- *Jn. 20: 19-23*: "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you'. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'"

- *Jn. 20: 26*: "A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'"

• *Lk. 24: 36-43*: “While they were talking about this [*It refers to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who had met with the Lord*], Jesus himself stood among them [*He materialized inside there, He didn’t knock at the door*], and said to them ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.”

What about us? What the bible says?

• *1 Cor. 15: 35-58*: “But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies [*a twig of wheat is not born if a seed does not die on earth, that’s what it means*]. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain [*we must first sow the grain or seed to have the foot or the entire tree*]. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed, its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies [*angels, stars and planets*] and earthly bodies [*we and the animals*], but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable [*we sow here in life, living in an unclean and imperfect body*], what is raised is imperishable [*we sow in the spiritual things in order to have a spiritual body of glory and splendor and it differs from person to person, depending on their sowing on earth*]. It is sown in dishonor [*human imperfection*], it is raised in glory [*spiritual perfection*]. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam [*Jesus*], became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual [*We need to sow here while we are alive what we want to be in the future. If we sow only in the material and the worldly things, we can not be saved in the soul, nor have a spiritual body, because we did not think of it on earth, when we had a chance*]. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust [*our material body that was generated in the womb*]; the second man is from heaven [*our spirit generated from God’s Spirit in the new birth*]. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed [*cf. Phil. 3: 21 – he means that when Jesus returns a second time, many who are alive will be caught up in a spiritual body, glorified, as happened with Jesus when Mary Magdalene saw Him and therefore did not recognize Him immediately, for His appearance was different*], in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet [*an angel will sound a trumpet, summoning those who belong to Christ, for having His seal on their forehead – Rev. 7: 3; 9: 4; 14: 1; 22: 4*]. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable [*with a body clean of impurities and different from that they had in life on earth*], and we will be changed [*we’ll be caught up to heaven in our new body*]. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal

body must put on immortality [*we need to take care of our salvation and our holiness here on earth so that we can arrive purified in heaven*]. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ [*incitement, stimulus*] The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law [*Law is government and authority over sin and that brings punishment*]. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

In short: the children of God that separate themselves from the earthly things for Him and for His sake, will have a brighter and more beautiful body when Jesus comes back, as if they were angels, with no marks and dirties of sin.



“This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day” (Jn. 6: 40).