

# Why We Do Not Celebrate Lent

by Pastor David L. Brown, Ph.D.

**First Baptist Church of Oak Creek Wisconsin**

[www.FirstBaptistChurchOC.org](http://www.FirstBaptistChurchOC.org) [www.sermonaudio.com/fbcoc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/fbcoc)

Blog - <http://SaltLightTruth.blogspot.com> Twitter - [www.twitter.com/drdauidlbrown](http://www.twitter.com/drdauidlbrown)

Facebook - [www.facebook.com/DrDavid.Brown](http://www.facebook.com/DrDavid.Brown)

Email - [FirstBaptistChurchOC@gmail.com](mailto:FirstBaptistChurchOC@gmail.com)

Lent.01172011

There are certain special events that are clearly seen in the Bible. Here are several examples. **Palm Sunday** is a remembrance of the day when Jesus Christ entered into Jerusalem and the crowds cheered Him as their King. **John 12:13** “Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

We also remember the **Crucifixion of Jesus Christ**. We read in **John 19:30** “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” We know that Jesus was three days and three nights in the grave. He prophesied this in **Matthew 12:40** “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Paul attests the fact that this is exactly what happened (**1 Corinthians 15:3-4**). We will remember the death of our Lord Jesus Christ this Friday.

Then there is the **Resurrection**. Resurrection Sunday is next week! To be sure we will be focusing on the glorious event. My heart is warmed by the words of the angel recorded in **Mark 16:6** “And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.”

However there are other **non-biblical events** that we do NOT celebrate, that have their origin in paganism but have been transported into Christianity. What I am referring to is what is called **LENT**. When I was a child, I went to a church that celebrated Lent. I never really understood why we celebrated it when I was younger. When I started going to the Baptist church they did NOT celebrate the Lenten Season. I want to explain why.

- **The Modern Definition of Lent**

Lent is the 40-day period (Sundays excluded) prior to Easter, which the Catholic and most Protestant church observes as a penitential season. It begins on **Ash Wednesday** (which can occur any time between February 4 and March 11, depending upon the date of Easter), and it concludes with the **Passiontide**, the two-week period during which the church's liturgy follows Christ's activity

closely through the final stages of his life on earth. These two weeks are called Passion Week and Holy Week.” The Roman Catholic Church says it was established to commemorate the 40 days that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan.

However, you can search the Scriptures diligently, from Old Testament to New, and you will find no mention of Jews or Christians observing an annual period of 40 days of fasting and abstinence preceding the festival of the Passover or Resurrection Sunday. Yet today much of the Christian world observes a 40 day period called Lent, which precedes the festival of Easter Sunday.

Some have falsely claimed that the celebration of Lent goes back to the time of the Apostles. Believe it or not, Lent was never observed by Christ or His Apostles.

- **The Pagan Origin of Lent**

But, where did the Catholic Church get Lent? The word actually comes from the Anglo-Saxon *Lencten*, meaning “**spring**,” which in turn was derived from the Anglo-Saxon word *lenctentid* (pronounced LENG-ten-teeed), which means the time of lengthening and flowering. The entire spring season was called *Lenctentid*.

The ancient Anglo-Saxons (and other pagans) celebrated the return of spring with riotous fertility festivals commemorating their goddess of fertility and of springtime, **Eastre**. In fact, the word Easter is derived from the Scandinavian **Ostara** and the Teutonic **Ostern** or Eastre, both pagan goddesses of fertility. The complete month of April was called Eostur-monath with the entire month was dedicated to Eostre.

The pagan religion taught that Eostre was one responsible for changing a bird into a rabbit, this then is how the rabbit became an Easter symbol. Rabbits symbolize the fertility of springtime. It should be noted that the rabbit's capacity of abundant production of young is especially great at this time of year.

I should also tell you that most ancient races, including the Anglo-Saxons, included spring festivals to celebrate the rebirth life, using the Egg was a symbol of fertility, life and re-birth. This is old Latin proverb catches this idea -- *Omne vivum ex ovo*. This means “all life comes from an egg”.

Where did the Anglo-Saxons get Lent. We have go back to the ancient Babylonian mystery religion. “The forty days’ abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshippers of the Babylonian goddess. Among the Pagans this Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz.” (*The Two Babylons*).

But why did the church at Rome institute such a pagan holiday? “To pacify the Pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated, and, by a complicated but skillful adjustment of the calendar, it was found no difficult matter, in general, to get Paganism and Christianity—now far sunk in idolatry—in this as in so many other things, to shake hands” (*The Two Babylons*).

Cassianus, the monk of Marseilles, writing in the fifth century A.D. contrasting the primitive New Testament Church with the Roman Church of his day, “that the observance of the forty days had no existence, so long as the perfection of that primitive Church remained inviolate.”

Lent was not observed by the first century Church! It was first addressed by the church at Rome during the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, when Emperor Constantine officially recognized that church as the Roman Empire’s state religion. Any other form of Christianity that held to doctrines contrary to the Roman church was considered an enemy of the state. In A.D. 360, the Council of Laodicea officially commanded Lent to be observed.

Originally, people did not observe Lent for more than a week. Some kept it for one or two days. Others kept it for 40 consecutive hours, falsely believing that only 40 hours had elapsed between Christ’s death and resurrection. Eventually, it became a 40-day period of fasting or abstaining from certain foods. “The emphasis was not so much on the fasting as on the spiritual renewal that the preparation for Easter demanded. It was simply a period marked by fasting, but not necessarily one in which the faithful fasted every day. However, as time went on, more and more emphasis was laid upon fasting...During the early centuries (from the fifth century on especially) the observance of the fast was very strict. Only one meal a day, toward evening was allowed: flesh meat and fish, and in most places even eggs and dairy products, were absolutely forbidden. Meat was not even allowed on Sundays” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

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

Today, Lent is used for “fasting from sin and from vice...forsaking sin and sinful ways.” It is a season “for penance, which means sorrow for sin and contrition to God.” However, before giving up personal sins and vices during Lent, the pagans held a wild, “anything goes” celebration to make sure that they got in their share of debaucheries and perversities. All Catholic and some

Protestant countries traditionally call the day before Ash Wednesday "**Fat Tuesday**" or **Mardi Gras** today. Some call it **Carnival** and **Shrove Tuesday**.

- **The Biblical Problems With Lent**

- ✓ **Lent Has Its Roots In Paganism**

You cannot Christianize Pagan observances. This principle is set out in **Deuteronomy 7:1-5**

**Ephesians 5:11** “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*.”

- ✓ **Lent Is A Man Made Celebration**

**Colossians 2:20-23** “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, 21 (Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.”

- ✓ **The Bible Does Not Instruct Penance**

Penance is an act of self-mortification or devotion performed voluntarily to show sorrow for a sin or other wrongdoing. It includes contrition, confession to a priest, acceptance of punishment, and absolution.

- ✓ **The Bible Does Call For Repentance and Confession To The Lord**

**1 John 1:9** “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

**Revelation 2:5** “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”

- ✓ **We Are To Daily Live In A Christ Honoring Way**

**Luke 9:23** “And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

**Ephesians 5:15-16** “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

Our focus should not be on human tradition, fabrication or speculation, but on the reality of things recorded in the Bible – Palm Sunday and Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, His death on the Cross for our sins and His victorious resurrection. Thank you Lord Jesus for what YOU have done for us!