

Easter: What the Bible Says About It

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It might surprise people to know that the Bible has absolutely nothing to say about Easter. Zero. Zip. Nada.

Okay, it's true that the word *Easter* is found one time in the King James Version:

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

— Acts 12:4

However, check how the other English translations render Acts 12:4, and you'll see something different. No mention of Easter at all. Instead, all of them have the word *Passover* in place of *Easter*. For example, the English Standard Version:

And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

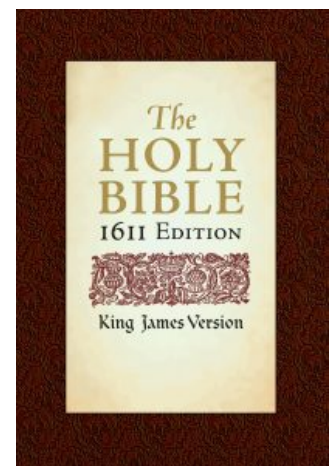
— Acts 12:4

Why do all of the English translations of the Bible talk of *Passover* in Acts 12:4 while only the King James Version mentions *Easter*?

Well, the New Testament was originally written in Greek, and [the original Greek word in Acts 12:4 is *pascha*, which literally talks about the Jewish holiday of *Passover*](#). So the more literal translation of the verse would mention *Passover* rather than *Easter*.

That being the case, why did the King James translators decide to render *pascha* as *Easter*?

Basically, it all boils down to a case of allowing a bias towards human traditions to take precedence over communicating a literal translation of the divinely inspired text. Why do I say that?



Luke was inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:19-21; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17) to write the book of Acts at around A.D. 61-62, according to Wayne Jackson's commentary *The Acts of the Apostles*. As we have seen, he made no mention of Easter at all, in actuality referring to Passover while talking of Peter's imprisonment of Herod. This is because the idea of Easter – an annual religious celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ – was not something that was thought up until years later.

No, the apostle Paul did not carry the
1611 with him.

And it was not God who thought it up, by the way. In fact, the New Testament doesn't care too much for religious holidays. Did you know that? Check this out:

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

— Galatians 4:9-11

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ...These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

— Colossians 2:16-17, 23

Contextually in both of these passages, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to tell Christians that they did not need nor did he want them to observe religious holidays such as the ones the Jews had observed under the Old Testament.

- ★ Notice how he calls them “**the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world**” and “**the shadow of the things to come,**” while saying that the actual “**substance**” belongs to Christ.
- ★ Notice also how he told the Galatians while talking of their observance of religious holidays that he was afraid he may have labored over them “**in vain.**”
- ★ After warning them about the religious holidays of Judaism, he went on to warn the Colossians about people insisting that they also involve themselves in asceticism, worship of angels, visions, and regulations about what they should handle, taste, and touch (Col. 2:18, 21).
- ★ He calls it all – religious holidays included – “**the elemental spirits of the world**” (v. 20) and “**human precepts and teachings**” (v. 22).
- ★ Most tellingly, he said that these human precepts and teachings – which included teaching others to observe religious holidays – “**have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion...but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh**” (v. 23). Think about that for a second. If you decide that you're going to come to church only because it's Easter Sunday, is that really going to help you overcome the sin in your life?

So is it any surprise that we find no record in the New Testament of Christians being commanded to observe Easter, Christmas, or any other religious holiday? Is it any surprise that we have no record of them observing the resurrection of Christ, or his death, or his birth, or any other event in his life, on an annual basis as a special religious holiday? In fact, the only record we have of any observance they participated in was a weekly worship service on each Sunday during which they remembered Christ's death through communion (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:23ff).

We're also told not to add to God's Word (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; 1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18). Think about that for a second. If we're not to add to God's Word, and God's Word mentions *nada* about Christians observing a religious holiday known as Easter, but we go ahead and do it anyway...

Well, you get the picture...

A lot of people don't, though. The Bible talks about them, too.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

— Hosea 4:6

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

— 2 Timothy 4:3-4

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

— Acts 20:29-30

God knew that people, either through ignorance of his Word or through wanting to have their own way or both, would depart from what he actually commanded and come up with their own ideas, which in reality would be nothing but falsehoods. That's how the idea of Easter came about.

From [Wikipedia](#):

*The modern English term Easter derives from the [Old English](#) word *Ēastre* or *Ēostre*.^[nb 2]*

The word Easter is held by some to have originally referred to the name of an Anglo-Saxon goddess, [Ēostre](#).^[nb.3] Easter is held by others to have originally referred to the name of a Babylonian goddess, [Ishtar](#).^[22] Others surmise that Eostre and Ishtar, pronounced identically, are two forms of the same word, referring to two forms of the same goddess, although the spelling differentiated through time and distance.^[23]

So when you're talking about *Easter*, you're really talking about the name of some pagan goddess. Did you know that? I sure didn't.

Also from [Wikipedia](#):

The first Christians, [Jewish](#) and [Gentile](#), were certainly aware of the [Hebrew calendar](#).^[nb.4] and there is no direct evidence that they celebrated any specifically Christian annual festivals.^[41] It was probably as an aspect of Passover that Jewish Christians, the first to do so, celebrated the resurrection of Jesus, dated close to Passover.^[24]

Direct evidence for the Easter festival begins to appear in the mid-2nd century. Perhaps the earliest extant primary source referencing Easter is a mid-2nd-century Paschal [homily](#) attributed to [Melito of Sardis](#), which characterizes the celebration as a well-established one.^[41] Evidence for another kind of annual Christian festival, the commemoration of martyrs, begins to appear at about the same time as evidence for the celebration of Easter.^[42]

While martyrs' days (usually the individual dates of martyrdom) were celebrated on fixed dates in the local solar calendar, the date of Easter was fixed by means of the local Jewish [lunisolar](#) calendar. This is consistent with the celebration of Easter having entered Christianity during its earliest, [Jewish period](#), but does not leave the question free of doubt.^[43]

The ecclesiastical historian [Socrates Scholasticus](#) attributes the observance of Easter by the church to the perpetuation of its custom, "just as many other customs have been established", stating that neither Jesus nor his [Apostles](#) enjoined the keeping of this or any other festival. Although he describes the details of the Easter celebration as deriving from local custom, he insists the feast itself is universally observed.^[44]

So it looks like Easter came about as a result of "customs," particularly the customs the early Jewish Christians had of observing Jewish holidays like Passover...even though the Holy Spirit inspired Paul in Galatians and Colossians to tell them not to do that anymore.

And even though Jesus had this to say about human customs:

You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

— *Matthew 15:7-9*

So why did the King James translators write *Easter* instead of the correct Passover while translating *pascha* in Acts 12:4? Again, bias towards human tradition rather than what the inspired text actually said.

So what does the Bible actually say about Easter? Nothing, zip, nada.

But what does the Bible say about Christians collectively observing religious holidays? Quite a lot, as we've seen. None of it good.

And what does the Bible say about adding to God's Word? Quite a lot, as we've seen. None of it good.

Easter isn't in the Bible. Think about that if you're thinking about observing it as a religious holiday...

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