April 1, 2018 am

Remembering the Death of Jesus

Reading: **Hebrews 9:11-22**

* On the first Sunday after the first full moon after the first day of Spring, many celebrate a day that is called Easter. Where did this holiday come from? What are its origins?
* For many who profess a faith in Jesus, Easter is a time to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. For some, it is the culmination of a longer period with special celebrations tied to Jewish practices (Passover) with a special emphasis on the last week of Jesus’ life.
* Holy Week it is called by some – begins with Palm Sunday – the day when he entered Jerusalem on the donkey and palm leaves were placed in His path and then Good Friday – the day of His crucifixion – ending with Easter – His resurrection.
* “Just as there are many traditions surrounding the celebration of Easter, there are many stories and legends surrounding the origin of the word Easter.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* “But in English-speaking countries … Easter takes its name from a pagan goddess from Anglo-Saxon England who was described in a book by the 8th century English Monk Bede. ‘Eostre was a goddess of spring or renewal and that’s why her feast is attached to the vernal equinox,’ Professor Cusack said.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
* “Despite its significance as a Christian holy day, many of the traditions and symbols that play a key role in Easter observances actually have roots in pagan celebrations—particularly the pagan goddess Eostre (or Ostara), the ancient Germanic goddess of spring—and in the Jewish holiday of [Passover](https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/passover).”[[3]](#footnote-3)
* “Alternatively, as Hutton suggests, Eosturmonath simply meant ‘the month of opening,’ which is comparable to the meaning of ‘April’ in Latin. The names of both the Saxon and Latin months (which are calendrically similar) were related to spring, the season when the buds open.
* So Christians in ancient Anglo-Saxon and Germanic areas called their Passover holiday what they did—doubtless colloquially at first—simply because it occurred around the time of Eosturmonath/Ostarmanoth. …The Christian title ‘Easter,’ then, essentially reflects its general date in the calendar, rather than the Paschal festival having been re-named in honor of a supposed pagan deity.”[[4]](#footnote-4) (Christianity Today website)
* But then there is this on the Billy Graham website - “The origins of Easter can be traced to several pre-Christian cultures. The name Easter is attributed to Eastre, the Teutonic goddess of spring and fertility, Astarte the Phoenician goddess, Ishtar the Babylonian goddess, and Oster, the German equivalent. Eastre was celebrated on the day of the Spring Equinox.

Jesus was crucified at the time of the Passover; read John 13:1; 18:28, 39; 19:14. In the early centuries of the Christian church, the celebration of Christ’s death and resurrection, based on the timing of the Jewish Passover, coincided with Eastre’s festival.

As pagans were transformed by the Gospel, the Christian celebration took the pagan name. In the year 325, the Nicene Council set the annual observance of Easter on the first Sunday following the full moon after the March equinox (usually March 20 or 21).

Some Christians prefer the name Resurrection Sunday instead of Easter. This avoids any confusion with pagan roots and also exalts the significance of Christ’s death and resurrection above the commercialization of Easter. May God help us to honor Christ every day, including the day when we especially remember His glorious resurrection.[[5]](#footnote-5)

* Note the differences in the information found on the Christianity Today website (this was a magazine founded by Billy Graham and the April issue is dedicated to him) and the Billy Graham website.

GOD IS NOT THE AUTHOR OF THIS CONFUSION!

(**1 Cor. 14:33**)

**SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION**

* “It is clear, therefore, that Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.” (Wikipedia, Second Vatican Council, 1962-65)
* “However, the Christian tradition of the Easter Bunny has distinctly Christian origins. The ancient Greeks thought rabbits could reproduce as virgins. Such a belief persisted until early medieval times (middle ages – 500-1500 AD) when the rabbit became associated with the Virgin Mary, who we know became pregnant without knowing man.
* During the medieval period, rabbits began appearing in illuminated manuscripts and paintings where the Virgin Mary was depicted, serving as an allegorical illustration of her virginity. Conversely, there is considerable documentation that the rabbit was once associated with virginity, the Virgin Mary, and with the season itself, in a Christian context.
* As a result, we must conclude, the Easter Bunny is a distinctly Christian symbol, and does not have pagan origins as occasionally claimed by those who despise the popular children's myth.”[[6]](#footnote-6) (Seriously?!)

**WE OUGHT TO APPEAL TO SCRIPTURE AND NOT TRADITION**

* If we have to search ancient history and traditions outside of the scriptures to find the origin of a religious holiday, shouldn’t that in and of itself raise a question in our minds?
* This was the very problem Jesus had with the Pharisees on several occasions.
* Their traditions (of men) became as if not more important than the Law.
* Relevant questions concerning any practice:
* Is the practice from heaven or from men? (**Matt. 21**)
* Can we do it by faith according to the faith?
* Is it in the name of Jesus? (his authority, rule, kingship)

**THE RESURRECTION**

* It is the key note of most of the sermons in the book of Acts.
* If Jesus was not raised, our faith is in vain, the apostles are liars, and we are still in our sins. (**1 Cor. 15:14-17**)
* We have many proofs of his resurrection (**Acts 1:3**) – intended to be historical evidence.
* It is the declaration that Jesus is the Son of God (**Romans 1:4**)

**THE LORD’S SUPPER**

* This practice is from heaven – we do so by faith in the name/authority of Jesus Christ.
* I don’t believe it is accurate to tell others that we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus every Sunday when we eat the Lord’s Supper. It is not a memorial of his resurrection but rather of His death. Let’s not add to the confusion. Let’s be as true to the text as we teach that others ought to be.
* As important and significant as the resurrection of Jesus is, that is not what we are remembering at the time we eat the Lord’s Supper.
* The Lord’s Supper is a proclamation of the Lord’s death(**1 Cor. 11:26**)
* The bread – his broken body – broken in the last day of his life – at the cross
* The fruit of the vine – his shed blood – he gave his life – life is in the blood
* The covenant God made with us was dedicated with his blood. (**Heb. 9:18**)
* *“Christ died for our sins”* (**1 Cor. 15:3**)
* His death was the means of our redemption(**Heb. 9:15**)
* Our sins are remitted – we are purged – we are purified by his blood (**Heb. 9:21-23**)
* He offered himself – it was a sacrifice for sin – to put away sin. (**Heb. 9:26, 28**)
* He was *wounded for our transgressions*, *bruised for our iniquities* – we are healed *by His stripes* – he was an *offering for sin* (**Isa. 53:5, 10**)
* We are to be thinking about his sacrifice – the giving up of himself – his body.

(**1 Cor. 11:27-29**)

* Together, we need to be reminded of the price of our salvation.

1. <https://www.allabouthistory.org/origin-of-the-word-easter-faq.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-15/the-origins-of-easter-from-pagan-roots-to-chocolate-eggs/8440134> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/history-of-easter> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2009/april/was-easter-borrowed-from-pagan-holiday.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://billygraham.org/answer/is-it-true-that-the-name-easter-is-pagan-in-origin/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.catholic.org/lent/story.php?id=67999> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)