



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

*“Should Christians celebrate Easter? Should we observe ‘Easter Sunday’
in a special way in our worship?”*

I realise that, according to the calendar, this question is late by about three months!

But there were other questions that had to be answered first. In any case, since the ‘Easter’ query arises almost annually, perhaps you might wish to put aside the answer I am now offering and read it again next year!

What do the scriptures say about the celebration of 'Easter'?

The short answer is, nothing whatsoever. To put it as plainly as I am able; there is no authority in God's Word for setting aside one special day in the year as an occasion for a religious festival commemorating the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.

There is no mention of 'Easter' to be found anywhere in the Scriptures.

I am well aware of the fact that the word occurs in the 'Authorised Version' in Acts 12:4. The responsibility for this lies with William Tyndale and Thomas Cramer. They erroneously translated the word *pashe* - which means '*passover*' - as 'Easter,' and the mistranslation crept into the A.V., where it remained until the 'Revised Version' appeared and the mistake was removed.

Cramer's inadequacy as a scholar revealed itself on another occasion when, writing about the Jewish Passover celebrations he referred to the Jews eating their '*Easter lamb*'.

If you will read Acts 12 in a modern version you will see that the reference is clearly to the Jewish Passover and not to any so-called 'Easter' celebration of the Lord's resurrection.

So, just as the scriptures do not in any way teach us to hold a special *annual* celebration of the *birth* of Christ, neither are we authorised to set aside a special day for an *annual* observance of His *death* or His *resurrection*.

An Un-Christian Celebration

The simple fact is that 'Easter' is a word connected with paganism and not with Christianity, as any good English Dictionary will reveal. It is an anglicised form of '*Oestre*', the name that was given to the pagan goddess of the dawn of Spring, to whom the month of April was dedicated in Anglo-Saxon times.

Even '*The Catholic Encyclopaedic Dictionary*,' authorised by the church of Rome as its name suggests, admits 'Easter's pagan origins. It states that one of her most revered 'doctors of the Church,' the Venerable Bede, who was born in 673 AD traced those origins back to paganism, and further states that Easter eggs are '*possibly a baptised pagan custom*,' and that '*chocolate eggs and such fooleries are a degeneration of no significance*.'

Pre-dating Christianity

In Old Testament times the 'fertility' goddess appears in different cultures and under different names. The Egyptians knew her as 'Ishtar,' whilst to the Greeks, she was 'Astarte.' Her consort in Egypt was 'Osiris' and in Greece, 'Adonis,' whilst to the Babylonians he was 'Tammuz' who is mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14, where we read of women '*weeping for Tammuz*.'

In ancient mythology Tammuz was said to have been killed by a wild boar whilst tending his sheep, but his wife, being a 'goddess,' rescued him from the Underworld and brought him back to life. Those who worshipped Astarte and Tammuz believed that the onset of Winter represented the death of Tammuz and the birth of Spring represented his return to life again.

Now, bear in mind that such ideas were common enough among the pagans, when the Church spread throughout the Roman world in New Testament times. When Constantine declared Christianity to be the 'official' religion of his Empire, the temples and shrines of the pagans were either destroyed, or, more frequently, taken over by the newly elevated Roman Church. The leaders of that Church took the gods and goddesses whom the pagans had been worshipping, along with their feast days and festivals, and - to use Rome's own expression - '*baptised*' them, turning them into supposedly

'Christian' festivals.

And that is *precisely* what 'Easter' is! That is how a celebration which honoured a pagan goddess of fertility and new life, was transformed into something which was declared by the Roman Church, to celebrate the resurrection of Christ from the dead. In this convenient way, the Roman clergy saw to it that their 'converted' pagans did not lose their familiar festivals

Disagreement as to the Date!

After Christendom had adopted this pagan custom as an occasion for celebrating the Lord's resurrection, its leaders found themselves unable to agree on the date! This is not at all surprising since, even before the introduction of the 'Easter' feast, Jewish and non-Jewish Christians disagreed about the true date of the resurrection.

Jewish Christians placed it in the time of the Passover and regarded 14th Nisan as the correct date.

Non-Jewish Christians, on the other hand, always celebrated the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week - the Lord's day, and it was not until 325 AD, that the Council of Nicea decided it was necessary to authoritatively set, or fix, the date, and they chose '*the first Sunday after the full-moon which follows the Spring Equinox,*'

If you find this reference to the Spring Equinox a bit of a puzzle, this is what it means.

The Equinox is the time of the year when the Sun crosses the Equator and the day and night are equal in length. However, the result of this bizarre decision meant that the date of the celebration of Christ's resurrection could be anywhere between March 22nd and April 25th! Clearly, this was a ridiculous decision for the Council to make, because if the intention is to commemorate a historical event, the commemoration should surely be held on the exact date!

But, even although the *Council* reached this decision, the *people* did not readily accept it. Churches in different parts of the world continued to hold their own celebrations.

During one year alone in the 9th century, there were celebrations of the Resurrection of Christ on three different dates.

In France - or Gaul, as it was then called - they observed March 21st.

In Italy, it was April 18th.

In Egypt, it was April 25th, and there was so much controversy about the date that it even led to bloodshed.

Here, in the United Kingdom, as late as 1928, the Government decided that a 'fixed date' for the celebration of 'Easter' should be agreed upon. But no action was taken, because, yet again, church leaders are unable to agree on a date!

So, in the 'religious' calendar, 'Easter' continues to be regarded as a '*moveable feast.*'

What harm is there in 'Easter'?

For thinking people, there is a great deal of harm.

1. It reduces one of the most important historical events of the Christian faith, to a sham celebration and a farce, whose date shifts from year to year.

2. It trivialises and secularises a fact on which the Christian faith rests; the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, turning it into a vulgar commercial opportunity similar to 'Christmas.'

(I remember seeing '*Easter Eggs*' on sale just a few days after the 'Christmas' celebrations).

3. It undermines the scriptural teaching of the weekly celebration of the Lord's life, death and resurrection in the Lord's Supper, so faithfully observed by the New

Testament Church.

After the adoption of 'Easter' it was not long before churches began to move away from that weekly celebration, and the Roman Church introduced the 'Mass' instead.

Conclusion

If, then, we ignore the denominational celebration of 'Easter', and like the first Christians, hold faithfully to the observance of the Lord's Supper on the Lord's own Day, have we lost anything? Nothing at all!

We need no 'Easter Sunday', because every first day of the week is a celebration honouring a risen and living Saviour, and what we remember is something which goes far beyond any historical fact, however important that fact may be.

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THE ALL SUFFICIENT WORD

The Bible is an inspired revelation that will last forever, and claims to be an all sufficient guide in matters of belief, practice and life.

It is most important that we fully and clearly understand this fundamental teaching of the Scriptures about the Scriptures. In this day there are many different religions and churches, all claiming to be God authorised and God approved and yet all different in belief and teaching. All men have something on which they think they should base their religious beliefs and practices. Some appeal to their own feelings, opinions, thinking and experiences, as a basis for determining right and wrong before God. Others rely upon their priest, pastor, or church to tell them what they are to think and do. Still others follow tradition. That tradition may be one established over the years by a particular church, or it may simply be a tradition held by a man's immediate family.

If God accepts and approves all of these various ideas, and if God permits man to decide right and wrong in religion on this variety of different standards, then God is partial and a God of confusion. Yet the Bible teaches us that He is neither partial (Acts 2:11;10:34), nor a God who creates and approves of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).

The Bible teaches that the Scriptures are the only guide God recognises in religion. Hence, they are the only guide that man can recognise and follow, and still please God. Notice the following statements:

John 8:31: "If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples." Christ here points out that to be a disciple of His (that is, a Christian) a man must "continue" in HIS WORD. To "continue" means abide by, or remain within the limits of His word. Just because a man claims to be a disciple of Christ's does not make him one. Neither is one a Christian just because others say he is. One is not even a Christian because some church, or all churches, recognise him as such. One is recognised by Christ as a Christian ONLY IF that person CONTINUES IN CHRIST'S WORD. Did not the Lord Himself say so?

Then John writes, "Whoever goes onward and abides not in the teaching of Christ, has not God" (2 John 9). God's word tells us that we must believe and do to be pleasing to God. But if he does not abide by that teaching, he is WITHOUT GOD, no matter how sincere he may be. If we must "continue" in Christ's words to be His disciples, and if going beyond His word means we have not God, then surely we must conclude that Christ's teaching, or scripture, is the only guide we can follow and be saved. If this is not the case, what do these verses mean?

Other verses point out the same idea. Read Galatians 1:8,9. In this reference, Paul