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A Bible Study

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EASTER

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'...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*," "*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 which "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 which 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, pascha 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 chose to satisfy such a desire. A more plausible explanation is offered by 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. (See the editor's tapes, Satan's Church). It is an ancient festival derived from the worship of Ashtaroth (Judges 2:13; 10:6)(Also known as Astarate, Ishtar, etc. By quickly repeating these names we can easily see how they became our word Easter.)

This festival was held in late April as a celebration of the earth "regenerating itself after the 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 (Ezk. 8:14) who was also her *husband!* The perverted rites used to celebrate this festival would take place at *sunrise* on Easter morning (Ezk. 8:13-16).

It doesn't take much thought to see that that Easter has *never* had *anything* to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, the term was *assimilated* by the Roman church

as it sought to "Christianize" paganism and thus *wrongly* came to be associated with the celebration of the resurrection of Christ. (Thus explaining why it is celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox.)

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 door posts of their homes. The name "passover" comes from the fact that the Lord promised, "When I see the blood, I will *passover* you" (Ex. 12:13).

The Passover was to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the month Abib (Ex. 12:1-6; 13:4)-our April. *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 make 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, II 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:

"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 twentyfirst and shortly thereafter would come the celebration of pagan Easter. (Cf. Acts 12:21, 22 where it seems a religious festival was indeed held.)

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 12:13 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 *King James Bible* can indeed be defended-even when its critics seem to raise what they consider insurmountable arguments.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth" (II Tim. 2:15).

In Eph. 2 the Apostle Paul sets forth the *basic three-fold division* in God's dealings with mankind: **Time Past** (vs.11, 12), **But Now** (v.13), **The Ages to Come** (v.7). When the Bible is "laid out" according to this divinely inspired design we easily get an overview of not only *what* we are reading but *when* and to *whom* it was written. Thus the Word of God itself provides us with the key to its own proper understanding and right division:

Time Past: Eph. 2:11, 12 sets forth the basic issue in *Time Past* as *the division between the Circumcision and the Uncircumcision*, between the nation Israel and the Gentiles. When you find this issue governing the way God was working with men, you know you are in *Time Past*. This covers "Old Testament" (see Gen. 17:9-14, Deut. 4:5-8, Num. 23:9) as well as *Matthew thru John* (see Rom. 15:8, Matt.10:5,6; 15:24, John 4:22) and the *early Acts* period (see Luke 24:47, Acts 1 :6,8 ; 2:14,22,36; 5 :32 ; 11 : 19).

But Now: Eph. 2:13 indicates that in the *But Now* portion Gentiles are no longer "far off" but rather this "middle wall of partition" between Israel and the Gentiles has been eliminated and now "*those who were far off are made nigh.*" *Romans thru Philemon* provide the doctrine for the dispensation of grace (Rom. 11:13; 15:16; 16:25, I Cor. 14:37, Eph. 3:1-9).

The Ages to Come: God will bring His purposes to fruition and thus Eph 2:7 points to the *Ages to Come*. The books of Hebrews *thru Revelation* focus on this.

Our multi-color chart has a *foldout section* to demonstrate the importance of the secret, hidden nature of the present dispensation of grace (Eph. 3:1-9). Fold the chart to hide the "mystery" section and you will see the perfect continuity of that "which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets *since the world began*" (Acts 3:21). Open the chart to reveal the *mystery program* and you will visualize how the prophetic program has been temporarily *interrupted*, by "the revelation of the *mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest*" (Rom. 16:25, 26).

The present dispensation of grace is “the mystery” hid in God until first revealed to the Apostle Paul (Eph. 3:1-9, Col. 1:24-26, Rom. 16:25, 26, I Tim. 2:4-7, Tit. 1:2, 3, etc). Thus in Paul’s writings alone we find the doctrine, position, walk and destiny of the body of Christ, Remember: While *all* Scripture is not written to or *about* us. This is the *key* to understanding the Bible.
