

THE PAGAN WORSHIP OF EASTER

Reading from *Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia*, 1948, Volume 4, page 140, we find that Easter is the Greatest Festival of the Christian Church, which commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ—which festival was named after the ancient Anglo Saxon Goddess of Spring!

EASTER. The greatest festival of the Christian church commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a movable feast, that is, it is not always held on the same date. The church council of Nicea (a.d. 325) decided that Easter should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox (March 21). Easter can come as early as March 22 or as late as April 25.

The name Easter comes from the ancient Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, Eostre or Ostara, in whose honor an annual spring festival was held. Some of our Easter customs have come from this and other pre-Christian spring festivals. Others come from the Passover feast of the Jews, observed in memory of their deliverance from Egypt (*see* Passover). The word “paschal,” meaning “pertaining to Easter,” like the French word for Easter, *Pâques*, comes through the Latin from the Hebrew name of the Passover.

• *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, by Merrill F. Unger, 1957, page 283, goes on to corroborate this fact, saying:

Easter (Gr. *pascha*, from Heb. *pesah*), the Passover, and so translated in every passage excepting “intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people” (Acts 12:4). In the earlier English versions Easter had been frequently used as the translation of pascha. At the last revision Passover was substituted in all passages but this. *See* Passover.

The word Easter is of Saxon origin, Eastr, **the goddess of spring, in whose honor sacrifices were offered about Passover time each year.** By the 8th century Anglo-Saxons had adopted the name to designate the celebration of Christ's resurrection.

It is a fully documented historical fact that the day which was chosen by the Christian Church to celebrate this resurrection, was a day which had been celebrated by pagans from antiquity! Yes, the only difference between these two celebrations, is the fact that its name was changed to veneer it with Christian Respectability! It is simply no secret that **EASTER** originated with the **WORSHIP OF A PAGAN GODDESS!** This fact is presented almost every time one researches the word Easter.

• *Compton's Encyclopedia*, 1956, Volume 4, says this about Easter:

“Many Easter customs come from the Old World...colored eggs and rabbits have come from pagan antiquity as symbols of new life...**our name ‘Easter’ comes from ‘Eostre’, an ancient Anglo Saxon goddess, originally of the dawn.** In pagan times an annual spring festival was held in her honor. Some Easter customs have **come from this and other pre-Christian spring festivals.**”

Reading about this Pre-Christian spring festival from *Funk & Wagnall's Standard Reference Encyclopedia*, 1962, Volume 8, page 2940, we learn:

Although Easter is a Christian festival, **it embodies traditions of an ancient time antedating the rise of Christianity. The origin of its name is lost in the dim past;** some scholars believe it probably is derived from *Eastre*, **Anglo-Saxon name of a Teutonic goddess of spring and fertility,** to whom was dedicated *Eastre monath*, corresponding to April. **Her festival was celebrated on the day of the vernal equinox, and traditions associated with the festival survive in the familiar Easter bunny, symbol of the fertile rabbit, and in the equally familiar colored Easter eggs originally painted with gay hues to represent the sunlight of spring.**

Such festivals, and the myths and legends which explain their origin, abounded in ancient religions. The Greek myth of the return of the earth-goddess Demeter from the underworld to the light of day, symbolizing the **resurrection of life in the spring** after the long hibernation of winter, had its counterpart, among many others, in the Latin legend of Ceres and Persephone. The Phrygians believed that their all-powerful deity went to sleep at the time of the **winter solstice**, and they performed ceremonies at the **spring equinox** to awaken him with music and dancing. The universality of such festivals and myths among ancient peoples has led some scholars to interpret the resurrection of Christ as a mystical and exalted variant of fertility myths.

• *The Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore, and Symbols*, Part 1, page 487 tells us more about this Spring Festival:

“It incorporates some of the **ancient Spring Equinox ceremonies of sun worship** in which there were phallic rites and spring fires, and in which the deity or offering to the deity was eaten...The festival is symbolized by an ascension Lily...a chick breaking its shell, the colors white and green, the egg, spring flowers, and the Rabbit. **The name is related to Astarte, Ashtoreth, Eostre and Ishtar, goddess who visited and rose from the underworld.** Easter yields ‘Enduring Eos’... ‘Enduring Dawn’.”

Part of this spring festival centered around Phallic Rites. *Collier's Encyclopedia*, 1980, Volume 9, page 622, tells us of the **Babylonian Ishtar Festival Phallic Rites:**

The **Ishtar Festivals** were symbolical of Ishtar as the goddess of love or generation. As the daughter of Sin, the moon god, she was the **Mother Goddess** who presided over child birth; and women, in her honor, sacrificed their virginity on the feast day or **became temple prostitutes**, their earnings being a source of revenue for the temple priests and servants.

We learn about these Temple Prostitutes from *The Interpreter's Dictionary of The Bible*, Volume 3, pages 933-934:

a. *The roll of the sacred prostitute in the fertility cult.* The prostitute who was an official of the cult in ancient Palestine and nearby lands of biblical times exercised an important function. This religion was predicated upon the belief that the processes of nature were controlled by the relations between gods and goddesses. **Projecting their understanding of their own sexual activities, the worshipers of these deities, through the use of imitative magic, engaged in sexual intercourse with devotees of the shrine, in the belief that this would encourage the gods and goddesses to do likewise. Only by sexual relations among the deities could man's desire for increase in herds and fields, as well as in his own family, be realized.** In Palestine the gods Baal

and Asherah were especially prominent (see BAAL; ASHERAH; FERTILITY CULTS). These competed with Yahweh the God of Israel and, in some cases, may have produced hybrid Yahweh-Baal cults. Attached to the shrines of these cults were priests as well as prostitutes, both male and female. Their chief service was sexual in nature—the offering of their bodies for ritual purposes.

Sexual relations for ritual purposes was the ceremony for the Fertility Cults. *The Interpreter's Dictionary*, Volume 2, page 265 says:

FERTILITY CULTS. The oldest common feature of the religions of the ancient Near East was the worship of a great mother-goddess, the personification of fertility. Associated with her, usually as a consort, was a young god who died and came to life again, like the vegetation which quickly withers but blooms again. The manner of the young god's demise was variously conceived in the myths: he was slain by another god, by wild animals, by reapers, by self-emasculatation, by burning, by drowning. In some variations of the theme, he simply absconded. **His absence produced infertility of the earth, of man, and of beast. His consort mourned and searched for him. His return brought renewed fertility and rejoicing.**

In Mesopotamia the divine couple appear as **Ishtar and Tammuz**, in Egypt as **Isis and Osiris**. Later in Asia Minor, the Magna Mater is **Cybele and her young lover is Attis**. In Syria in the second millennium b.c., as seen in the Ugaritic myths, the dying and rising god is **Baal-Hadad, who is slain by Mot** (Death) and mourned and avenged by his sister/consort, **the violent virgin Anath**. In the Ugaritic myths there is some confusion in the roles of the goddesses. **The great mother-goddess Asherah, the wife of the senescent chief god El**, seems on the way to becoming **the consort of the rising young god Baal**, with whom we find her associated in the O.T. Ashtarte also appears in the Ugaritic myths, but she has a minor and undistinguished role.

The O.T. furnishes abundant evidence as to the character of the religion of the land into which the Israelites came. Fertility rites were practiced at the numerous shrines which dotted the land, as well as at the major sanctuaries. The Israelites absorbed the Canaanite ways and learned to identify their god with Baal, whose rains brought fertility to the land. **A characteristic feature of the fertility cult was sacral sexual intercourse by priests and priestesses and other specially consecrated persons, sacred prostitutes of both sexes, intended to emulate and stimulate the deities who bestowed fertility.** The agricultural cult stressed the sacrifice or common meal in which the gods, priests, and people partook. Wine was consumed in great quantity in thanksgiving to Baal for the fertility of the vineyards. The wine also helped induce ecstatic frenzy, which was **climaxed by self-laceration, and sometimes even by self-emasculatation. Child-sacrifice was also a feature of the rites.** It was not simply a cult of wine, women, and song, but a matter of life and death in which the dearest things of life, and life itself, were offered to ensure the ongoing of life.

Reading on page 103 of *The Two Babylons*, by Alexander Hislop, 1959, we find that Easter and Ishtar are the same:

Then look at Easter. What means the term Easter itself? It bears its **Chaldean origin** on its very forehead. **Easter is nothing else than "Astarte"**, one of the titles of Beltis, "The Queen of Heaven" whose name, as "pronounced" by the people of Nineveh, was evidently **identical with that now in common use in this country.** That 'name', as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is "Ishtar".

• *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop tells us of the doctrines of Semiramis:

"She (Semiramis) taught that he (Nimrod the Babe) was a god-child; that he was Nimrod, **their leader reborn**; that she and her child were divine. This story was widely known in **ancient Babylon** and developed into a well established worship—**The Worship of The Mother and Child!**

Numerous monuments of Babylon show the **Goddess Mother Semiramis with her child Tammuz in her arms.**"

ISHTAR (pronounced **EASTER**) of Assyria was worshiped in Pagan Antiquity during her spring festival! *Collier's Encyclopedia*, 1980, Volume 15, page 748, gives us this information:

Ishtar, **goddess of love and war**, the most important goddess of the Sumero-Akkadian pantheon. Her name in Sumerian is Inanna (lady of heaven). She was sister of the sun god Shamash and daughter of the moon god Sin. Ishtar was equated with the planet Venus. Her symbol was **a star inscribed in a circle**. As goddess of war, she was often **represented sitting upon a lion**. As goddess of physical **love, she was patron of the temple prostitutes**. She was also considered the **merciful mother who intercedes** with the gods on behalf of her worshippers. Throughout Mesopotamian history she was worshiped under various names in many cities; one of the chief centers of her cult was Uruk.

Astarte of Phoenicia was the offshoot of Ishtar of Assyria. To the Hebrews, this abomination was known as Ashtoreth—Ashtoroth. From *Collier's Encyclopedia*, Volume 3, page 13, we read:

ASHTAROTH [Æ(terath) **the plural of the Hebrew 'Ashto-reth**, the **Phoenician-Canaanite goddess Astarte**, deity of **fertility, reproduction, and war**. The use of the plural form probably indicates a general designation for the collective female deities of the Canaanites, just as the plural Baalim refer to the male deities.

• *Watson's Biblical and Archaeological Dictionary*, 1833, tells us more about this mother goddess, Ashtaroth:

ASHTAROTH, or **ASTARTE**, a goddess of the Zidonians. The word Ashtaroth properly signifies flocks of sheep, or goats; and sometimes the grove, or woods, because she was goddess of woods, and groves were her temples. In groves consecrated to her, such lasciviousness was committed as rendered her worship infamous. **She was also called the queen of heaven; and sometimes her worship is said to be that of "the host of heaven."** She was certainly represented in the same manner as **Isis, with cow's horns on her head, to denote the increase and decrease of the moon**. Cicero calls her the fourth Venus of the Syrians. She is almost always joined with Baal, and is called a god, the scriptures having no particular word to express a goddess.

It is believed that the moon was adored in this idol. Her temples generally accompanied those of the sun; and while bloody sacrifices or human victims were offered to Baal, bread, liquors, and perfumes were presented to Astarte. For her, tables were prepared upon the flat terrace-roofs of houses, near gates, in porches, and at crossways, on the first day of every month; and this was called by the Greeks, Hecate's supper. Solomon, seduced by his foreign wives, introduced the worship of Ashtaroth into

Israel; but Jezebel, daughter of the king of Tyre, and wife to Ahab, principally established her worship. She caused altars to be erected to this idol in every part of Israel; and at one time four hundred priests attended the worship of Ashtaroah, I Kings xviii. 7.

• *The Interpreter's Dictionary*, Volume 3, page 975, tells us of Ishtar's role as The Queen of Heaven:

Ishtar, the goddess of love and fertility, who was identified with the Venus Star and is actually entitled "**Mistress of Heaven**" in the Amarna tablets. The difficulty is that the Venus Star was regarded in Palestine as a male deity (*see* DAY STAR), though the cult of the goddess Ishtar may have been introduced from Mesopotamia under Manasseh. It is possible that Astarte, or ASHTORETH, the Canaanite fertility-goddess, whose cult was well established in Palestine, had preserved more traces of her astral character as the female counterpart of Athtar than the evidence of the O.T. or the Ras Shamra texts indicates. The title "Queen of Heaven" is applied in an Egyptian inscription from the Nineteenth Dynasty at Beth-shan to "Antit," the Canaanite fertility-goddess Anat, who is termed "**Queen of Heaven and Mistress of the Gods.**" This is the most active goddess in the Ras Shamra Texts, but in Palestine her functions seem to have been taken over largely by Ashtoreth.

We find this information about Ashtoreth from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1979, Volume 1, pages 319-320:

ASHTORETH ash'te-reth [Heb. 'astoret. pl. 'astarôt; Gk. Astarte]. **A goddess of Canaan and Phoenicia whose name and cult were derived from Babylonia**, where Ishtar represented the evening and morning stars and was accordingly androgynous in origin. Under Semitic influence, however, she became solely female, although retaining a trace of her original character by standing on equal footing with the male divinities. **From Babylonia** the worship of the goddess was carried to the Semites of the West, and in most instances the feminine suffix was attached to her name; where this was not the case the deity was regarded as a male. On the Moabite Stone, for example, 'Ashtar is identified with Chemosh, and in the inscriptions of southern Arabia 'Athtar is a god. On the other hand, in the name Atargatis (2 Macc. 12:26), 'Atar, without the feminine suffix, is identified with the goddess 'Athah or 'Athi (Gk. *Gatis*). **The cult of the Greek Aphrodite in Cyprus was borrowed from that of Ashtoreth**; that the Greek name also is a modification of Ashtoreth is doubtful. It is maintained, however, that the vowels of Heb. 'astoret were borrowed from *boset* ("shame") in order to indicate the abhorrence the Hebrew scribes felt toward **paganism and idolatry**.

In **Babylonia and Assyria Ishtar was the goddess of love and war**. An old Babylonian legend relates how the **descent of Ishtar into Hades in search of her dead husband Tammuz was followed by the cessation of marriage and birth in both earth and heaven**; and the temples of the goddess at Nineveh and Arbela, around which the two cities afterward grew, were dedicated to her as the goddess of war. As such she appeared to one of Ashurbanipal's seers and encouraged the Assyrian king to march against Elam. The other goddesses of Babylonia, who were little more than reflections of a god, tended to merge into Ishtar, who thus became a type of the female divinity, **a personification of the productive principle in nature, and more especially the mother and creatress of mankind**.

In Babylonia Ishtar was identified with Venus. Like Venus, **Ishtar was the goddess of erotic love and fertility**. Her chief seat of worship was Uruk (Erech), **where prostitution was practiced in her name and she was served with immoral rites by bands of men and women**. In Assyria, where the warlike side of the goddess was predominant, no such rites seem to have been practiced, and instead prophetesses to whom she delivered oracles were attached to her temples.

From various Egyptian sources it appears that Astarte or Ashtoreth was highly regarded in the Late Bronze Age.

Reading on pages 412-413 of *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, we find this information about Ashtoreth-Astarte:

Ash'toreth (ash'to-reth), **Astarte**, a Canaanite goddess. In south Arabic the name is found as 'Athtar (apparently from 'athara, *to be fertile, to irrigate*), a god identified with the planet Venus. The name is cognate with Babylonian **Ishtar, the goddess of sensual love, maternity and fertility**. Licentious worship was conducted in honor of her. As Asherah and Anat of Ras Shamra **she was the patroness of war as well as sex** and is sometimes identified with these goddesses. The Amarna Letters present Ashtoreth as Ashtartu. In the Ras Shamra Tablets are found both the masculine form 'Athtar and the feminine 'Athtart. Ashtoreth worship was early entrenched at Sidon (I Kings 11:5, 33; II Kings 23:13). Her polluting cult even presented a danger to early Israel (Judg. 2:13; 10:6). Solomon succumbed to her voluptuous worship (I Kings 11:5; II Kings 23:13). The peculiar vocalization **Ashtoreth instead of the more primitive Ashtaroah** is evidently a deliberate alteration by the Hebrews to express their abhorrence for her cult by giving her the vowels of their word for "shame" (*boseth*). *M. F. U.*

• *The Interpreter's Dictionary*, Volume 1, page 252 says:

The **antipathy** toward the Asherah on the part of the Hebrew leaders was due to the fact that the **goddess and the cult object of the same name were associated with the fertility religion of a foreign people and as such involved a mythology and a cultus which were obnoxious to the champions of Yahweh**.

• *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, page 412, gives us this information about Asherah:

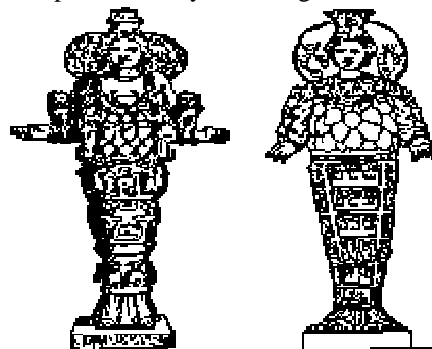
Asherah (a-she'ra), plural, Asherim, a pagan goddess, who is found in the Ras Shamra epic religious texts discovered at Ugarit in North Syria (1929-1937), as Asherat, "Lady of the Sea" and consort of El. She was the chief goddess of Tyre in the 15th century b.c. with the appellation *Qudshu*, "**holiness**." In the Old Testament Asherah appears as a goddess by the side of Baal, whose consort she evidently came to be, at least among the Canaanites of the South. However, most Biblical references to the name point clearly to some cult object of wood, which might be worshiped or cut down and burned, and which was certainly **the goddess' image (I Kings 15:13; II Kings 21:7). Her prophets are mentioned (I Kings 18:19) and the vessels used in her service referred to (II Kings 23:4). Her cult object, whatever it was, was utterly detestable to faithful worshipers of Yahweh (I Kings 15:13) and was set up on the high places beside the "altars of incense" (hammanim) and the stone pillars (masseboth). Indeed, the stone pillars seem to have represented the male god Baal (cf. Judg. 6:28), while the cult object of Asherah, probably a tree or pole, constituted a symbol of this goddess** (See W. L. Reed's *The Asherah in the Old Testament*, Texas Christian University Press). But Asherah was only one manifestation of a chief goddess of Western Asia, regarded **now as**

the wife, now as the sister of the principal Canaanite god El. Other names of this deity were Ashtoreth (Astarte) and Anath. Frequently represented as a **nude woman bestride a lion with a lily in one hand and a serpent in the other**, and styled *Qudshu* “the Holiness,” that is, “the Holy One” in a perverted moral sense, she was a divine courtesan. In the same sense the male prostitutes consecrated to the cult of the *Qudshu* and prostituting themselves to her honor were styled *qedishim*, “sodomites” (Deut. 23:18; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46). **Characteristically Canaanite the lily symbolizes grace and sex appeal and the serpent fecundity** (W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1942, pages 68-94). At Byblos (Biblical Gebal) on the Mediterranean, north of Sidon, a center dedicated to this goddess has been excavated. She and her colleagues specialized in sex and war and her shrines were temples of legalized vice. Her degraded cult offered a perpetual danger of pollution to Israel and must have sunk to sordid depths as lust and murder were glamorized in Canaanite religion.

On page 413 of *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, we have found that **Astarte** is the Greek name for the Hebrew **Ashtoreth**. From *Collier’s Encyclopedia*, Volume 3, page 97, we find that Astarte-Ashtaroth is merely the Semitic **Ishtar**—which we have already learned is pronounced **Easter**:

ASTARTE [aesta’rti], the Phoenician goddess of fertility and erotic love. **The Greek name, “Astarte” was derived from Semitic, “Ishtar,” “Ashtoreth.”** Astarte was regarded in Classical antiquity as a moon goddess, perhaps in confusion with some other Semitic deity. In accordance with the literary traditions of the Greco-Romans, Astarte was identified with Selene and Artemis, and more often with Aphrodite. Among the Canaanites, Astarte, like her peer Anath, performed a major function as **goddess of fertility**. Egyptian iconography, however, portrayed Astarte in her role as a warlike goddess massacring mankind, young and old. She is represented on plaques (dated 1700-1100 b.c.) as naked, in striking contrast to the modestly garbed Egyptian goddesses. Edward J. Jurji

In Ephesus from primitive times, this **MOTHER GODDESS** had been called **DIANA**, who was worshiped as the Goddess of Virginity and Motherhood. She was said to represent the generative powers of nature, and so was pictured with many breasts. A tower shaped crown, symbolizing the Tower of Babylon, adorned her head:



Reading from *Bible Manners And Customs*, by James M. Freeman, 1972, page 451, we learn these facts about the **Mother of all things**: “The circle round her head denotes the nimbus (sin circle) of her glory, the griffins inside of which express its brilliancy. In her **breasts** are the twelve signs of the **zodiac**, of which those seen in front are the ram, bull, twins, crab, and lion; they are divided by the hours. Her necklace is composed of acorns, the primeval food of man. **Lions** are on her arms to denote her **power**, and her hands are stretched out to show that she is ready to receive all who come to her. **Her body is covered with various breasts and monsters**, as sirens, sphinxes, and griffins, to show that she is the **source of nature, the mother of all things**. Her head, hands, and feet are of bronze while the rest of the statue is of alabaster to denote the ever-varying light and shade of the moon’s figure... Like Rhea, **she was crowned with turrets, to denote her dominion over terrestrial objects.**”