

The purpose of this publication is to spread the truth, to sow God's good seed, the Word of God, and to confront religious error for the good of men's souls. Editor: Allen Dvorak

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Christ's wilderness fasting, His crucifixion and resurrection) and cultural practices and have invented religious holidays which religious people are expected to observe or be considered irreligious.

It is undisputed that the Lord requires repentance and mourning for sin. Although the New Testament does not require fasting as a routine religious ritual, there are occasions when it is appropriate (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:5; NKJV). We are commanded to follow in the footsteps of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21-24), although we are clearly not required to imitate every specific thing which Jesus did (He was a carpenter; can Christians pursue other occupations?).

Lent, Ash Wednesday and a host of other religious holidays are the result of men loosely tying biblical practices together (e.g., "Wearing ashes was a sign of mourning in biblical times, so why not put ashes on our forehead on a particular day to signify mourning?") and associating them with some specific day of the year. The bottom line is that such holidays are the invention of men, perpetuated and gradually enlarged by

tradition. When men invent a mandatory period of abstinence and fasting, it is not surprising that a phenomenon like Mardi Gras springs up as a consequence (reaction?).

Is this significant? What can it hurt for someone to give up coffee for 40+ days? There is no harm in the abstention from some luxury, but there is indeed a more fundamental principle involved here. Jesus criticized the Pharisees and scribes for their invention of commandments for others to follow. He said,

⁸ "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:8-9; ESV)

We are instructed to observe the authority of Jesus Christ in everything that we say and do (Colossians 3:17). Can we do that while inventing holy days and teaching others that they must observe those days?

Bible Challenge Question - Answer

Jesus told the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31. The two requests?

"Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame"

- and -

"Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house - for I have five brothers -so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment."



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Invented Holy Days

By Allen Dvorak

It was a casual conversation and she was explaining why she was having trouble "getting going" on that particular morning. She said that she had given up coffee for Lent.

Lent is a forty-day period prior to Easter Sunday during which supposedly "the church" readies itself by prayer and fasting for the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on the Saturday ("Holy Saturday") before Easter. Sundays during this period are not included in the 40-day count that defines Lent. One source described Lent as "a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter... a time of self-examination and reflection... a period of fasting, repentance, moderation and spiritual discipline."¹ Another source described Lent as "a season of penance, reflection, and fasting which prepares us for Christ's Resurrection on Easter Sunday."² Typically participants in Lent abstain from something in imitation of the Lord's fasting for forty days in the wilderness

¹ www.umc.org; accessed 3/10/17.

² www.catholic.org; accessed 3/10/17.

just after His baptism by John. Others volunteer for some worthy cause as a way of "giving of themselves."

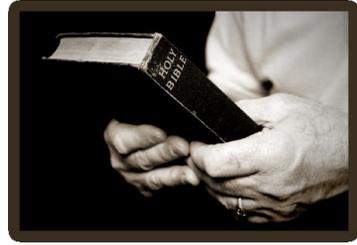
The date for Ash Wednesday this year was March 1st, marking the beginning of Lent. On Ash Wednesday, Roman Catholic priests place the ashes of palm leaves on the foreheads of parishioners during Mass. The ashes are intended to symbolize the dust from which man is made and also grief, "grief that we have sinned and caused division from God."³ It is certainly true that sackcloth and ashes put on the head were a sign of mourning and/or repentance (e.g., 2 Samuel 13:19 [Tamar]; Esther 4:1, 3; Job 42:6 [Job]; Daniel 9:3 [Daniel]; Jonah 3:6 [king of Nineveh]). Roman Catholics are taught that Ash Wednesday is "a day of penitential prayer and fasting" and "it is generally inappropriate to dine out, to shop, or to go about in public after receiving the ashes."⁴ Some Catholics wear the ashes the rest of the day, although it is not mandatory to do so.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

A Failed Marriage

By Allen Dvorak



Text: _____

Contemporaries with Hosea: J _____, A _____, I _____, & M _____.

Conditions in Ephraim:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Gomer's children: (name & meaning of name)

1. Name: _____; Meaning: _____
2. Name: _____; Meaning: _____
3. Name: _____; Meaning: _____

Israel had committed adultery by means of i _____.

Passages: _____, _____, _____, _____

Hosea has been called the prophet of the _____.

Why? _____

For I desire _____ and not _____, the _____ of God rather than _____.

-- Hosea 6:___; ESV

“Until we taste the bitterness of our own misery we will never relish the sweetness of God’s mercy. Until we see how foul our sins have made us we will never pay our tribute of praise to Christ for washing us... If you would know the heart of your sin, then you must know the sins of your heart!”

-- William Secker

The day before Ash Wednesday is known as Shrove Tuesday in some countries. It is probably more commonly known as Mardi Gras which is French for “Fat Tuesday.” The day received its name from the tradition of eating richer or fatty foods prior to the beginning of the Lenten season. Since the Lenten fast historically usually involved abstaining from eggs and fat, the tradition of eating pancakes on “Fat Tuesday” represented the last opportunity for such “indulgence” before the beginning of Lent.

It is interesting that many religious people who are not Catholics celebrate Ash Wednesday and Lent. Perhaps many of them do not realize the origin of these “holy days.” Of course, many people around the world were celebrating Mardi Gras in the days before Ash Wednesday. Mardi Gras celebrations vary in length (some last only 3-4 days, but in other places various Mardi Gras activities can be spaced out over a couple of weeks or more), but usually involve elaborate parades. In some localities, Mardi Gras celebrations are known

for their sensuality and uninhibited behavior (Rio de Janeiro, for example, prominently features samba dancing in its parades which take place in *sambadromes*). Mardi Gras has come a long way from a day when people indulged in pancakes! There is definitely irony in the fact that Mardi Gras has evolved, in many places, into a licentious party lasting several days in which people carouse and drink in preparation for the penitential period of Lent! Naturally there are many people who care nothing about Lent, but welcome the opportunity to behave without inhibition.

Don't feel bad if you are a little foggy about the details of these special days. You could take your Bible concordance and search from now until Easter (a “holy day” borrowed from the pagans!) and not find one occurrence of the words “Lent,” “Ash Wednesday” or “Shrove Tuesday” in your Bible. The same is true of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Of course, the names of the weekdays wouldn't be in the New Testament, but not even the special days represented by “Ash Wednesday” and “Shrove Tuesday” are described in the New Testament. Your Bible will not supply any details about how to celebrate Lent either.

Bible Challenge Question

What two requests did the rich man make while in Hades?

The answer to this question is on the back page.

How can these days be a part of my service to God if the Bible doesn't even mention them? Good question. The fact is that men have taken some biblical events (e.g.,