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# EASTER

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The celebration of Easter is well known in our society and is observed by the masses. Few, however, know its origin and that it holds no authority from the Bible. Many traditions exist as to the origin of the word "Easter," but one thought appears to be present in most all ideas, Easter refers to the East and rising sun, and in many people's minds, causing it to have a connection with the resurrection.

The observance of Easter represents a convergence of three particular events:

- 1) The Hebrew passover (celebrated during the month of Nisan which is the first of the month of the Hebrew calendar. It always fell in the Spring of the year).
- 2) The commemoration of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (which happened to take place during the feast of the Hebrew passover).
- 3) A pagan festival of Spring which fell at the vernal equinox on March 21. This pagan festival embodied the worship of the goddess of the Saxons in whose honor sacrifices were offered annually.

The merging of these three events became associated with the unauthorized festival of the resurrection which was celebrated each year at the time of the passover.

The day on which Easter was to be observed has been much disputed. The council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) decreed it should be on Sunday but did not establish which particular Sunday. It was not until the 7th century that the rule was finally set and adopted. This same method of calculation is used today. Easter Sunday is determined to be:

- 1) The first Sunday after,
- 2) The first full moon after,
- 3) The first day of Spring (March 21).

Easter Sunday may fall anywhere between March 21 and April 25, a period of 35 days. This explains why Easter is on a different Sunday every year instead of on the same Sunday in the same month every year.

Many other occasions are connected with the celebration of "Easter Season."

LENT or "Lenten" is the name applied to the forty days of fasting preceding Easter Sunday. The word "Lent" signifies the Spring-fast for "Lenten-tide." It is observed in commemoration of Jesus' fast in the wilderness for a period of forty days. It begins on "Ash-Wednesday" which is forty days before Easter (Sundays excluded). It is supposed to be a time of penitence where one shows sorrow for sin and their need to seek

forgiveness. It is a time its observers prepare for Easter by abstaining from certain foods and activities. The Bible gives no authority as to anything concerning this event.

**ASH-WEDNESDAY** is the first day of Lent. It came from a custom observed by people expressing their humiliation at this time by appearing in sackcloth and ashes. In some churches, ashes burned from the preceding years Palm Sunday is blessed by the priest and used to mark a cross on the foreheads of the members of the congregation. This reminds the people to begin their lenten penance in a humble spirit. Like the other observances in this study, there is no authority from the scriptures to observe such a day.

**PALM-SUNDAY** is the Sunday before Easter and marks the beginning of what many call “Holy Week” or “Passion Week.” Palm-Sunday is supposed to honor Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem where palm branches were used to align the road (cf. John 12:12-15). The first celebration of this was not known until the fourth century — 300 years after the revelation of God’s word was complete!

**MAUNDAY-THURSDAY** (also called Holy Thursday) is the Thursday before Easter and is supposed to recall to one’s mind Jesus’ last meal with the twelve apostles in the upper room. In some places, the priest will wash the feet of twelve members of the congregation to show that Jesus washed his disciples’ feet.

**GOOD FRIDAY** (the Friday before Easter) is supposed to observe the death of Jesus on the cross and his suffering for our sins. However, according to the New Testament, Christians observe the Lord’s death the first day of every week, not simply on one day of the year (cf. Acts 20:7).

**HOLY SATURDAY** (the day before Easter) is supposed to be a day of solemn vigil (waiting). Some churches hold vigil services which often include the baptism of new members. Many times this leads up to a dramatic moment in which all the lights are put out leaving everyone in the dark. The priest will light a tall candle which represents the risen Christ. He then lights the members’ candles which is supposed to symbolize the light of Jesus going out into the world. Many vigils last until dawn which ends in a “sun-rise service.” Many denominations have a special “sun-rise service” on Easter morning.

**WEARING NEW CLOTHES** (including a bonnet, hat) on Easter Sunday is an established tradition in some places. It originated from the practice of having those who had recently been baptized to wear new white robes for Easter. The new clothes represented the new life offered through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

**EASTER EGGS** have long been a part of the Easter Season. Eggs were considered a symbol of life and creation. The giving of multi-colored eggs was a custom throughout the East. Purple was the color of kings and nobility. In ancient times, purple dye was very expensive so that only the rich could afford it. Yellow was the color of the sun with its radiance and brilliance. White was the color of purity. In uninspired church history, the egg symbolized the immature hope of the resurrection.

**RABBITS** (Easter bunny) are connected with the observance of Easter because they are associated with the fertility of Spring. Their ability to multiply, bringing “new life” into the world, brings hope and joy. Tradition says the Easter bunny brings a basket of multi-colored eggs the night before Easter which is hidden either in the house or in the garden for children to find the next morning.

**PRETZELS and HOT CROSS BUNS** are supposed to be a Lenten food. The Saxons honored their goddess of Spring by eating wheat cakes. It is believed that from this ritual came the idea of hot cross buns and pretzels. The buns had a cross of icing on top and the pretzels brought to mind a person praying with their arms folded across their chest. In some places, they are given to the poor to eat during Lent.

**WHIT-SUNDAY** is sometimes called Whitsuntide, White Sunday or Pentecost Sunday. It comes fifty days after Easter and marks the end of the Easter season. It is in commemoration of the Pentecost day we read of in Acts two when the Holy Spirit descended upon the twelve apostles. Newly baptized people would wear their robes of white on that day.

Easter, and its associated festivities, is considered by the masses to be the greatest event in the Christian religion. Some will “go to church” on that Sunday when they do not go any other Sunday of the year. Does the Bible claim Easter Sunday is of greater significance than any other Sunday of the year? You will search in vain to find it! It is not there.

The facts bear testimony that Easter and its seasonal observance stand without any Bible authority whatsoever. There is no command, example or implication anywhere in scripture that would authorize the observance of this day with any religious significance. New Testament Christians observe and commemorate the death of Christ each and every Lord’s day, the first day of the week (Sunday), in the observance of the Lord’s supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Since the celebration of Easter came about after the time of the apostles and New Testament revelation, it has no place in worship guided by the Word of God. In fact, there are no special occasions, seasons, dates, or day(s) that have any religious significance for the Lord’s church and Christians. The New Testament authorizes Christians to assemble and worship on every first day of the week. Since every week has a first day, the whole church assembles for worship. Authorized worship includes: singing (Eph. 5:19), praying (Acts 2:42), Lord’s supper (Acts 20:7), giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2) and preaching (Acts 20:7). Every Sunday is the same as the Sunday which comes before it and the Sunday which comes after it. Any “first day” is no more special than any other is. It is man, not God, who makes some days or times more important and special than others; and, man does so to his own peril.

## **THE KING JAMES VERSION AND EASTER**

Some have referred to those who use the King James Version as “Easter Bunny preachers” because it uses the word Easter in Acts 12:4. I suppose they seek to cast reflection and doubt on the reliable and time-tested King James Version and those who use it. For some reason they feel threatened by it and want it to go by the wayside because, in their thinking, it is old, obsolete, archaic and hence, people cannot understand it. Could it be because it refutes the numerous errors found in their favorite per-version? If the worst thing they can say about it is that it uses the word Easter, then it stands on good ground. What can be said about the word Easter in the KJV?

The King James Version, in Acts 12:4, reads: “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 Greek word translated Easter in this verse is translated “passover” (referring to the annual Jewish passover) in all the other 28 places it appears in the King James New Testament. The New King James Version uses the word “passover” in Acts 12:4. Why, then, is it translated Easter in the KJV?

I do not know why the translators of the King James Version chose to use the word Easter in Acts 12:4. One plausible explanation is this: the context of the passage shows that Herod had arrested the apostle Peter and put him in prison “...intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.” The translators may have chosen to use the word Easter so the English-speaking people of the early 17th century could relate it to their own calendar of events. That is, English readers would be more familiar with the time of year in which Easter fell than they would when the passover was observed. This way, they would more readily know the time of year that Herod intended to deliver Peter to the people — after the Jewish passover or as Christendom observed, “Easter Sunday.”

Regardless of why the word Easter appears in Acts 12:4 in the KJV, these things are certain: 1) it does not teach that Easter is a religious holiday, 2) that Easter was observed in the first century in any sense, and 3) it certainly does not teach that Easter is to be observed as a religious holiday at any time. It does not mention any kind of religious service connected with it at all. It simply refers to a “time” or “day” on the calendar in which Herod intended to bring Peter before the people. There is absolutely no reference to Christians celebrating or observing Easter in any religious way: either by command, example or implication.

To celebrate Easter with any religious significance is to go beyond the authority of the scriptures and therefore, stands condemned (2 John 9-11). How would one explain to the Lord on judgment day that he added religious observances to the Christian life without any regards to the Bible? Human tradition makes worship vain (Matt. 15:8-9). Paul told the Galatian brethren, “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain” (Gal. 4:10-11).

The Lord’s people (true Christianity) do not have a “Christian calendar” as the world often refers to it. The New Testament knows nothing about Saint Valentine’s Day, Mardi Gras, Advent, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Saint Andrew’s Day, Saint Patrick’s Day, All Saint’s Day (they were running out of days so they grouped them all together), Christmas, Epiphany, Twelfth Night, on and on and on. Name them all, NOT ONE has any religious significance attached to it in the Bible. Man created them and with man they all will perish. As the Lord’s people, we must not go beyond that which is written (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9-11).