

## Should Christians Observe Easter?

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by Ferrell Jenkins

Easter is a widely-observed annual celebration commemorating the resurrection of Christ. You probably have noticed that Easter comes at a different time each year. "Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon that falls on or next after the vernal equinox (Mar. 21 in the Gregorian calendar); if the full moon happens on Sunday Easter is celebrated one week later. Easter Sunday cannot be earlier than March 22 or later than April 25; dates of all other movable church feasts depend on that of Easter" (Webster).

### The Origin Of Easter

Some church historians assert that Easter observance began in the first century, but they must admit that their first evidence for the observance comes from the second century (**Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 11:207; Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 1:137**). There soon arose a bitter controversy over which day Easter was to be celebrated. Some were observing it on any day of the week, and others were celebrating it only on the nearest Sunday. This indicates that they had no instruction from the Lord on this matter. By AD 325 the council of Nicaea decreed that it should be on Sunday, but did not fix the particular Sunday. The exact time of observance was determined by later councils.

### Is Easter In The Bible?

The word *Easter* is only found one time in the English translation of the Bible and there it is a mistranslation. The King James rendering of Acts 12:4 used the phrase "*intending after Easter.*" Albert Barnes, a noted Presbyterian commentator who wrote in the nineteenth century when the King James Version was widely used, said,

"There never was a more absurd or unhappy translation than this. The original is simply after the Passover. The word *Easter* now denotes the festival observed by many Christian churches in honor of the resurrection of the Saviour. But the original has no reference to that, nor is there the slightest evidence that any such festival was observed at the time when this book was written. The translation is not only unhappy, as it does not convey at all the meaning of the original, but because it may contribute to foster an opinion that such a festival was observed in the time of the apostles" (**Barnes Notes on the New Testament, XI: 190**).

The word translated *Passover*, and the one used in Acts 12:4, is *pascha*. It means "a passing over" and is used with reference to the Jewish festival of Passover which was celebrated on the 14th of the month Nisan. This same word is used in Matthew 26:2; Mark 14:1; Luke 2:41; 22:1; John 2:13, 23 and other places, and in every instance is translated *Passover* in the King James Version except Acts 12:4. More recent versions correctly use the term *Passover* in Acts 12:4. It is absurd to think that Herod Agrippa I wanted to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. The Scripture says that he "*laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword ... he proceeded to arrest Peter also*" (Acts 12:1-3).

### New Testament Christians Did Not Observe Easter

The famous fourteenth edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* says,

"There is no indication of the

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