

EASTER

Text: Acts 12:4

INTRO: Scholars universally recognize that the Greek word rendered "Easter" in Acts 12:4 (KJV) is the word for Passover. Cruden comments: "The name Easter was given later to the Christian celebration of this season." No other translation I know of contains the word Easter.

I have been asked to explain why churches of Christ do not have special Easter services, observances, etc. I will briefly attempt to examine the Biblical principles involved.

I. THE RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY KNOWN AS EASTER IS OF POST-APOSTOLIC ORIGIN.

The I.S.B.E. explains that after "Christians" began to observe a special yearly commemoration of Christ's resurrection, "Differences arose as to the time... The Jewish Christians naturally fixing it at the time of the Passover feast... on the evening of the 14th day of... Nisan without regard to the day of the week, while the gentile Christians identified it with the first day of the week, i.e., the Sunday of the resurrection, irrespective of the day of the month. This latter practice finally prevailed in the church, and those who followed the other reckoning were stigmatized as heretics. But differences arose as to the proper Sunday for the Easter celebration which led to long & bitter controversies. The Nicene council in 325 decreed that it should be on Sunday, but what particular Sunday continued to be a matter of controversy until the 7th century--when it was settled by the "authority" of the Roman Catholic Church. The date is determined through a long and complicated process. The change in the calendar in 1582 reopened the controversy between the Roman Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church so that the two branches of so-called orthodox Christianity seldom observe Easter on the same Sunday, as the 2 "churches" follow religious calendars that are 13 days apart.

II. THE WORD EASTER WAS BORROWED FROM PAGANISM.

Wycliffe Bible Encyclopaedia: "The English word 'Easter' is thought to be derived from the name of a Teutonic goddess of

spring, Eastre, and to have been adapted by Christians to its present usage about the 8th century after Christ."

I.S.B.E.: "The Eng. word comes from the AS *Eastre* or *Estera*, a Teutonic goddess to whom sacrifice was offered in April, so the name was transferred to the paschal feast... There is no trace of Easter celebration in the N.T....

III. EASTER IN MOST RELIGIOUS BODIES IS A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE OBSERVANCE GOD COMMANDED.

- A. Christ's death is memorialized every first day of the week in keeping with Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20; 16:1-2, etc.
- B. The first day of the week recognized as the Lord's day is a weekly commemoration of Christ's resurrection.
- C. When we meet every first day of the week in commemoration of Christ's death & resurrection, we have followed the teaching & practice of the inspired apostles, and of the churches for centuries thereafter.

IV. THERE IS NO COMMAND, EXAMPLE, OR INFERENCE THAT WE SHOULD OBSERVE SUCH A SPECIAL RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY. If so,...

- A. When should we observe it? With the Roman Catholics or with the Eastern Orthodox churches? Or when? Sunday? Anniversary of resurrection? April 9.
- B. How should we observe it? Lord's supper on Thursday night before Easter? Should churches sponsor Easter egg hunts, holiday social functions, etc.?

V. SOME AREAS OF HUMAN DISCRETION.

- A. It is not wrong for a preacher to preach about the resurrection--or any other Bible subject--on that day. One may reason that it would be poor judgment.
- B. It would not be wrong for brethren to hold an early morning assembly on that day, anymore than it would be wrong to do so on any other day, Sunday or otherwise. It

might be poor judgment--or maybe not. Why pick that particular day?

C. It is not wrong for parents to hide colored eggs, nor for their children to hunt them. It is not wrong for families to gather, eat ham, etc. It is just another day, and individuals and families can do on that day what they could do on any other day. They should try to use good judgment.

D. It is not wrong for women to get a new dress, hat or shoes or for men to get a new suit or tie. Easter, for some people, is the opening of the spring fashion season.

E. Arguments, pro and con, can be made about the wisdom of such matters, but I believe they lie totally in the discretion of the individuals involved. If I feel that my influence may be damaged by engaging in certain traditional practices, I should refrain from participating in those practices--but I dare not make a law for those whose judgment differs from mine in such matters.

CONCLUSION: In closing, I must remind you that "Easter Sunday" is the Lord's day, but no more so than any other Sunday. I fear the eventual consequences of setting one Sunday above another and remind you that there is no Bible precedent for doing so. Jesus never taught it, the Holy Spirit never revealed it, The apostles didn't practice it; the early church never heard of it.

I have no desire whatsoever to regulate what you as individuals and/or families choose to do in matters of individual discretion. Just remember that others are watching you, and you want to use the best judgment you are capable of using that your influence may help lead others to a right relationship with Christ.

Liberty Hill, TX, Easter, 1963

Cox Springs, TX, April 18, 1965

Shiloh, Mexia, TX, April 12, 1995 (Wed. night inv.)