Intending After Easter

(Kent Heaton)

 The celebration of Easter is “a Christian festival marking the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (Encarta Dictionary). Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the Spring Equinox (with the exception of the Eastern Orthodox Church which uses a different time table for calculating the date). For most people Easter is a Biblical observance in accordance with Luke’s account in Acts 12:4 which reads, “*And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternion of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people*.” Herod had “killed James the brother of John with the sword” and arrested Peter to meet the same fate. Luke writes of Peter’s deliverance from prison by the angel of God and Herod’s violent death (Acts 12:5-24).

If you tell a lie long enough people will believe it to be a truth. Remarkable as it may seem with many people, Easter is not in the Bible. It is found in the King James Version of the book of Acts but true Bible students understand the gross misrepresentation of the text by the King James translators. Albert Barnes writes, “***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 Savior. 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.***”

 Paul warned the church at Colosse of those who would establish “festivals” and “not holding fast to the Head” (Colossians 2:16-19). With the exception of Christmas, celebrating Easter is one of the most important religious holidays enjoyed by the Christian religious world. Neither Christmas nor Easter were celebrated by the New Testament disciples, ordained by the apostles, suggested by Christ, nor instituted by the Holy Spirit and yet many professing Christ pretend these celebrations are Biblical. It is only a pretense without Biblical authority.

 The result of attitudes that embrace Christmas and Easter is a view toward what is written in the Bible and what is not written in the Bible. The Lord told the people of Israel not to add to nor take away from His law (Deuteronomy 4:2). John affirmed in the Revelation that man should not add or take away anything from that message (Revelation 22:18-19). Yet every year thousands of people add Easter to the Bible and celebrate it as if the Lord instituted it. Is it wrong to celebrate Easter as a religious holiday inspired by God? No more than adding anything else one desires to the Bible.

 Jesus did institute one celebration that most of the religious world fails to observe in accordance with divine Scripture. “*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom*” (Matthew 26:26-29). The New Testament disciples celebrated the resurrection every first day of the week.

**The Lure of the Easy Way**

(Dan S. Shipley)

 “And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah” (1 Kings 12:26-27).

Whether or not Jeroboam’s fears were well founded is uncertain. However, of one thing we can be sure. He was more concerned about the people’s loyalty to him than to God. To accomplish his aims, he shrewdly baits his trap with something that entices most all men – the lure of the easy way. He told them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem.” Little did it matter, apparently, that he gave them idols, pretended priests and pagan worship. The important thing was that he provided them with an easy religion – and that overshadowed all else. They became victims of the easy way.

Many are the mortals who have succumbed to the lure of the easy way, both spiritually and otherwise. Our advertising agencies have learned the devil’s sales pitch well. They tell you how to lose weight – the easy way. They offer easy ways to quit smoking, to achieve physical fitness or financial independence.

People haven’t changed much since Jeroboam’s day. They still fall for the same old bait, “the easy way”; and in doing so have filled the prisons, swelled the welfare rolls and lengthened unemployment lines (Not to mention the irretrievable waste of time, talent and potential).

 And, as in Jeroboam’s day, the easy way is still a popular way in religion. The prospects of having to “go up to Jerusalem” (or even across town) is still too much for too many. They would take the denying self out of following Christ; the giving diligence out of seeking approval; and the striving out of entering in at the straight gate. Such would have the benefits without the bother. As Jesus says of others, “They have their reward.”

 As might be expected, even the Lord’s church has been touched by the lure of the easy way. It is felt in our teaching program when preachers and teachers find it “too much” to make adequate preparation of their lessons and when Bible class students find it “too much” to study and prepare assigned work. It affects our visitation program when members find it “too much” to leave their comfortable homes and TV programs to call on the sick or unfaithful. It affects our personal evangelism program when brethren think it “too much” to try and teach others the way of salvation. It affects the purity of the church when we think it “too much” to finally discipline the unruly among us. Of all things that contribute to the weakening of the church, none is more influential than taking the easy way.

The narrow way can never be the easy way. Not only are the ways different, they lead to different destinations (Matthew 7:14). “Going up to Jerusalem” may require self-denial, sacrifice and hard work but it’s the way of the cross – and that leads home.