

Easter or Passover?

All my life, I have heard the word "Easter", especially around March and April every year! In most church traditions and in Western society as a whole today, Easter is associated with the resurrection of Christ. As I grew up, I celebrated Easter along with almost everyone else, recognizing the beauty of the little Easter eggs, the cute little rabbits, the chocolate bunnies and eggs, special church services, the talk of new life, marked increase of church attendance, et cetera.

Just a few years ago, my curiosity arose when I suddenly started thinking, "What do rabbits and eggs have to do with the resurrection of Christ?", and how did we acquire the word "Easter"?

In my quest to learn the answer to this question, I started with the Bible. The only appearance of the word "Easter" that I could find in the major recognized Bible versions was in the King James version at Acts 12:4. This is a very poor translation because the word "Easter" doesn't come close to the word "Passover", which is the accurate translation of the word "pascha" (Greek, for Passover) that is found there. A new question arose. Why did they substitute Easter in place of Passover?

Easter, according to Encarta Encyclopedia, was originally a pagan festival honoring Eastre, the Anglo-Saxon name of a Teutonic (Germanic) goddess of light, spring, and fertility. At the time of the vernal equinox, the day in the spring when day and night are of equal length, sacrifices were offered in her honor. St. Bede, an eighth century English scholar, believed that our Easter can be traced to this goddess and her festival.

Respectfully, perhaps St. Bede was wrong. Easter can be traced much further back than the eighth century. The council of Nicaea, a great meeting of ministers and scholars in 325 A.D., ruled that Easter should be celebrated throughout the Christian world. This was long before St. Bede! It is very likely that St. Bede's Eastre, was just another name for a goddess originating in Babylon. Her name was Ishtar. Her name appeared in different forms in every society in the ancient world. She was worshiped among the Babylonians, perhaps as early as 3500 B.C, as the Great Mother, the queen of Heaven, the queen of war, and the goddess of fertility. Why didn't the Council of Nicaea rule that the world should celebrate Passover, instead of Easter? Why did they

rule that the world's most sacred event, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ be remembered by using the name of a Babylonian fertility goddess?

Passover is the feast that observes the night before the Jews were allowed to leave Egypt. They were instructed to paint their door posts with the blood of an unblemished lamb in order for the Lord to 'pass over' them when taking the life of all the firstborn in Egypt (see Exodus 12:1-14). Jesus, on the very eve of His death, celebrated Passover, not Easter, with His disciples.

When God originally gave instructions for the Passover, He stated that it was to be a "statute forever throughout your generations" (Leviticus 23:14). Paul, the Apostle, states

"...Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the feast..." (I Cor. 5: 7-8). The prophet Ezekiel indicates that during the coming time of Jesus reign on earth, "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the Passover..." (Ezekiel 45:21). Even with Jesus present on earth, this great feast will still be observed every year as a memorial of what He accomplished as our Passover lamb. Jesus Christ, being the unblemished lamb of God, was the fulfillment of the Passover. He was crucified, buried, and was resurrected during this feast.

Passover and what it stands for, is the event we are to remember at this time of year! Celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a great honor the Lord has left in our care, but why should we do it using the name of a Babylonian fertility goddess? As we continue to celebrate this great event, why don't we call it what it should have been called all along and what it will be called after Jesus returns, Passover?