

A Study of the Easter Holiday

by Pastor Roy Hogan

Let us look at what we know as the “Easter holiday.” What does the Word of God say about this holiday? The Easter holiday is observed around the world by Christians and non-Christians.

The best way for us to look at the subject “Easter” is to do so by asking a series of questions. That is how this study will progress, that is, as a series of questions.

Is Easter found in the Bible?

The Greek word for Easter is Pascha. Pascha means Passover. In all places where we have the Greek word Pascha translated in the King James Bible, it is translated *Passover* except one place. That one place is Acts 12:4 which 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.*” Yes, this is the only time the English word Easter appears in the Bible. In all other places, as mentioned above, the translation of Pascha is Passover.

In Acts 12:4 what is meant by “Easter?” Herod was not a Christian. He had no interest in observing Christ’s resurrection. He likely did not believe any of Christ’s teachings. He killed Christians. So, Easter in Acts 12:4 is the pagan Eastre (spelling varies) explained in the next paragraph and is not the Christian Easter. So, there is no contradiction or mistake in the Bible regarding Pascha being translated Passover in all places except in Acts 12:4.

Where did Easter originate?

Eastre is the name of an ancient goddess known as the “goddess of springtime.” Sacrifices were offered to the goddess Eastre and a celebration was held. This celebration was around the time the Jews were celebrating Passover each year.

Springtime gives us new life in trees budding, the flowers blooming, and the grass turning green. The earth once again becomes fertile and

yields forth life. The birds build nests. Life is coming forth. The rabbit became the symbol of the celebration known as Eastre because of the fertility of the rabbit. A lot of life can come forth from a rabbit for they reproduce abundantly. An egg is also a symbol for Eastre, the pagan celebration of Easter, for by eggs new life comes forth on the earth. So, we have the role of the rabbit and the egg regarding Easter, though this is not related to the “Christian” Easter.

Around the eighth century, Anglo-Saxon Christians adopted the name “Easter” to designate their celebration of Christ’s resurrection. So, the heathen has Eastre, the Jews have Passover, and the Christians have Easter. All three events occur about the same time during spring.

Is Easter commanded as a date of celebration, or holiday, in the Bible?

The answer is no. No scripture in the Bible requires Christians to have one day set aside to celebrate the Lord’s resurrection. In fact, nowhere in the Bible is any sect of people commanded to denote a day to commemorate Christ’s resurrection. Christians celebrate Christ’s resurrection daily.

We do know from the Bible that many days were set aside unto the Jewish people, that is, the nation of Israel, wherein special observances took place. There were *many* Jewish holidays for *many* occasions. For the most part, the Jewish people do not accept Christ, much less His resurrection. They do celebrate the Passover as a time of remembrance for the liberation of Israel from Egyptian bondage, but do not celebrate Christ’s resurrection. They, in large part, do not believe Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ.

Gentiles, who make up the Grace bride of Christ, have no days of celebration commanded in the Scripture. Listen to Colossians 2:16 *“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:”* Likewise, we find the words in Romans 14:5-6 *“One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. 6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth*

not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.” We are to celebrate the Lord every day and hold no day above another.

We are not told to observe Christmas, Easter, or any holiday. I am not advocating that Easter or Christmas should *not* be observed, but I am only trying to answer the question “does the Bible command us to observe this holiday called Easter or any other holiday, for that matter?”

Where is lent found in the Bible as a time we should observe?

We have no record of such an observance in the Bible. Lent is observed by Roman Catholics, Eastern religions, and some Protestant groups. Lent is 40 weekdays (no Sundays) between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. (Note: For year 2019, lent is from Wednesday March 6 to Saturday April 20) Lent is set aside by religious groups, such as the Catholics, as a time of penance and fasting. It is supposed to be a season of self-purification and closeness to God. It is supposed to be a time of self-denial wherein a participant gives up something they like well. The idea of giving up something for a period of time is supposed to be an outward expression of sorrow for ones’ wrongdoing. Some give up the eating of a favorite food such as chocolate. That seems like a pitiful way to express sorrow for wrong-doing toward God.

Likely, lent season is fashioned after Christ 40 days in the wilderness. Others say it originated with the time of the Babylonians who mourned the loss of the ruler Nimrod’s son for 40 days. There are many “stories” about the origination of lent. It is not Biblical. It is a ritual of, primarily, the Roman Catholic Church.

What is Good Friday?

In some places, Good Friday is noted as a holiday. In our area, some businesses have a day off for employees on Good Friday. Some businesses are closed on this day. Christians set up Good Friday as the day Christ died on the cross. Certainly, His death was brutal but it brought salvation to mankind. Later in this article we will find Good

Friday is **not** the day of Christ's death.

What time and what day did Christ die and what time and day did he resurrect?

If Christ was taken from the cross on the day of his death on the afternoon of Good Friday and was out of the tomb early Easter Sunday morning, as some believe, how do we say Christ was buried three days and three nights? How do we say Christ was "three days and three nights" in the heart of the earth? In other words, could it be there is a fallacy in Good Friday and Easter Sunday? There are many fallacies in mans' traditions. The traditional thinking of many folk regarding Easter is flawed.

Christ had to spend **72 hours** in the grave to fulfill the Scripture. Matthew 12:40 says "*For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*" Jonah 1: 17 says "*Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*" The Lord said himself in John 11:9 "*Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day?*" Then, there are 12 hours a night. One day is 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness for a total of 24 hours. Thus, three days and three nights equal 72 hours.

There are important facts to address in order to gain an understanding of the subject of exactly when Christ went into the grave and when he came out:

First, the Jewish day was divided at 6 p.m. That is, a day ended and the new day began at 6 p.m. considering clock-time as we now know it. Leviticus 23:32 says "*It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.*" This verse defines a day as a period of twenty-four hours and sets the day as spanning from evening-to-evening. As we know in this age, days now go from midnight to midnight. Midnight-to-midnight is the manner of timekeeping set forth by the Romans- not the Hebrew people.

Secondly, the *weekly* Sabbath was always approximately 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday by present-day timekeeping. The *weekly* Sabbath was always on Saturday, which is the seventh day of the week. Sunday, which is the first day of the week, is not the Sabbath and should not be called the Sabbath. Sunday is the *first day of the week* as we know from I Corinthians 16:2 and Acts 20:7. I once had neighbors who were Seventh Day Adventist. They stopped all activity at 6 pm Friday and resumed normal life Saturday at 6 pm.

Thirdly, and this is very important, one time each year Passover was observed. It was an *annual* observance set forth in Exodus chapter 12. During the week of the annual Passover, there were **two** Sabbaths. One was the usual *weekly* Sabbath occurring always on Saturday and the other was the *annual* Sabbath occurring on Thursday associated with the Passover. The Sabbath associated with the annual Passover was a “high day” Sabbath as recorded in John 19:31 which reads “*The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.*”

Thus, there were **two** preparation days (explained below) the week of Christ death for He was offered at the time of the annual Passover feast. What is “preparation day?” Preparation day was the day *before* a Sabbath set forth for getting ready for observing the Sabbath. The preparation day was Friday before the *weekly* Sabbath occurring Saturday and was a time to *prepare* food for the Sabbath for no cooking was allowed on the *weekly* Sabbath day. To repeat, food was prepared on Friday for the observance of Saturday Sabbath.

Likewise, the day before the *annual* “high day” Sabbath, which occurred on Thursday of Passover week, was a Preparation Day. From Exodus 12:16 we read that food preparation was legal on the *annual* Sabbath associated with Passover, but seems all other activities were prohibited just as they were for weekly Sabbath occurring on Saturday.

Christ must be taken down from the cross on preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, for no one could hang on a cross on the

Sabbath as John 19:31 says *“The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.”* Christ was removed from the cross on Wednesday evening, preparation day, just before 6 pm, the start of the *annual* Passover Sabbath (Thursday). There was a race against the clock to get his body down before 6 pm. If prisoners were not dead by, say, 3 pm, their legs were broken to allow them to slump down and die by suffocation. When the soldier inspected the Lord on the cross, he found there was no need to break his legs as we read in John 19:36 *“For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.”* Jesus had given up the Ghost by the time the soldiers arrived for his inspection. Truly, Christ **gave** His life; no man took it.

As soon as His body was removed from the cross that Wednesday afternoon, Joseph and Nicodemus prepared his body for burial. They then carried him a short distance to the garden near Calvary, within walking distance I am told, and placed Him in Joseph’s tomb. By the time His body was prepared for burial and He was placed in the tomb, that is, in the heart of the earth, it was likely very near 6 pm on Wednesday.

Let us take a look at the resurrection day of our Lord. In Matthew 28:1 we read: *In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn (dawn means “to draw nigh”, and does not mean daylight) toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.* The two Marys’ of Matthew 28:1 came to the tomb about 6 pm Saturday. They were informed in Matthew 28:6 *he is not here for he is risen.*

We read in Mark 16:1-2 *And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. 2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.* These three ladies came to the tomb at the rising of the sun on the *first* day of the week (Sunday morning). One of the ladies was Mary Magdalene who had visited the tomb at 6 pm the

evening before. Like the two ladies who came to the tomb at sundown the previous evening (Matthew 28), an informant advised these three ladies Christ was not in the tomb. Mark 16:6 *And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.*

Thus, we conclude: Christ went into the tomb Wednesday evening about 6 pm and, counting 72 hours, arose Saturday evening about 6pm. This fulfilled the Scripture that He must be in the heart of the earth 3 days and 3 nights for 3 times 24 equals 72.

So, what do you make of Good Friday and Easter Sunday? Why not celebrate Easter on Saturday? Because, to a Christian, Easter Sunday is **not** a celebration of Christ being **in** tomb but is a celebration that he is **out** of the tomb. The tomb is **empty!** Good Friday is an incorrect day to commemorate Christ being taken from the cross and placed in the tomb. He was placed in the tomb on Wednesday about sundown.

One final note in regard to John 19:14 *“And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!”* In this verse, Christ is before Pilate at the 6th hour. However, the other three Gospels record Christ hanging on the cross at the 6th hour. For example, we read in Matt 27:45 *“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.”* Is this then a contradiction between the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Matthew? There is an explanation. The first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are based on Jewish time (new day starts at our 6 pm). The Gospel of John uses Roman time where the new day begins at 12 midnight by our present time. There is, thus, no contradiction in God’s eternal word, the 1611 King James Bible. Christ was before Pilate at the sixth hour, which was our present-day 6 a.m. Roman time. Most of Christ’s cruel trial and scourging took place in the darkness (night) of the last day of his life before going to the ol’ rugged cross to die for the sins of humanity.

Go to church Easter Sunday to join in the celebration that the tomb is empty.