

## A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered

*Acts 12.1 ¶ Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.*

*2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.*

*3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)*

*4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after **Easter** to bring him forth to the people.*

The topic tonight concerns the celebration of Easter, and I'll use this to briefly segue into one other *Christianized* holiday. The occasion for this discussion arises from the single use of the word *Easter* in our KJV Bibles.

It has been my assumption for years that Easter, as used in the KJV Bible, referred to a Pagan holiday that not only had coincided with the Jewish Festival of Unleavened Bread, also called Passover, BUT was also a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I thought by the text of Acts 12.1-4 that Herod was waiting until after his Pagan holiday Ishtar (Easter), which is now our Christian holiday, to bring Peter out of prison to be executed. There is here truth and error mixed. Herod was not waiting for a pagan holiday to pass. He was waiting until after the 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread to kill Peter. Furthermore, the truth is, the Christianized holiday, Easter, as we know it, didn't exist in the days of the apostles. It was nearly three centuries later that a pagan festival observing the vernal equinox, the time when light overtook darkness in the springtime, that the apostate church, now known as Catholicism, merged it with a festival of their own making at the time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The apostate church thought that because O.T. Israel had a 7-day festival, that they ought also to have something similar. They reasoned that by it they could bring the heathen away from paganism and into Christianity, and so win them for Christ. So, essentially the Easter holiday was conjured from the imagination of men's minds, and has nothing to do with the word of God at all. These are some of the things we'd like everyone to consider at this time. Probably the greatest point to emphasize here is that there was no such thing as an Easter holiday, AS WE KNOW OF IT TODAY, in the days of the apostles and the first churches! Once we understand this point most of those which follow will fall into place.

## A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered

'The word *Easter* now denotes the festival observed by many Christian churches in honour of the resurrection of the Savior. But the original has no reference to that, nor **is there the slightest evidence that any such festival was observed at the time when this book was written.**' *Barnes' Notes*, vol. 10, Acts, p.190, (Bolding added)

'The word does not properly occur in Scripture, although the AV has it in Acts 12.4 where it stands for Passover ... **There is no trace of Easter celebration in the NT** ...' *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Copyright 1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Reprint, February 1983, vol. 2, p. 888, (bolding added)

### First Consider the Holidays of Scripture

The word of God considers holidays. This English is either the combination of two words, 'holy day,' or as one word, *holyday*. (*holy day*, three times: cf.Ex.35.2; Ne.10.31; Is.58.13; & *holyday*, twice: Ps.42.4; Col.2.16) In the Bible this refers to the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath and to the Sabbaths or Feasts that God gave to national Israel to observe.

As a 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath

*Ex.35.2 Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death.*

As a Feast of the LORD

*Ne.10.31 And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.*

*Ps.42.4 When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.*

*Joh 19:31 The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high [a great] day,) besought Pilate that their legs*

## A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered

*might be broken, and that they might be taken away. (It was technically Passover, which was leading into the first day, a Sabbath, of the 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. [Ex.12.16])*

Referring to the same holidays, the apostle Paul would have the saints not to be condemned on account of their refusal to participate in those O.T. practices.

*Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday (ἑορτή, tss. feast [26], holyday [1]), or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:*

*17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.*

So, what we have determined is that the holidays *in Scripture* refers to the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath and to the various Feasts of the LORD and have nothing to do with Valentine's Day, Easter, Halloween, or Christmas. So what of these particular holidays? The Bible does refer to them, but *never* in a good light. Why not in a good light? Because these are things which the heathen did as they worshipped their gods. The LORD warned His people against worshipping their gods and taking up their practices.

*Ex 23:24 Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images.*

*Le 18:3 After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do:*

*4 Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God.*

*Jer 10:2 Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.*

*3 For the customs of the people (the heathen) are vain ...*

*customs, חֻקִּים, chuq-qah; tss. custom (2), manner (1), ordinance (22), rite (1), statute (77), appointed (1); in some instances this is what someone began to do and was continued by others. (cf. Jd.11.39, 40,*

## A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered

that the daughters would for four days every year lament the daughter of Jephthae)

*De 12:30 Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.*

*1Pe 4:3 For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:  
4 ¶ Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:*

### Second, Consider the Pagan Origin of Easter

First these two citations.

*'Intending after Easter. ...The word **Easter** is of Saxon origin, and is supposed to be derived from *Eostre*, the goddess of Love, or the Venus of the North, in honour of whom a festival was celebrated by our pagan ancestors in the month of April (Webster).' Barnes' Notes, vol. 10, Acts, p.190,*

*'The word *Easter* is derived from *Eastre*, **the Anglo-Saxon goddess of Spring**, to whom the fourth month answering to our April, was dedicated. The ninth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica well remarks: "The ecclesiastical historian, Socrates, states with perfect truth that neither Christ nor His Apostles enjoined the keeping of this or any other festival. The sanctity of special times or places was an idea quite alien from the early Christian mind.' *Church History*, C. B. Hassell & Silvester Hassell, p.603*

Easter, the pagan side of this holiday, came from ancient heathen practices. It was the name of a goddess among many gods. She was celebrated in the springtime at the time of the vernal equinox. This is when the sun begins to overtake the darkness; more light to the day, generally beginning about March 21<sup>st</sup>.

## A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered

### The Apostate Church Assimilates Easter

Easter, the so-called Christian side of this holiday has no Biblical basis at all. As we have already seen it is derived from heathen practices. How did this become Christianized? The infusion of *Easter* into Christianity was relatively easy being Pascha or Passover (the time when the Feast of Unleavened Bread was observed by Israel) came at the same time of the year. In effect Easter, as we know it, is nothing less than a Christianized pagan holiday made to correspond to the time of the Jewish festival of Passover.

‘The Eng. word comes from the AS [Anglo-Saxon, added] *Eastre* or *Estera*, a Teutonic [Germanic] goddess to whom sacrifice was offered in April, so the name was transferred to the paschal feast.’ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Copyright 1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Reprint, February 1983, vol. 2, p. 889

‘There was a Teutonic goddess *Ostera*, whose festival was celebrated early in the Spring by the Saxons, and the occurrence of the Easter festival at the same season made it easier for them to give up their heathen feast, and perhaps led to their attaching thereto a name to which they were already accustomed. Francis Garden.’ *Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Copyright 1868, 1896 by Hurd and Houghton and Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Reprinted 1981 by Baker Book House Co., vol. 1, p.637,

The Bishop of Rome began to impose the observance of Easter upon the apostate church.

‘During the greater part of this century [A.D.175, added], Christian churches were independent of each other; nor were they joined together by association, confederacy, or any other bonds but those of charity. ... **but in process of time, as above noticed, all the churches of a province were brought into one ecclesiastical body.** ... As the boundaries of the church were enlarged by an easier ingress, the number of vicious and irregular persons who entered into it, proportionably increased.

...

[By A.D. 195] The ceremonies introduced occasioned strife and discord. Victor, Bishop of Rome, insisted upon Easter being observed by the Asiatic

## **A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered**

churches, at the same time it was kept by the western.’ *History of Baptist*, G. H. Orchard, pp. 110, 111,

Then the apostate church began to reason that, since the Israelites had their 7-day holiday season of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and being the Lord’s Supper is (supposedly) an extension of this festival, that they should do the same thing. So began the evil notion of ecclesiastical *Holy Days*: something added to Christendom that is completely foreign to the word of God. This was settled in the council of Nice, June 14<sup>th</sup> – July 25<sup>th</sup>, A.D.325.

‘At the council of Nice, the rule for the observance of Easter was finally settled by the whole Church ... *Ante-Nicene Church Fathers*, vol. 1, p.310, (cf. vol. 5, p.126, fn. 6)

Next, they needed to agree on a time when it should be observed, and thus there was a split between the eastern and western Catholic (meaning, Universal) church.

### **Introduction of Easter into England**

The heretical practice of Easter, adopted from the Germanic tribes by the apostate church, ultimately carries over into England; but when that was is difficult to say. Austin (aka, Augustine) came to England in A. D. 596 trying to compel them to observe, among other things Easter *at the same time* that Rome did.

‘Up to that time, the Christians of what are now England, Ireland and Scotland had been free from the direct jurisdiction of Rome, and had maintained their ancient rites and customs. Thus, Austin charged them, saying: ‘You act in many particulars contrary to our custom, or rather the custom of the universal Church; and yet, if you will comply with me in these three points, namely; **to keep Easter at the due time**; to administer baptism, by which we are again born to God, according to the custom of the holy Roman Apostolic Church; and jointly with us preach the word of God to the English nation, we will readily tolerate all the other things you do, though contrary to our customs.’ *The History of the Baptists*, Thomas Armitage, vol.1, p. 229, (cf. Cathcart’s *Baptist Encyclopedia*, Vol.1, A-G; stating this was A.D.603)

## **A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered**

It is said that A. D. 603 was for England a notable period for merging pagan and Christian practices of Christmas and Easter.

‘... the old Pagan temples were “consecrated” by being sprinkled with “holy” water, and by having the “saints” relics put in place of the idols; and the old heathen festivals, such as **Yule and Easter**, were transformed into so-called “Christian” festivities.’ *Church History*, C. B. Hassell and Sylvester Hassell, p. 410 (bolding added)

But the English church refused Austin’s proposal for the time. It was in A.D. 664 that England would adopt the Roman system for calculating the days of celebration so that everyone in the west could observe these holidays together.

It is the English state church that took up this debate in A.D.664 at Whitby. (cf. *History of England and the British Commonwealth*, Laurence M. Larson, Copyright 1924 Henry Hold and Co., p. 21)

The *O.E.D, Compact Edition*, vol.1, p.827 records the celebration of Easter as early as Aelfred, A.D. 890. A.D.1175 we can read of Easter Sunday.

c. **1175** *Lamb Hom. 45* Uwilc sunne-dei is to locan alswa ester dei

The outgrowth of this error in England is phenomenal. And one can truly appreciate the need for the Word of God coming into the native language of the country when once we realize how easily the masses can be affected with such error. But when error takes a foothold, except for the grace of God it is difficult to rout. Through process of time even the true churches of Jesus Christ become infected with the *Christian holiday* season error. Far too many are completely oblivious to the leavening introduced so many centuries ago.

### **The Early Use of Easter in English Translations of the Bible**

The climate of England, to have a Bible of their own, in their own tongue began to rise and swell, though fiercely resisted by the apostate church of Catholicism. There is a powerful wave of Reformation vying for change. This movement begins to put Scriptures into the hands of the common people. Among those who would stake their lives to bring the word of God to the people are two notable men

## A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered

named John Wycliffe and William Tyndale. While many call these men reformers, they were not of the apostate church and, though they would have joyed at any reforms in a religion whose use and abuse of civil powers has wielded the sword against all dissenters, they kept to the work of translating the Scriptures into the English language.

Wycliffe never uses the word Easter in his version of the Bible (A.D.1380). My opinion is that it might be because his English translation was based on the Latin Vulgate. However, to be clear, he was certainly familiar with that holiday. He mentions Easter Monday. Perhaps this is proof of a season of observance, Easter Monday, Easter Tuesday, and so forth.

‘c. **1380** Wyclif *Serm Sel. Wks, II, 133* On Eester monedai’ *O.E.D. Compact Edition*, vol. 1, p.827,

As a result the term Easter becomes as *ecclesiastical* a term as the words *baptism* and *church*.

Unlike John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, properly called the father of the King James Version Bible, uses the term *Easter* often in his version. Very likely this is because his predecessors, reformers Myles Coverdale and John Rogers, had done the same.

Tyndale/Rogers/Coverdale translation which has Easter/Ester in Ez.45.21; Mt. 26.2, **17**, 18, 19; Mk. 14.1, 12, 14, 16; Lk. 2.41; 22.1, 8, 11, 13, 15; Jn. 2.13, 23; 6.4; 11.55; 12.1; 13.1; 18.39; 19.14; Acts 12.4; 20.6; 1Co.5.7; He.11.28. (**At least 27 times**) But I cannot say if that is someone’s compilation of versions, or if there is such a version of the English Bible.

Coverdale (1535) Ez.45.21 confirmed by reference in *O.E.D. Compact Edition*, vol.1, p. 827.

Tyndale (1534)

Mt. 26.2, 18, 19; Mk. 14.1, 12, 14, 16; Lk. 2.41; 22.1, **7**, 8, 11, 13, 15; Jn. 2.13, 23; 6.4; 11.55; 12.1; 13.1; 18.39; 19.14; Acts 12.4; 20.6; 1Co.5.7; He.11.28; I could not confirm Ez. 45.21. (27 verses)



## **A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered**

Cranmer (1539)

Mt. 26.2, 19; Mk. 14.1; Lk. 2.41; Jn. 2.13, 23; 6.4; 11.55; 12.1; 13.1; 18.39; 19.14; Acts 12.4; I could not confirm Ez. 45.21. (14 verses)

Geneva (1557)

Mt. 26.2, 19; Mk. 14.1, 12, 14, 16; Lk. 2.41; 22.1, 8, 11, 13, 15; Jn. 2.13, 23; 6.4; 11.55; 12.1; 13.1; 18.39; 19.14; Acts 12.4; 1Co.5.7; He.11.28; I could not confirm Ez. 45.21. (24 verses)

Geneva (1599)

The word *Easter* was stricken completely from the version.

It is wrong that *Easter* became a part of Christian history. As a result of centuries of this unbiblical tradition it was introduced into the English Scriptures without the least objection. It is an illegitimate practice that almost everyone that names the name of Christ fellowships, the true churches of Jesus Christ not excepted. That's the sad truth of it.

This leads us up to the 1611 King James Version of the Bible.

### **Easter in the King James Version Bible**

The King James Version has in Acts 12.4 retained the only instance of the ancient and heretical holiday called Easter. While many would point to this and renew calls for a new translation of the Bible, there are some things we need to consider in this vein of thought.

The use of the term *Easter* in our KJV Bible gives us an occasion to speak against this Christianized, Paganized, Jewish festival popularly celebrated by most of Christendom today. Some claim otherwise, that by the use of the term the KJV Bible condones this false practice. So, we need to consider how the term Easter is used.

The King James Version, the word of God, has a self-interpretive literary device. Perhaps it is as simple as paying attention to the context. In any event, there are many places where a word, phrase, or statement is made and there follows close on its heels another word, phrase, or statement which gives it clarity. For example, in Ge.24.16 the word *virgin* is defined as a woman that has never known

## **A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered**

a man. In Mk.12.23, the *resurrection* means to *rise* from the dead. In Ps.32.5, to acknowledge sin is not to hide iniquity. Ac.8.38, 39 *baptism* is a going down into the water and coming back out. It is a burial in water. (cf. Ro.6.4) So, the Bible defines itself. The same applies to the only time that the word *Easter* is found in Scripture. In Ac.12.3, *Then were the days of Unleavened Bread*.

Just a side note: the days of Unleavened Bread & Passover sometimes refer to the Feast as one and the same:

*Eze 45:21 In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, ye shall have the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten.*

*Lu 22:1 Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover.*

Then in Ac.12.4 there are the words ... *intending after Easter (πάσχα, pascha, which is tss. in the N.T. Passover [28 times], & Easter [1 time]) to bring him forth to the people*. Here, the *days of Unleavened Bread* and *Easter* are synonymous terms.

The English saints in the day that the KJV was completed (A.D.1611) had been groomed through the centuries of extra-biblical tradition to think that Easter was a Christian holiday. It was not! It was in fact the Feast of Unleavened Bread or more properly Passover, *πάσχα, pascha*. At the time of the apostles, not only was Easter it non-existent, but the issue had nothing to do with Christ's resurrection at all. This is the main point I hope that we can all take away from this study. Easter, as we know it today, did not exist then! To apply today's concept of Easter to the Biblical account is a serious departure from the true doctrine of God's word. Now for a moment let's turn to the other Christianized, Pagan holiday called Christmas.

### **A Christian Response to the Holidays?**

The best thing we can do as Christians is to steer clear of all so-called *Christianized* holidays. These days are filled with error that cannot help the saints to walk in the truth. We cannot take to ourselves these *days* without sacrificing truth in our doctrine and in our lives. Christ is NOT held before others when we practice these things. At the Christianized, Pagan festival of Christmas there is a man who represents Christ, being omniscient, to whom we teach our children to confess

## **A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered**

their sins, he brings them reward and punishments, there are lights and wreathes to keep away evil spirits, an evergreen trees erected in the house, and much revelry. Then there is the issue is wasting our substance to buy things that we would otherwise never have done. And for what? If we could only see that we have no Scriptural basis for this practice we could begin to denounce it. What truth is there in Christmas? There weren't three wise men. They did not come to the manger? Angels did not sing. Jesus wasn't born at this time of the year. When we stop to consider these things, and scrutinize them with the Word of God, we discover one error after another.

And what of Easter? The symbols of bunnies, chicks, eggs, spring themes, sunrise observances, baskets, new clothes, baptisms, all descended from early paganism. What biblical truth is contained in this, we should ask ourselves? The claims of a Friday crucifixion and burial are false. The claim for a first day of the week resurrection is false. The very core purpose for this holiday is a ruse. It is not based on any truth whatsoever from a biblical standpoint. But so many continue to justify these practices because it has Jesus in it.

‘The church is to-day courting the world. Its members are trying to bring it down to the level of the ungodly. The hall, the theatre, nude and lewd art, social luxuries with all their loose moralities, are making inroads into the sacred inclosure of the church, and, as a satisfaction for all this worldliness, Christians are making a great deal of Lent and Easter and Good Friday and church ornamentation. It is the old trick of Satan. The Jewish Church struck on that rock; the Roman Church was wrecked on the same; and the Protestant Church is fast reaching the like doom. *The Church*, C. B. Hassell and Sylvester Hassell, p. 603

I am no Protestant. The true churches of Jesus Christ were never Catholic or Protestant, but have a history that precedes and runs parallel to these apostate churches. But how sad it is to report that not only is the apostate church infected with these false practices, but this has come into the true churches of Jesus Christ. How relevant are the words of the apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians to the churches today? *2Co.6.17 Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you ...*

## **A Concise History of The Easter Holiday Considered**

There was no such Christian holiday as Easter in the days of the apostles; not in the time of the history of Acts.

Have we been deceived? If it is false it cannot glorify our Lord Jesus Christ or our Heavenly Father. Dear saints of God, renew a commitment to abstain from all appearance of evil.

*Jer 10:2 Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen ...*

*1Thes.5.21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*

*22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

*23 ¶ And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.*

While our flesh is habituated to these things, we can truly get clear of them if we have a genuine Bible-based conviction. Understand for yourself the teaching of the Word of God and then act. Believe the truth. Bear with the inconvenience, the temporal discomfort, and the continuous criticism. My personal experience has been one of great thanksgiving to God for His deliverance from such a grievous and fruitless exercise. The things of the world have a hold on us that we are so unaware of; that is until we begin to try to get clear of them. God grant us the faith to stand more for Christ in every way that He reveals to us through His Word.

file: documents/Bible Studies/Craig/Misc Studies/Christianized Holidays/191116-7 A Concise History of the Easter Holiday Considered-CThurman