Glad Tidings

"And we bring you good of the promise made unto the fathers…" (Acts 13:32)

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Why "Easter" is in the Bible

(Jerry Fite)

IN the 1611 King James Version of the Bible we read, *"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 (Acts 12:4).* Were the first century Christians the festival commemorating the resurrection of Jesus? Why is the Greek word *"pascha"* translated *"Passover"* everywhere else in the King James Version, except here in Acts 12:4?

The 47 actual translators of the Greek and Hebrew Scripture into English were divided into six committees. Besides referring to the texts, the scholars were instructed to follow the Bishop's Bible (1568) as long as it was accurate with the Hebrew and Greek texts. There were also to consult other translations such as Tyndale's New Testament (1534), and The Geneva Bible (1560).

Starting with Tyndale, the translations of the Bible reveal something interesting. The word *"easter"* was used referring to the Jewish Passover. In the early "English" translations such as Wycliffe's Bible (1380-1382) the Greek word *"pascha"* was not translated, but transliterated, "pask." For example, we read *"...the pask of the Jews was at hand"* in John 11:55. The context clearly is speaking of people going up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast which was "at hand." William Tyndale was the first to use *"easter"* to translate *"pascha."*

In Tyndale's 1534 addition to the New Testament, *"easter"* or *"ester"* occurs fourteen times, and *"esterlambe"* eleven times. But in the middle of the 16th. Century, such translations as the Geneva Bible (1560) and the Bishop's Bible (1568) completely eliminated *"easter"* from the New Testament translation (Geneva), or reduced it to two references: John 11:55, Acts 12:4 (Bishops' Bible). In 1611, the translators of the King James did not follow the Bishop's Bible in John 11:55, translating *"the Jews' Passover"* instead of *"the Iewes ester."* But they kept *"Easter"* in Acts 12:4)

Defenders of the King James Bible argue that the Passover only referred to the events of the 14th. day when the Passover lamb was offered, not the week following. Peter had been captured after the "Passover lamb" was offered (cf. Acts 12:3). So, the word "easter" was used to denote the season following the offering of the "Passover lamb." If this is the reason, it is not consistent with Scripture. Ezekiel writes, *"In the first month in the fourteenth day of the month, he shall have the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten" (Ezekiel 45:21).* Luke writes, *"Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover" (Luke 22:1, King James Bible)* The "Passover" refers to the entire feast of unleavened bread, from start to finish.

Surely *"Easter"* was not left in Acts 12:4, inadvertently. The five other committees and editors overseeing the work would surely have caught it, avoiding the inconsistency.

In the 16th. Century, the English-speaking world celebrated "Easter" as the resurrection of Christ and fulfillment of the Jewish Passover, observed in the same season. Tyndale, the Bishop's Bible, and the King James translators may have simply wanted this fact emphasized where they thought they could legitimately retain it. If so, this is a case where practice trumps Scripture as originally revealed in the Hebrew and Greek texts.