

THE ORIGINS OF EASTER

by Daud Ben Israel

Easter has for centuries been recognized as the celebration of Messiah's (Christ's) resurrection. Included within the celebration are a variety of customs that are practiced. Such as, making Easter baskets filled with colored eggs, chocolate bunny rabbits, fruit, and candies of different sorts. Also, the coloring of eggs and having Easter egg hunts are regarded as part of the celebration. On Easter special emphasis is placed upon eggs and bunny rabbits. In the stores and in advertisements the preparation for Easter is almost always highlighted by eggs and bunny rabbits. Since a great deal of emphasis is placed on bunny rabbits and eggs, then we must question the connection that bunny rabbits and eggs have with the resurrection of the Messiah. It appears that rabbits and eggs have no connection with the resurrection. The scriptures surely do not speak of rabbits and eggs as part of the resurrection. So, where did this aspect of celebration come from? In order to address this question, the history of the resurrection celebration must first be noted. Afterwhich, the origin of Easter and its customs shall be examined.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE RESURRECTION CELEBRATION

The focus of the believer during the first and second centuries was the death and resurrection of Yahshua (Jesus) the Messiah. These two events were central and of critical importance to the foundation of the gospel and faith of the believer. The festivals celebrated by the early believers in connection with the Messiah's death and resurrection were the annual feasts of Passover and First Fruits (see Lev. 23:4-11). The early believers recognized the Messiah as the fulfillment of what these festivals represented. Yeshua the Messiah became regarded as the true Paschal (Passover) Lamb and the first fruits of all that rise from the dead. There is no biblical evidence that points to the early believers observing a festival by the name "Easter". Although in Acts 12:4 of the Old King James Version the word "Easter" is mentioned, it is an improper translation of the Greek term "pasche". "Pasche" is literally translated "passover", and was understood by the early believers as "passover". Only Passover and First Fruits were observed in connection with the death and resurrection of Yahshua. Another reason for the early believers' observance of Passover and First Fruits was because Yahshua died the day after Passover day and rose on the day of First Fruits.

EASTER'S ORIGIN AND CUSTOMS

Since there appears to be no connection between the resurrection and the Easter Celebration, let us consider the origins of Easter. The name "Easter" is derived from the words "Eostre" and "Ishtar". "Eostre" is the name of the ancient Saxon female deity of spring (fertility). "Ishtar" is the name of the ancient Babylonian female deity of love and generation (fertility). The name "Easter" (Eostre or Ishtar) was also used to represent the spring festivals devoted to the deity of love and fertility. Its celebration goes back about 4,000 years, which is obviously before the birth of Yahshua. It originated from the Babylonian religious system where it is believed that idolatry began after the flood. The practices associated with the Ishtar festival were symbolic of Ishtar. She was the mother deity who presided over childbirth, and in her honor women sacrificed their virginity on the feast day or became temple prostitutes.

Rabbits and eggs also have their origin within the ancient Babylonian cult of the Easter festival. According to the legend, the white rabbit played in the full Easter moon that was pure white, and brought gifts of colored eggs to children who were good. From this legend the rabbit and the egg became important symbols of the celebration. It should be noted that both the rabbit and the egg represent fertility. The

rabbit was known as a quick reproducer of many rabbits, and the egg was an emblem of life to the ancient pagan worshipper. It was believed that the egg symbolized the universe and that mankind was formed and then enclosed within it. The Persians in their Easter festival, which they regarded as the Solar New Year, gave colored eggs to each other in celebration of the sun's resurrection.

Since there was no connection between the resurrection and the Easter celebration during the time of the early believers, then how did Easter become associated with the resurrection? From the time of Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicea in 325 CE, Christianity became the prominent religion of the Roman empire. From this time in history, a process of blending pagan practices and Christian beliefs took place. There was an edict that forced pagan temple worshippers to accept Christianity as their religion. As a result, the temples of idolatry became christianized on the surface while maintaining pagan practices within the framework of the church. For example, the mother deity and child form of worship that existed prior to the edict was represented in Mary and Yahshua (Jesus). During the 4th century after 325 CE, Mary was regarded as the Queen of Heaven. Pagan practices developed a strong hold in the church. Since church leaders were unable to stop the people from embracing pagan practices, they included

these practices within the framework of the church. During the time when Passover and First Fruits were being celebrated, the Easter festival was being celebrated. Over a period of time in history, the Easter festival and the resurrection celebration were blended together. It became so blended that when one speaks of celebrating Easter it is naturally associated with the resurrection of the Messiah by many. It is also seen historically in the King James Version translation of the Bible. In Acts 12:4, the Greek term "pasche" which literally means "passover" was translated as "Easter".

Based upon the information given, it must be concluded that Easter has no connection with the celebration of Yahshua's resurrection. Remember Elohim loves you, and BE AWARE OF WHAT YOU CELEBRATE.

REFERENCES

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