

EASTER

Should It Be In Your Bible?

“...intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.” (Acts 12:4)

In Acts 12:4 the term “Easter” is the translation of the Greek word, *pascha*. In all of its 28 other occurrences in the New Testament, it is rendered “passover.” Acts 12:4 is the lone exception.

Thus, critics of the King James Version of the Bible hasten to use this verse as a “test case” for its worthiness to be trusted as a translation.

These critics tell us that “Easter” is a “bad translation,” that it is “*misleading*,” “*incorrect*,” an “*unfortunate*,” and “*uncalled for translation*” that is “*entirely inaccurate*.” One writer goes so far as to declare that it has “nothing behind it” and is a rendering that “simply can not be defended.”

We have, however, learned not to simply accept such claims too quickly. Rather we should scrutinize very carefully any such claims that attack the King James Version in this manner. After doing so, it is our conclusion that Acts 12:4 is correctly translated by KJV. Let’s examine the evidence.

THE BACKGROUND

Some background will help us understand the origin of the use of Easter by the translators in Acts 12:4.

William Tyndale was the first to translate the Received Text into English (1525). He used “Easter” to translate *pascha* in about half of its occurrences; he also introduced the use of “passover” for the other occurrences.

The reason for the use of “Easter” as a translation of *pascha* can be found in an English dictionary. Look up its Anglicized form, *pasch* or *paschal*, and you will find it defined as, “The passover, the feast of Easter.”

While the use of Easter gradually diminished in subsequent English translation efforts, the KJV translators obviously purposefully and intentionally retained it in Acts 12:4. But why in this one place?

If it was (as often claimed) to satisfy their supposed attachment to ecclesiastical terms, surely this was a strange verse to choose to satisfy such a desire. A more plausible explanation is offered by Cornelius Stam in his Acts commentary when he identifies Easter as “the name by which the heathen referred to the passover.”

But, again, is this all there is to it? On more thoughtful examination, the translation of *pascha* as Easter, turns out to not only be legitimate but also very important and even a necessity.

As is generally understood, the origin of Easter is found in the ancient pagan religion known in Scripture as Baal Worship.¹ It is an ancient festival derived from the worship of Ashtaroah.² (Judges 2:13; 10:6)

This festival was held in late April as a celebration of the earth “regenerating” itself after the

¹ See the editor’s tapes, *Satan’s Church*.

² Also known as Astarte, Ishtar, etc. By quickly repeating these names, we can easily see how they became our word Easter.

winter season. Because it involved *reproduction*, the common symbols were the *rabbit* and the *egg*. At the center of attention was the female deity known in Scripture as “the queen of heaven.” (Jer. 7:18; 44:17-25) She is the mother of Tammuz (Ezek. 8:14) who was also her *husband*! The perverted rites used to celebrate this festival would take place at sunrise on Easter morning. (Ezek. 8:13-16)

It doesn’t take much thought to see that Easter has never had *anything* to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, the Roman church assimilated the term as it sought to “Christianize” paganism and thus *wrongly* came to be associated with the celebration of the resurrection of Christ.³

But why would a term derived from paganism be so intentionally used to translate *pascha* in Acts 12:4? For the answer to this question let’s look at the context.

THE CONTEXT

The key to the proper translation of *pascha* in verse 4 is found in the explanatory parenthesis in verse 3. Notice it carefully:

“And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (THEN WERE THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD.)”

To grasp the import of this parenthetical explanation concerning the timing of Peter’s arrest, we must understand the relation between the “passover” and the “days of unleavened bread.”

The first “passover” took place the night when the Lord smote all the first-born in Egypt. The Israelites were told to kill a lamb and place its blood on the side and upper doorposts of their homes. The name “passover” comes from the fact that the Lord promised, “when I see the blood, I will *pass over* you.” (Ex. 12:13)

The passover was to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the month Abib – our April. (Ex. 12:1-6; 13:4) *After* the passover, seven days were to be fulfilled in which the Jews were to eat unleavened bread. (See Ex. 12:13-18)

Lev. 23:4-6 makes it clear that the Feast of Passover is a *separate* feast from the feast of unleavened bread:

“These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.”

“In the FOURTEENTH DAY of the first month at even is the LORD’s passover.”

“And on the FIFTEENTH DAY of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread.”

Although they are celebrated progressively and in conjunction with one another, they are consistently recognized in Scripture as two separate feasts having two distinct names and dates. (Num. 28:16-18; Deut. 16:1-6; 2 Chron. 35:17, etc.) The passover is a reference to the night of the *fourteenth* of April – not the following week. It must be remembered that the angel of the LORD passed over Egypt on one night, *not* seven.

With this in mind, let's read Acts 12:3 once again.

³ Thus explaining why it is celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox.

“And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (THEN WERE THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD.)”

Notice how careful Luke is to make it clear that Peter was arrested *during* “the days of unleavened bread.” That is, he was arrested between April 15 and 21. In other words, when Peter was arrested, the passover – held on April 14 – was *already past*.

Acts 12:4 could not possibly be referring to the passover since the next passover was *a year away*! The pagan holiday, Easter, was only *a few days away*, however.

Thus the King James translators correctly translated *pascha* as Easter in Acts 12:4, since it could not refer to the Jewish passover. In fact, to change it to “passover” would confuse the issue and make the truth of the situation unclear.

But what of the so-called “passover *season*?” Couldn’t *pascha* be referring to the whole time period, including “the days of unleavened bread?” A careful consideration of the terms involved clearly answers in the negative.

It is true that the terms “passover” and “unleavened bread” can be used interchangeably since they are celebrated in conjunction with one another. In fact, Luke 22:1 does include the passover with the *feast* of unleavened bread – no doubt because unleavened bread was mandated for both. However, where *both* the terms *passover* and “*days* (or *day*) of unleavened bread” are found in the same passage, they refer to the two as *distinct* entities.

Acts 12:3 says “*days* of unleavened bread,” not “*feast*,” making it clear that Luke was making a *distinction* between the feasts and dates involved.

Those who suggest Herod was delaying the murder of Peter out of a regard for the Jews should remember that Herod was a Roman, *not* a Jew. He had no reason to keep or reverence the Jewish passover.

Further, we would ask, what reason is there to believe the Jews would have been upset by Peter being killed at their passover? They had demanded Christ be killed during the same religious holiday! No. The murder of Jesus had been approved and Peter’s would have been no different. In fact, we should recall that it is most often *during* religious festivals that the courage for violent acts is prominent.

The Herod’s of Scripture are well known for celebrating and even for being willing to kill a man of God during such times. (See Matt. 14:6-11) Herod arrested Peter during the days of unleavened bread, *after* passover. The “days of unleavened bread” ended on the twenty-first and shortly thereafter would come the celebration of pagan Easter.⁴

It is certainly plausible that Herod did not kill Peter during the days of unleavened bread because he wanted to wait until after his own pagan festival and see to it that Peter died in the excitement.

Thus it is our conclusion that the specific identification of the timing of Peter’s arrest in Acts 12:3 means that in this instance *pascha* could not refer to the Jewish passover and is thus properly translated as “Easter” in Acts 12:4. To do otherwise would be to ignore the context, confuse the reader and make the truth of the situation unclear.

We realize that those who choose to find errors in the Bible will never be persuaded to the contrary, regardless of the proof presented. We write to demonstrate to reasonable people that the

⁴ Cf. Acts 12:21,22 where it seems a religious festival was indeed held.

King James Bible can indeed be defended... even when its critics seem to raise what they consider insurmountable arguments.