INTRODUCTION
Among Christians who believe in and practice it, Lent is “a season of self-examination, fasting and penance in preparation for...Easter Day observance”. To these adherents, it is “a period of...moderation and spiritual discipline” during which they reflect on Jesus Christ's “suffering, sacrifice, life, death, burial and resurrection”? The 40-day Lenten period is perhaps the only annual activity that makes such depth of sobriety possible for many of its adherents. Even among its critics, the fact is accepted that faithful adherents of Lent find inspiration around at least one of the following cardinal points:
1. A 40-day period of fasting and heightened religious awareness by Christians in preparation for the commemoration of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ;
2. A time when converts are prepared for baptism and reception into the church at Easter;
3. The church's corporate imitation of Jesus' 40-day fast following His baptism (Luke 4:1-2).³

By way of biblical justification, reference is also made to:
1. Moses' 40-day fasts when he received the law and when he returned to the presence of God after he saw the children of Israel worshipping the golden calf (Exodus 24:18; 34:28);
2. Elijah being without food for forty days as he fled from Jezebel (I Kings 19:8);
3. The people of Nineveh fasting upon receiving warnings of divine judgment (within a 40-day period) from God through the prophet Jonah (Jonah 3:1-10).⁴

The word “Lent” is derived from a German word for “springtime”⁵ It is known as Tessarakosti in Greek and Quadragesima in Latin, both of which mean “the Forty”.⁶ In addition, “Lent has significant themes: prayer, fasting, almsgiving, the number 40, wilderness, journey, covenant, temptation
and the presence of God”.

In his 2015 message for Lent, Pope Francis describes Lent thus: “Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for…communities and every believer. Above all it is a “time of grace” (2 Cor 6:2)”

Lent is observed by various denominations within the Christian community, including the Catholic Church and protestant churches such as the Lutheran Church, the Anglican Church, and the Methodist Church, with variations in practice. It is a period of sobriety not only in penitence for sins and with a view to communing with God but also with a disposition of mourning in solidarity with the passion (suffering) of Jesus Christ as captured in a Lenten hymn by Frederick William Faber, the first verse of which states:

- O come and mourn with me awhile
- See Mary calls us to her side
- O come and let us mourn with her
- Jesus our love is crucified

During Lent, in solidarity with the passion of Christ, activities to commemorate Christ’s sufferings are intensified, one of such being the observations of the Stations of the Cross; “a series of artistic representations, often sculptural, depicting Christ Carrying the Cross to His crucifixion”.

**HOW DID LENT BEGIN?**

It was generally believed that Lent was instituted by the apostles themselves or in the immediate post-apostolic period and was observed everywhere throughout the days of the early church. However, some scholars regard these seemingly self-evident positions as assumptions which held until recently. Nicholas Russo, Assistant Dean of Arts and Letters at the University of Notre Dame, a Catholic university in the United States, writes:

Closer examination of the ancient sources, however, reveals a more gradual historical development. While fasting before Easter seems to have been ancient and widespread, the length of that fast varied significantly from place to place and across generations. In the latter half of the second century, for instance, Irenaeus of Lyons (in Gaul) and Tertullian (in North Africa) tell us that the
preparatory fast lasted one or two days, or forty hours commemorating what was believed to be the exact duration of Christ's time in the tomb. By the mid-third century, Dionysius of Alexandria speaks of a fast of up to six days practiced by the devout in his see; and the Byzantine historian Socrates relates that the Christians of Rome at some point kept a fast of three weeks. Only following the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. did the length of Lent become fixed at forty days, and then only nominally. Accordingly, it was assumed that the forty-day Lent that we encounter almost everywhere by the mid-fourth century must have been the result of a gradual lengthening of the pre-Easter fast by adding days and weeks to the original one- or two-day observance. This lengthening, in turn, was thought necessary to make up for the waning zeal of the post-apostolic church and to provide a longer period of instruction for the increasing numbers of former pagans thronging to the font for Easter baptism. Such remained the standard theory for most of the twentieth century.¹¹

Sources suggest that a precursor to Lent existed among Christians in Egypt and that, unlike the current Lenten calendar, this fast commenced after Epiphany which was celebrated on January 6:

Every indication is that this 40-day fast was of Egyptian origin, and, in its original purpose, was wholly unconnected with ascetical preparation for the celebration of the Lord's passion, death, and Resurrection. Rather, the ancient Egyptian fast was a commemoration and imitation of the Lord's fasting in the wilderness for 40 days following his baptism by John the Baptist. This fast therefore began right after the feast of Epiphany, which celebrated the Lord's baptism...

January 6, Epiphany (meaning “manifestation”), or Theophany (meaning “manifestation of God”), was a great feast throughout the Christian East. It celebrated the manifestation of Christ as Messiah and as One of the
Trinity indeed, it manifested the Trinity itself at his baptism in the Jordan [...]. In Egypt, this day was also the beginning of the church year. That there was a fast following this feast, a very ancient Egyptian fast, can be demonstrated not only from documents of Egyptian provenance that precede the episcopate of St. Athanasius, but also from collections of church lore and memorabilia made by Coptic writers over the next thousand years, especially the fourteenth-century Abu 'l-Barakat in his collection entitled *The Lamp of Darkness*.\(^{12}\)

Although uncertainties exist as to the purpose of this earlier fast\(^{13}\), it is certain that a forty-day fast, run on a different calendar from the current Lenten calendar, existed in certain countries before the universal institution of Lent by the Catholic Church in A.D. 325 under the control of the Roman Empire in Nicaea; a period referred to as the Nicene period:

Fasting for forty days for whatever purpose or occasion seems to have been a rather common phenomenon in the pre-Nicene and Nicene period, especially in Egypt.\(^{14}\)

Records suggest that it was at the Council of Nicaea convened in A.D. 325 by Roman Emperor Constantine with the intention of addressing controversies - regarding the nature of the Son in relation to the Father in the Trinity, the date of celebration of Easter among other matters relating to church discipline, liturgical practices, and so on - that the practice was institutionalized as a pre-Easter fast:

After the Council of Nicaea, the theory speculates, this fast would have been moved from its original position after Theophany and joined to Easter creating the Lent we know and with it bringing Egypt's baptismal practice in line with the rest of the Church.\(^{15}\)

Propositions regarding the origin of Lent may not be generally accepted.\(^{16}\) However, whereas proponents and practitioners of Lent limit their historical studies to the church era and propagate either the early church era commencement narrative (the notion that it was instituted by the apostles) or the idea that it evolved from the Council of Nicaea,\(^{17}\) opponents of the practice, referring to studies in ancient history, have traced the origin of Lent to pre-Christian idolatrous practices. Considering the weight of
these latter allegations, it is necessary to present them in the light of biblical truth.

THE BATTLE OF THE SEEDS
Understanding the idolatrous origin narrative necessitates a panoramic journey from the beginning of time to centuries after the death and resurrection of Christ (reminiscent of Stephen’s approach when he addressed the council in Acts 7) and examining these events in the context of the confrontation between the eternal purpose of God and Satan's anti-Christ agenda. In this regard, the journey will commence from the Garden of Eden.

God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. He constantly fellowshipped with man until the serpent intruded and Adam rebelled against God by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thereby exercising his will against God's, as documented in Genesis 3:1-6 (NKJV):

1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?
2 And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;
3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’”
4 Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.
5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

In tempting man, the serpent presented to him the three components of enmity against God - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life - and man fell for the temptation. Pronouncing judgment on the
serpent, God said:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{And I will put enmity} \\
&\text{Between you and the woman,} \\
&\text{And between your seed and her Seed;} \\
&\text{He shall bruise your head,} \\
&\text{And you shall bruise His heel} \quad \text{(Genesis 3:15; NKJV)}
\end{align*}
\]

Once that pronouncement was made, Satan was on the lookout for that Seed and designed a multi-pronged strategy against prophecy comprising murder, mixture, corruption, counterfeiting, compromise and confusion.

**Murder:** Beginning from Abel who was murdered by his brother Cain, the devil sought to eliminate any repository of the seed of righteousness. However, God, who is always infinitely ahead of the devil, appointed another seed, Seth, in place of Abel whom Cain killed. Also, to Seth was born a son by the name of Enosh at whose birth the earth experienced a reawakening of the seed of righteousness and a revival of God's presence as men began to call upon the name of the Lord.

**Mixture:** When men began to call upon the name of the Lord, the spirit of sonship (John 1:12) was manifest in the earth and sons of God (born of the spirit), recipients of the spiritual outcome of this phenomenon of men calling upon the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13), populated the earth alongside the sons and daughters of men (born of the flesh) (See John 3:6). The sons of God, however, comngled with the daughters of men (Genesis 6:1-2). This mixture of seeds produced giants on the face of the earth.

**Corruption:** The giants that were born from the comingling of the seeds became the mighty men of old; men of renown. The comngled seed produced wickedness on the earth such that the earth became corrupt and violence was everywhere. (Genesis 6:11-12).

In response to the corruption of the earth and the corruption of all flesh, God sent divine judgment through the flood that “destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground” (Genesis 7:23; NKJV); but Noah found grace in the sight of God and had, in obedience to God's instructions, built the ark in which he and his family were preserved.

**Counterfeiting:** The seed of the evil one manifested on the other side of
the flood in the act of Ham, Noah's second son (Genesis 9:22). This seed was inherited by Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, who took defiance against the will and purpose of God to an unprecedented height. Genesis 10:8-12 (NKJV) states:

8 Kush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth.
9 He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.”
10 And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.
11 From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah,
12 and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).

Who was Nimrod?
The Genesis 10 account is the only direct reference to Nimrod in the Bible. However, inference from Genesis 10:8-10 would reveal that Nimrod was the inspiration behind the rebellion against God recorded in Genesis 11:1-9 (NKJV) as Nimrod was the founder of Babel:

1 Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.
2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.
3 Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar.
4 And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”
5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.
6 And the Lord said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.
7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language,
that they may not understand one another's speech.”

8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.

9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

The name “Nimrod” is derived from the Hebrew verb marad, meaning “rebel.” However, “Nimrod” may not have been the character's actual name but an indication of his embodiment of rebellion, suggesting that he was not merely a rebel but “The Rebel”:

It is more likely a derisive term of a type, a representative, of a system that is epitomized in rebellion against the Creator, the one true God. Rebellion began soon after the Flood as civilizations were restored. At that time this person became very prominent. 18

Historical accounts not only corroborate the assertion that Nimrod was behind the rebellion but also have much more to say about the person of Nimrod. Josephus the ancient historian wrote about Nimrod:

Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah—a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny—seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence upon his own power. He also said he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers! 19

Exegesis of the biblical description of him as a mighty hunter before the Lord reveals more damning things about him:

Nimrod was mighty in hunting, and that in opposition to
YHWH; not 'before YHWH' in the sense of according to the will and purpose of YHWH, still less, in a simply superlative sense... The name itself, 'Nimrod' from marad, 'We will revolt,' points to some violent resistance to God... Nimrod as a mighty hunter founded a powerful kingdom; and the founding of this kingdom is shown... to have been the consequence or result of his strength in hunting, so that hunting was intimately connected with the establishing of the kingdom. Hence, if the expression 'a mighty hunter' relates primarily to hunting in the literal sense, we must add to the literal meaning the figurative signification of a 'hunter of men' (a trapper of men by stratagem and force); Nimrod the hunter became a tyrant, a powerful hunter of men.  

Still on his hunting prowess, historical sources state: Nimrod worshipped the pagan sungod named Moloch. The title “Great Hunter before (in the face of) YHVH” was ascribed to him because he literally hunted human beings to murder as sacrifices to his pagan god. In the Book of Jasher (the book of Jasher is mentioned in the Bible [in] Joshua 10:13 and 2nd Samuel 1:18) we learn that Nimrod received instruction from the priests of Molech to marry his mother in an act of incest in order to acquire “the third eye” or the “all seeing eye”. The exact same knowledge sought by those today who call themselves the “illuminati” or “illuminated ones”. 

It appears from this account that the serpent had found a willing vessel for the transmission of the iniquitous promise of enlightenment that he had made to Adam and Eve in the garden in the third chapter of Genesis. However, historical accounts indicate that Nimrod met his end in a violent death and that his wife (known in certain accounts as Semiramis and in others as Ashtoreth) sought to preserve his legacy and propagate her hold on his kingdom: 

In the face of Nimrod's death, Semiramis had to somehow maintain her grip and power over the people. In order to solidify her power she “invented” a religion for the people
that would keep Nimrod's control over them even after his death.\textsuperscript{23}

Nimrod's wife thus became the founder of the mysteries of Babylon (see Revelation 17:5). To achieve this, the queen elevated Nimrod to the level of the sun god Baal:

[Semiramis] told the people of Babylon that Nimrod had ascended to the sun and was now to be called “Baal”, the sun god. Semiramis was creating a mystery religion, and with the help of Satan, she set herself up as a goddess. Semiramis claimed that she was immaculately conceived. She taught that the moon was a goddess that went through a 28 day cycle and ovulated when full and that she had come down from the moon in a giant moon egg that fell into the Euphrates River at sunrise at the time of the first full moon after the spring equinox, on a Sunday. Semiramis became known as “Ishtar” which is pronounced “Easter” referred to as Ashtoreth in scripture, and her moon egg became known as “Ishtar's egg.” One of her titles was the Queen of Heaven, and two of her fertility symbols were the rabbit and the egg. She soon became pregnant and claimed that it was the rays of the sun-god Baal (the ascended Nimrod) that caused her to conceive.\textsuperscript{24}

With this myth, the virgin birth of Jesus by Mary, the means by which the Seed of the woman was to emerge in order to bruise the head of the serpent, was counterfeited by the serpent. The son Semiramis brought forth was named Tammuz. Tammuz was believed to be the son of the sun god, Baal. Tammuz, like his supposed father, became a hunter.

As ancient Egypt rose to world power status, it became a major centre of a variant of this so-called mystery religion. Egyptian mythology suggests that Semiramis (represented by the goddess Isis) had fled to the Nile Delta when she realized that she was pregnant with Tammuz (represented by Horus) for fear that he might be killed by her husband's killer.\textsuperscript{25}

Nevertheless, Tammuz was killed at the age of forty by a wild boar. The queen “told the people that Tammuz was now ascended to his father, Baal, and that the two of them would be with the worshippers in the sacred candle or lamp flame as Father, Son and Spirit”\textsuperscript{26} while she took on the title
of “Queen of Heaven” the same entity that God judged Israel for when
they adopted idolatrous practices:

_The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and
the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of
heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods,
that they may provoke Me to anger (Jeremiah 7:18; NKJV)_

_The women also said, “And when we burned incense to the
queen of heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did
we make cakes for her, to worship her, and pour out drink
offerings to her without our husbands’ permission?” (Jeremiah 44:19; NKJV)_

It is clear that Semiramis was counterfeiting the divine Trinity of the Father,
the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the religion instituted around
Nimrod's legacy was a deliberate attempt to counterfeit - as is the manner
of the anti-Christ - the experience of the Christ who was to come. This
religion was attempting to counterfeit the suffering Messiah just as the
coming anti-Christ would attempt to counterfeit the conquering Messiah:

The queen told the worshippers that when Tammuz was
killed by the wild pig, some of his blood fell on the stump of
an evergreen tree, and the stump grew into a full new tree
overnight. This made the evergreen tree sacred by the
blood of Tammuz. She also proclaimed a forty day period of
time of sorrow each year prior to the anniversary of the
death of Tammuz.

Many ancient religions were developed around variants of this story.
Though different names are ascribed to the personalities from religion to
religion and from place to place, they are consistent with the characters
reportedly created by the debauched ancient queen as she sought to
perpetuate her husband's legacy:

Since the languages now were “confused” the names of
Nimrod, Semiramis, and Tammuz were changed and
continued to change over time based on culture and
language. Although the names changed, the religion
remained exactly the same. Semiramis, however, became
known as “The Queen of Heaven” among all cultures and worshipped as the primary head of this false religion.\(^{29}\)

The system of Babylon, as opposed to the system of God, for which there is significant biblical reference (see, for instance, Genesis 10:8-10; 11:1-9 and Revelation 17 & 18), seems to have been instituted at this point in human history:

History reveals an ancient people-group, dwelling in Mesopotamia [the land between the rivers], which lies in contemporary Iraq, known as the Babylonians. They were a Semitic group, often referred to as Chaldeans [because of their language] and the progenitors of what we know, today, as religious mythology: the elaborate 'family' of gods who are said to rule every aspect of human and earthly life. Any study of mythology will reveal the commonalities between the various gods of every major ancient civilization: Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Chaldean, Minoan, Sumerian, Chinese. The names differ, but their role in the pantheon as well as the exploits that define them are amazingly similar. The only conclusion scholars can make is that these stories have a common origin.\(^{30}\)

Furthermore:

From Babylon this mystery-religion spread to all the surrounding nations, as the years went on and the world was populated by the descendants of Noah. Everywhere the symbols were the same, and everywhere the cult of the mother and child became the popular system. Their worship was celebrated with the most disgusting and immoral practices. The image of the queen of heaven with the babe in her arms was seen everywhere, though the names might differ as languages differed. It became the mystery-religion of Phoenicia, and by the Phoenicians was carried to the ends of the earth. Ashtoreth and Tammuz, the mother and child of these hardy adventurers, became Isis and Horus in Egypt, Aphrodite and Eros in Greece, Venus and Cupid in Italy, and bore many other names in more distant places. Within 1,000 years,
Babylonianism had become the religion of the world, which had rejected the Divine revelation.\textsuperscript{31} It is interesting to note that the image of the mother and child is reminiscent of the depiction of Mary and the baby Jesus by the Roman Catholic Church. It is also worthy of note that Mary is depicted in Catholicism as “Queen of Heaven”\textsuperscript{32}. It is against this backdrop of recurring symbolisms that the subject of Lent and, indeed, many of the festivals which have been adopted in Christianity, may be examined.

**LENT AND OTHER FESTIVALS: THE NIMROD CONNECTION**

As she deified herself, Semiramis became known as Ishtar (pronounced “Easter”). Upon the death of her son Tammuz, Ishtar instituted mourning rites in his honour:

> Devotees had begun the practice of 'weeping' for Nimrod, and now they weep for Tammuz. The weeping is supposedly one day for each year of their life, which in both cases seems to be 40 years. This weeping occurs in the Spring.\textsuperscript{33}

Furthermore:

> She also proclaimed a forty day period of time of sorrow for each year prior to the anniversary of the death of Tammuz. During this time, no meat was to be eaten [...]. Worshipers were to meditate upon the sacred mysteries of Baal and Tammuz, and to make the sign of the “Tau” (a cross) in front of their hearts as they worshiped. They also ate sacred cakes with the marking of a “T” or a cross, on the top. Every year, on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox, a celebration was made. It was Ishtar's Sunday and was celebrated with rabbits and eggs. Ishtar also proclaimed that because Tammuz was killed by a pig, that a pig must be eaten on that Sunday.\textsuperscript{34}

As recorded in the Bible, this practice of weeping for Tammuz was adopted by some Jews and was condemned by God as seen in Ezekiel 8:12-14:

> \textsuperscript{12}Then He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in
the room of his idols? For they say, ‘The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.’”

13 And He said to me, “Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing.”

14 So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the Lord’s house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

This practice of weeping for Tammuz has been identified as the precursor of what is now known as Lent in the Roman Catholic tradition. The connection is also seen in the number of days the fast lasts:

The tradition of fasting for Lent is supposedly a tradition that comes from the Babylonian god Tammuz. He died at the age of 40, and every day of Lent is considered one year of Tammuz’ life and the time is spent in fasting to mourn for Tammuz. Moreover, as Ishtar came to be represented as the bare-breasted pagan fertility goddess of the east, a festival was instituted in her honour. This was the original feast of Easter:

The original pagan festival of “Easter” was a sex orgy that celebrated the return of life via the fertility of Ishtar's conception of Tammuz. Worshipers of the Babylonian religion celebrated the conception of Tammuz on the first Sunday after the Full Moon that followed the Spring Equinox. They celebrated it by baking cakes to Ishtar, getting drunk, engaging in sex orgies and prostitution in the temple of Ishtar. Women were required to celebrate the conception of Tammuz by lying down in the temple and having sex with whoever entered. The man was required to leave her money. Babies were sacrificed in the honor of these pagan gods and their blood was consumed by the worshipers. The priest of Easter would sacrifice infants (human babies) and take the eggs of Easter/Ishtar, as symbols of fertility, and die (sic) them in the blood of the sacrificed infants (human babies).

The myth was that the eggs collected at this festival would hatch on the 25th of December (nine months later). This is the origin of the practice of
coloring Easter eggs. The practice, however, was that “many babies would be born around December 25 from the sex orgies that began on the feast of Ishtar in the Spring and many of these babies would be sacrificed the following Easter/Ishtar feast”.

Also traced to paganism is the practice of baking cakes and hot cross buns at Easter:

> All the fun things about Easter are pagan. Bunnies are a leftover from the pagan festival of Eostre (apparently a variant of Ishtar), a great northern goddess whose symbol was a rabbit or hare. Exchange of eggs is an ancient custom, celebrated by many cultures. Hot cross buns are very ancient too. The early church clergy… tried to put a stop to sacred cakes being baked at Easter. In the end, in the face of defiant cake-baking pagan women, they gave up and blessed the cake instead.

This notion that Easter, the term for the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, was derived from the pagan feast has however been challenged. Nevertheless, the evidence behind the pagan origin of not just Lent but other modern day practices such as Christmas, Epiphany, St. Valentine’s Day, Mardi Gras, Ash Wednesday and Easter are alarming.

**SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE BACKING A PAGAN ORIGIN OF LENT**

The evidence backing the “Weeping for Tammuz” origin narrative regarding Lent over the notion that it sprang up as an independent Christian practice lies in the following:

1. The idolatrous fast was instituted centuries earlier than the Christian Lent;
2. The coincidences of symbolisms suggest that one was an imitation of the other; that the idolatrous fasting and mourning preceded the Christian Lent suggests that the latter at some point drew inspiration from the former but sought justification in Scriptures;
3. The coincidence of dates between the pagan festivals and the modern day Christian versions is striking. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, in harmonizing Easter celebrations which determine the commencement of Lent, the Council of Nicaea ensured that the date would no longer coincide with the Jewish
Passover around which Jesus' death, burial and resurrection took place.\(^4^2\) Although non-religious reasons are often propounded for this change,\(^4^3\) the alignment of the new dates with those of the old pagan festivals replaced by the Christian celebrations is telling.

4. Jesus never instructed the church to mark a forty-day fast either in remembrance of His fast in the wilderness after His baptism, in preparation for baptism, or in solidarity with His sufferings. The only practice institutionalized by Christ was Holy Communion:

   And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”
   \(\text{(Luke 22:19; NKJV)}\)

   \(\text{In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” (1st Corinthians 11:25; NKJV)}\)

Since the Feast of Passover had been instituted in the Old Testament following the exodus from Egypt as a foretaste of the true Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, the commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is biblically provided for and need not draw inspiration from pagan counterfeits.

5. The allusion to inspiration from other biblical 40-day fasting experiences such as those of Moses and Elijah is questionable considering the fact that Lent is circumstantially different from these and nowhere in the Bible were these institutionalized. Also far-fetched is the allusion to the Nineveh fast because the Bible does not record that it became an annual practice approved by God.

6. The Council of Nicaea was convoked at a time when Constantine was in the process of institutionalizing Christianity as a state religion and needed to make it appealing to pagans in the Roman
Empire for whom these festivals were sacrosanct, as buttressed by Alexander Hislop in his classic work, *Two Babylons*:

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, which was celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing, and which, in many countries, was considerably later than the Christian festival, being observed in Palestine and Assyria in June, therefore called the “month of Tammuz”; in Egypt, about the middle of May, and in Britain, some time in April. To conciliate the Pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated, and, by a complicated but skilful 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.\textsuperscript{44}

It is deducible from Constantine's intervention in, and modification of, the Christian faith that the enemy of the righteous seed who, until this time, had masterminded the persecution of the Church by Rome, changed tactics and deployed the tools of mixture and compromise. This is reminiscent of the deeds and doctrines of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6; 15) referred to by Jesus in His message to the angels of the churches at Ephesus and Pergamos. In analyzing this message, Rick Renner, a Bible teacher, writes:

> It was very hard for believers to live separately from all the activities of paganism because paganism and its religions were the center of life in these cities. Slipping in and out of paganism would have been very easy for young or weak believers to do since most of their families and friends were still pagans. A converted Gentile would have found it very difficult to stay away from all pagan influence.\textsuperscript{45}

It is significant that the “deeds” and “doctrines” of the Nicolaitans are only
mentioned in connection with the churches in these two occultic and pagan cities. It seems that the “doctrine” of the Nicolaitans was that it was permissible to have one foot in both worlds and that one needn’t be so strict about separation from the world in order to be a Christian. This, in fact, was the “doctrine” of the Nicolaitans that Jesus “hated”. It led to a weak version of Christianity that was without power and without conviction - a defeated, worldly type of Christianity. Eventually, in this battle of the seeds, the transition from murder to mixture, from mixture to corruption, from corruption to counterfeiting and from counterfeiting to compromise, produced confusion in the body of Christ as certain denominations, disillusioned by the parallels between the so-called Babylonian mystery religion and the Christian practices, ended up rejecting certain truths about the faith such as the reality of the Trinity. It is the nature of counterfeiter to produce confusion as seen, for instance, in the evolving Nigerian political arena where a prophetic call for the postponement of elections with a view to fixing the fundamentals is being counterfeited by self-pursuing partisan elements contrary to the spirit of prophecy, thereby confusing the public with respect to an alternative pathway that holds the key to the dilemma that the nation is currently entangled in.

CONCLUSION
The desire of the millions of adherents and practitioners of Lent for a deeper relationship with God is undeniable. Not all adherents of Lent imbibe its pagan-originated liturgy. As may be recalled, rejection of some of the extra-scriptural practices imposed upon the Church under the influence of the Roman Empire was what produced the protestant movement. The sober reflection that characterizes the Lenten period is an expression of the deep-seated desire of humanity to be in tune with its Creator. Fasting is one of the ways by which man seeks to journey into the presence of God even though the purpose of fasting is not to compel God to act but to realign man with His will. This pursuit of God that characterizes the Lenten fast is commendable. Nevertheless, the pagan precedence in the dates and symbolisms of the practice cannot be ignored. Reference to this coincidence of dates, however, does not imply that the fast is evil. In the words of Apostle Paul:
One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. (Romans 14:5-6; 13; NKJV)

However, it is essential for adherents to critically examine the spirit behind the fast with a view to ensuring that it is not an attempt to obtain righteousness before God by human effort and regulations as Paul also states in Colossians 2:20-23 (NKJV):

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations

“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,”

which all concern things which perish with the using according to the commandments and doctrines of men?

These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

To seek to obtain right standing with God through ascetic efforts is akin to embracing the spirit of Nimrod. As deducible in the biblical and historical accounts, Nimrod is the father of humanism, which is the belief in human sufficiency and a rejection of God. The hidden danger in drawing inspiration, albeit subtly, from the ancient idolatrous practices that precede Lent, is the subtle infiltration of an otherwise Christ-centred activity by the spirit that birthed those practices; in this case, the rejection, in whole or in part, of the salvation that comes by grace, and an attempt to obtain justification by works - a religious variant of humanism and secularism that fails to realize that religion is not enough!

Conversely, the Babylonic spirit from which pagan festivals were birthed could also foster a descent into licentiousness with the false guarantee that future penance would erode one’s sins.

It is needful to point out that the temptation of Jesus Christ, after He had
fasted forty days and forty nights, was the first major direct encounter between the seeds and, in this rematch, though He was tempted on all the components of worldliness like the first Adam, the Last Adam did not sin and eventually bruised the head of the Serpent, obtaining victory for humanity and fulfilling the Genesis 3:15 mandate.

Finally, despite the pagan-origins of the Lenten fast, a fact that ought to compel the Church to re-examine its liturgy, if adherents of the custom within the body of Christ must retain the practice, it must be done in the manner recommended by God as revealed in Isaiah 58:6-12 for only the fast that God has chosen can bring strength to the body of Christ and healing as well as prosperity to individuals, families, communities and the nation:

6“Is this not the fast that I have chosen:
To loose the bonds of wickedness,
To undo the heavy burdens,
To let the oppressed go free,
And that you break every yoke?
7Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;
When you see the naked, that you cover him,
And not hide yourself from your own flesh?
8Then your light shall break forth like the morning,
Your healing shall spring forth speedily,
And your righteousness shall go before you;
The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
9Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'

“If you take away the yoke from your midst,
The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
If you extend your soul to the hungry
And satisfy the afflicted soul,
Then your light shall dawn in the darkness,
And your darkness shall be as the noonday.

The Lord will guide you continually,
And satisfy your soul in drought,
And strengthen your bones;
You shall be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

Those from among you
Shall build the old waste places;
You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach,
The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. (Isaiah 58:6-12; NKJV)

Without a doubt this prophecy by Isaiah encapsulates God’s chosen fast. Therefore, rather than engaging in any self-imposed, man-made religious fast, believers seeking the face of God in times of adversity, national calamity or whenever divine direction is urgently needed should be guided by it.

Comparatively, Daniel's fast in Babylon fits into this category and so is the call for Solemn Assembly by Prophet Joel. The period, short or long, spent in fasting and praying by these vessels of the Most High God produced tangible and eternal results. (See Daniel 9&10 and Joel 2).

Our sincere prayer is that true practitioners of the Christian faith will neither fast nor pray in vain. But as we fast and pray, unbelief will be uprooted from our hearts and the Spirit of God will empower as well as give us the needed direction from time to time in Jesus Name. (Amen). (See Mark 9: 14 - 29 & Acts 13: 1 - 12)

Thank you so much for listening.
God bless you all.
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Lent is a period of fasting, moderation, and self-denial traditionally observed by Catholic and some Protestant denominations. It begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with Easter Sunday. The length of the Lenten fast was established in the 4th century as 46 days (40 days not counting Sundays). During Lent, participants eat sparingly or give up a particular food or habit. It’s not uncommon for people to give up smoking during Lent, or swear off drinking or eating candy or telling lies, and many more. It’s six weeks of self-discipline. Lent began as a way for Christian denominations to prepare for Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday in Western churches. Lent is observed for 40 days, in imitation of Jesus Christ’s fast in the wilderness, and focuses on fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. Learn more about the history and traditions of Lent. In addition, Catholics and other Christians often choose to give up specific pleasures, such as sweets, alcohol, or social media, during Lent as a way to foster simplicity and self-control; many use their cravings or desires for these items as a reminder to pray and to refocus on spiritual matters. In the Anglican churches, The Book of Common Prayer prescribes that Lent be observed with fasting. First published in 1968, God’s Chosen Fast has long been considered the essential guide to biblical fasting, a vital yet often neglected practice. With simplicity and straightforwardness, Arthur Wallis shares what the Bible says about fasting. It is not merely a how-to manual, but a timeless reference that explains the purpose of fasting, details accounts of fasting in the Bible, and provides guidance for modern-day practitioners. In the first published in 1968, God's Chosen Fast has long been considered the essential guide to biblical fasting, a vital yet often neglected practice. With simplicity and straightforwardness, Arthur Wallis shares what