

# Resolving the Passover Controversy

## Part 1

### When Was the Passover Sacrifice?

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The Church of God has claimed for decades that its observance of the New Testament Passover is a continuation of the Old Testament Passover instituted in Egypt. Repeatedly, the statement has been made that Jesus merely changed the symbols of the roast lamb and bitter herbs into the symbols of the bread and wine. To bolster this concept, attempts have been made to prove that the original Passover was observed at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, that the Bible clearly indicates this to be true, and that the Jews mistakenly changed the time of its observance to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>. But are these things true?

Many sermons and articles have been presented attempting to prove that the Passover was always intended to be kept at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. I have heard this for over thirty years, and while each individual has undoubtedly felt he was presenting an ironclad case, there is very simple opposing evidence for every point presented. More than that, there are significant questions and problems with the early 14<sup>th</sup> view which are rarely addressed at all. Here is a summary of the major ones. Each item will be addressed in further detail in the succeeding pages:

- Much is made of the concept that “between the evenings” (*ben ha-arbayim*) is after sunset (during twilight). Most of the support for this idea comes from commentaries or various English renderings of some of the verses. But when other uses of this phrase in Scripture are examined, we do not find this to be the case. For example, the evening sacrifice, which was usually offered around 3 p.m. (but earlier in the afternoon on special occasions) is also described in the Scriptures as being offered “between the evenings”.
- Many early 14<sup>th</sup> arguments are based on the idea that the Passover is the entire 14<sup>th</sup> day of Abib. The Scriptures speak of the Passover occurring **on** the 14<sup>th</sup>, but never say the Passover **is** the 14<sup>th</sup>. Christ is our Passover. The Passover is a sacrifice, not a day.
- The Passover is not always defined as occurring “*ben ha-arbayim*”. In Deuteronomy 16:6 and

Joshua 5:10, the Passover is described as occurring “*ba-erev*”, or “at even” (KJV) on the 14<sup>th</sup>. This is the same time expression used in Exodus 12:18 to define when the first day of Unleavened Bread begins. Thus it becomes clear that the Passover was kept around the time that the feast of Unleavened Bread began, not one day earlier.

- Numbers 33 states that the Israelites began their journey from Rameses (the territory in which they lived, Genesis 47:11) on the 15<sup>th</sup>, not the 14<sup>th</sup>. The Israelites did not have to gather at the city of Raamses (note the difference in spelling, Exodus 1:11) located in the north before beginning their journey south as some in support of the early 14<sup>th</sup> view have claimed. The extra time involved in such an unnecessary detour and delay presents problems regarding lack of sleep and food, as well as requiring a very convoluted reading of Exodus 12–13.
- The idea of a “domestic Passover”, one kept entirely in the home, is often presented to make it easier to say Jesus observed a Passover apart from the temple and priesthood. Yet every Passover described in the Bible (except the original for obvious reasons) is centered around the tabernacle or temple. Numbers 9 instituted a second Passover partly for those who were on a journey and unable to make it to God’s chosen meeting place for the Passover in the first month. And Deuteronomy 16 strictly forbids a “domestic Passover”.

- The argument is sometimes made that “the place God chose to place His name” is the entire city of Jerusalem, and that the Passover could be killed anywhere in its environs. This concept, though, ignores the fact that the Passover was a sacrificial offering, as clearly stated in Numbers 9 and elsewhere. Leviticus 17 and Deuteronomy 12 expressly prohibit the slaying of *any* sacrifice apart from “the place God chose to place His name” because the blood of all sacrifices had to be offered on God’s altar. These chapters make it plain that it was this atoning blood that made the Passover a sacrifice.
- While it has been stated as an article of faith that at some time the Jews changed the timing of the Passover, just when that would have been is extremely difficult to pin down. Some claim it must have happened after Ezra’s time, since Ezra certainly would have done it right, but the Passover in Josiah’s day was clearly at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>, not the beginning. There seem to be no historic records of such a change. It is remarkable that after many centuries of being scattered and separated, the same Jews who remained in complete agreement over which day is the Sabbath seem also to have remained in agreement over which night the Passover was eaten. If it is so clear in the Old Testament that the Passover sacrifice was eaten at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, it would seem that at least some separated groups of Jews would have been faithful to the original timing and that any divergence would have produced some historic evidence.
- Perhaps the main argument from the Old Testament for an early 14<sup>th</sup> Passover is the statement in Exodus 12:22 that no Israelite was to leave his house until morning. Yet it is common to speak of someone leaving a house at 2 or 3 in the morning while it is yet night. So the claim is made that although this is allowed in English, it is not allowed in the Hebrew language. There is, however, no Biblical proof for this alleged restriction. It is impossible to prove from Scriptural usage that *boqer* (morning) can *never* include time before dawn. Certainly there are instances where *boqer* is

clearly after dawn, but many uses of the word imply, and some even require, that time before dawn is meant.

- The #1 argument for an early 14<sup>th</sup> Passover involves the last supper of Jesus and His disciples. If it were not for a handful of verses in the synoptic gospels, there would probably be no argument over this issue. But was it even possible for Jesus to keep a domestic early 14<sup>th</sup> Passover on the night He was betrayed? How long does it take to kill, flay and roast a whole, ungutted lamb large enough to feed at least 13 adult men? An oven-roasted 20-pound turkey can take 6 ½ hours to cook at 325°. A leg of lamb alone takes 2-4 hours. When would dinner have been ready for Jesus’ last supper? If the disciples didn’t slay the lamb until after sundown, could they have finished their preparations early enough to satisfy Matthew 26:20 that “when evening had come, He sat down with the twelve”? Could the lamb have been ready soon enough to allow time for the meal, instruction, journey to Gethsemane, prayer in the garden, and the remainder of the activities that night?

All of these issues, and many others, are addressed in much greater detail in the pages that follow. This paper was written to encourage the reader to study the Bible — to prove the truth on this matter from the Scriptures (rather than from commentaries and dictionaries which often contradict each other and are frequently at odds with the Bible as well). Look up the Scriptures for yourself. Many bold claims are made here. Check them out for yourself in your own Bible and concordance. Don’t reject them just because they don’t match what you have always been taught or what you think the Bible says.

In writing this paper, I did not research articles or books presenting the idea that the Old Testament Passover occurred at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>. My support comes entirely from the Scriptures, using very little in the way of external sources. *Every* argument I have heard in defense of the early 14<sup>th</sup> has an adequate, and often far more compelling, counter-explanation in the Bible in support of the late 14<sup>th</sup>.

The usual reaction when someone suggests that the Old Testament Passover was sacrificed at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib is to assume that the individual is also suggesting that we should be keeping our New Testament observance at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup>. This conclusion is generally made because of the long-standing assertion that our New Testament ceremony is merely a transformation of the Old Testament Passover. But remember, the Old Testament Passover was a *shadow* of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ — which occurred at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>. What Jesus instructed His disciples to do on the eve of the 14<sup>th</sup> was, by contrast, described by Him as something to be done in *remembrance* of Him. Many who support the late 14<sup>th</sup> view, including this writer, are in no way trying to change the date of our New Testament observance.

Some have asked: If this doesn't affect the timing and observance of our New Testament ceremony, why bother to study this further and make waves? If it is merely a technical point of history, why argue about it? The answer is that some continue to dogmatically publish and preach errors about this subject as though they were true. Does it make any difference whether what we are teaching and what we believe is the truth?

### Between the Evenings

One of the primary arguments for the early 14<sup>th</sup> reckoning is the expression used in Exodus 12:6 and other verses to describe the time of day the Passover lamb was to be killed: “Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it **at twilight**.” (NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted.) “At twilight” is an English translation of an expression more literally translated “between the (two) evenings”. In English, “twilight” usually refers to a time after sunset before the light in the sky fades (except in situations such as “twilight golf”, which is played late in the afternoon, before sundown). If “at twilight” were an accurate translation, it could lend support to the early 14<sup>th</sup> view.

But the expression “between the evenings” (Hebrew *ben ha-arbayim*; or in *Strong's* spelled *beyn 'ereb*) is not unique to the Passover. It is also used as the time for the daily evening sacrifice in

Exodus 29:39,41 and Numbers 28:4,8: “One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight [between the evenings]” (Exodus 29:39).

Ample historic evidence shows that the evening sacrifice was normally offered around 3 p.m. If the Jews changed the time of the Passover, then they must have changed the time of the evening sacrifice as well, because it was also to be offered “between the evenings”. But the Scriptural evidence supports the concept that the evening sacrifice was offered in the afternoon.

In describing the morning and evening sacrifices, the evening sacrifice is listed and described second. The Scriptures are quite consistent in this. In Exodus 29:38-42 and Numbers 28:3-8, the RSV, the NIV, and others, especially the various “literal” translations, often use the words “first lamb” to refer to the morning sacrifice, or “second lamb” to refer to the evening sacrifice. And this follows the wording of the original Hebrew. If the evening sacrifice were after sundown, it would have been the first of the two daily sacrifices. But the Scriptures plainly say it was the second.

In 1 Kings 18 is the account of Elijah's challenge on Mt. Carmel against Baal worship. Elijah allowed the prophets of Baal to continue their futile efforts until after noon, “until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice” (v.29). While “evening” is not actually in the original Hebrew, the concept that this was the regular time of offering is. A number of events follow the actual sacrifice of the bull, including the killing of 450 false prophets at the brook Kishon, Abab's meal and an extended search for rain clouds from back up on the mountain. If the sacrifice had been sometime during twilight, then the rain would not have come until the twilight period was over — in other words, not before the dark of night. Since humans lack color vision in the dark, a cloudless late night sky always appears generally black. To say “the sky grew black with clouds” (verse 45, NIV) is just not the way a person would describe the sky clouding over during the night. And where there is a moon or city lights shining on the clouds, the presence of clouds reflecting that light can actually brighten up the night. On the other hand, when a storm moves in to fill a clear blue daytime

sky, one would indeed be inclined to say, “the sky grew black with clouds.”

There is an additional concern to the idea of the rain coming after dark: Driving horses hard in the dark, or racing down a mountain on foot when you can’t see where you are going can be rather treacherous. But Elijah seemed to have had no such immediate concern when he sent his servant to tell Ahab to hurry home, nor apparently did Elijah have any trouble finding sure footing in his own super-fast (albeit supernaturally assisted) possibly 20-mile race to get to Jezreel before the rain. Considering all of the events that happened after Elijah’s sacrifice, the “time of the offering of the evening sacrifice” had to have been in the afternoon.

If Exodus 12:6, and other similar verses, were translated: “Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month; then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it **at the time of the evening sacrifice**”, instead of “at twilight”, few would question what was meant.

### Evening

Not all verses related to the Passover use the phrase “between the evenings”. In Deuteronomy 16:6 it says: “but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt.” And in Joshua 5:10 we read: “So the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho.” In these verses, the word “twilight” does not come from “between the evenings”, but simply *‘erev* (translated “even” in the KJV). It is the same expression used elsewhere for the end of the day:

Leviticus 23:27 “Also the tenth *day* of this seventh month *shall be* the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD... <sup>32</sup>It *shall be* to you a sabbath of *solemn* rest, and **you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening** [*‘erev*], from evening [the end of the ninth day] to evening [the end of the tenth day], you shall celebrate your sabbath.”

Exodus 12:18 “In the first *month*, **on the fourteenth day of the month at evening** [at *‘erev* — at the end of the fourteenth], you shall eat unleavened bread, **until the twenty-first day of the month at evening** [the end of the twenty-first day]. <sup>19</sup> For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* a stranger or a native of the land.”

Note that the phrases “on the fourteenth day of the month at evening” quoted here in Exodus 12:18 and “on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight” in Joshua 5:10 are identical in the original Hebrew. Joshua 5, then, states that the children of Israel kept the Passover on the plains of Jericho toward the *end* of the 14<sup>th</sup> — around the time they were to begin eating unleavened bread for seven days.

Other verses show that the word for “evening” was also commonly used to refer to time before sunset:

Genesis 24:11 “And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw *water*.” [Women in that era would not have made a habit of doing chores outside the city after sundown. Even men were known to come in at sundown, and sometimes feared to do otherwise (cf. Psalm 104:20-23). The women would have gone out to draw water for the family’s evening and early morning needs sometime during the afternoon, before the water was needed for preparations of the evening meal, washing up for dinner, etc. See 1 Samuel 9:11-14 for the account of a sacrifice being offered at this same time.]

Jeremiah 6:4 “Prepare war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe to us, for the day goes away, for the shadows of the evening are lengthening.” [It is the *afternoon* shadows that lengthen as the day draws to a close. There are no such shadows after the sun sets. The Hebrew language seems to be lacking a separate word for “afternoon”. Instead the term “evening” is used, not just here, but throughout the Scriptures.]

## Between Which Evenings?

The expression “between the (two) evenings” implies that there were two different times that were each called “evening”. In 1 Samuel 20:5, David tells Jonathan that he is going into hiding “until the third day at **evening**”. In verse 19, Jonathan reiterates that on the third day David should return to a specific place so that he would be there for Jonathan’s signal. But in verse 35 it says: “And so it was, in the **morning**, that Jonathan went out into the field **at the time appointed** with David.” Certainly it appears that their carefully arranged *evening* meeting time must have immediately followed morning. Scriptures quoted above show that at least a portion of the afternoon time was referred to as evening. This passage in 1 Samuel indicates that the word ‘*erev*’ was apparently used to refer to the *beginning* of this afternoon time period (i.e. noon). Other Scriptures illustrate that the word ‘*erev*’ also applied to sundown (cf. Joshua 8:29; 2 Chronicles 18:34). But while ‘*erev*’ can refer to time after sundown (cf. Judges 19:14-17), it is never used to specifically denote the “end of twilight” as such. Scripturally, therefore, there is no support for the idea that the two evenings were sunset and dark, while there is support for the two evenings being noon and sunset.

## Morning

On the night of the Passover feast in Egypt, the Israelites were forbidden to leave their dwellings until the morning (*boqer*) (Exodus 12:22). This was imposed on them because, as God had told them in advance, the firstborn of Egypt were going to be killed at midnight (Exodus 11:4-5; 12:29). Once the firstborn had died, the plague was past, and at some time defined as “morning”, it was safe for the Israelites to leave. The belief that the Israelites were required by this passage to remain in their homes until daylight is central to the early 14<sup>th</sup> argument. But the book of Ruth makes it plain that morning definitely included time before sunrise:

Ruth 3:13 “Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be *that* if he will perform the duty of a near kinsman for you; good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, *as* the LORD lives! Lie down until

morning.”<sup>14</sup> So she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose before one could recognize another [well before sunrise]. Then he said, “Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.”

Certainly in the English language there is not a problem with the concept of 3 or 4 o’clock being “in the morning”. Ancient Greek also seems to allow for morning before dawn: “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35).

There are thirty instances in the Old Testament of people rising early in the morning (Hebrew, *shakam boqer*). While the precise hour at which they rose is not stated, it is totally unreasonable to assume that these people rising “early in the morning” never got up before dawn. This was in an era long before electric lights and late night television, back when people went to bed with the chickens and got up accordingly. People who had to work the land and milk their own animals could not always afford the luxury of sleeping in, and the examples of farmers even in the last few centuries bear this out.

The following is found in the article “Watch” in *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, page 1163: “The Jews, like the Greeks and Romans, divided the night into military watches instead of hours, each watch representing the period for which sentinels or pickets remained on duty. Thus we read of ‘a watch in the night’ (Psalm 90:4). The proper Jewish reckoning recognized only three such watches, entitled the first or ‘beginning of the watches’ (Lamentation 2:19), the middle watch (Judges 7:19), and the morning watch (Exodus 14:24; 1 Samuel 11:11). These would last from sunset to 10 p.m.; from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.; and from 2 a.m. to sunrise. Subsequently to the establishment of the Roman supremacy, the number of watches was increased to four, which were described either according to their numerical order, as in the case of the ‘fourth watch’ (Matthew 14:25, Greek *phulake*), or by the terms ‘even,’ ‘midnight,’ ‘cockcrowing,’ and ‘morning’ (Mark 13:35).”

Luke 12:38 “And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants.”

Matthew 14:25 “Now in the fourth watch [3-6 a.m.] of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.”

Mark 13:35 “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming; in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning;”

These were the names of the four night watches, as quoted above. Note that Christ used the generic term “morning” to refer to the time during the last night watch (3-6 a.m.). Could He also have done this when He instructed Moses that the Israelites were not to leave their houses until “morning”, i.e. until the morning watch? At the time of the Exodus and beyond, the last night watch was clearly called “morning”:

Exodus 14:24 “Now it came to pass, in the morning (*boqer*) watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians.”

1 Samuel 11:11 “So it was, on the next day, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning (*boqer*) watch, and killed Ammonites until the heat of the day....”

In support of the early 14<sup>th</sup> view, morning has sometimes been equated with day and evening with night. Genesis 1 is the Scriptural passage used to support this concept. While the King James translations can give the impression that the evening and morning *constituted* each day, the Revised Standard Version and other translations simply state that “there was evening and there was morning” each day. In common usage throughout the Bible, the word for “morning” in Hebrew (as in English and Greek) equates with the time period from predawn hours until noon, while “evening”, when used in reference to a period of time, extends from noon, or soon thereafter, until around bedtime. There is NO equation of morning with the twelve-hour day or evening with the twelve-hour night anywhere in the Bible. The King James Genesis 1 account has simply been misunderstood. If “evening” and “night” in Genesis 1 meant the

same thing, there would have been no need to use different words.

Of course, the only reason morning is an issue at all is because Deuteronomy 16:1 says that God brought the Israelites out of Egypt by night. The assumption seems to be that night requires “total darkness”. Yet “night” (Hebrew *layil*) is the word normally used in Scripture as the counterpart of “day” (Genesis 1:5). Jesus said there are twelve hours in a day (John 11:9-10), meaning there are also twelve hours in the average night. Comparing Matthew 12:40 with Jonah 1:17, we find that Hebrew and Greek usage are the same in this regard. If “day” is the twelve hours when the sun is up, “night” would have to include the twilight periods after sunset and before sunrise. So even if the Israelites did leave in the morning after dawn, they would still have been leaving at “night” if they went out before sunrise. But since the departure from Egypt came at the time of the full moon, there would have been ample light to leave Goshen well before dawn, during the night watch which Moses clearly called “morning” (Exodus 14:24).

### **The Morrow after the Passover**

The children of Israel left “on the morrow after the Passover” (Numbers 33:3 KJV). What is meant by this phrase? The NKJV translates this “on the day after the Passover”. Did the Israelites leave the morning after the night they ate the Passover or does the term “morrow” or “day after” require that they left on a different calendrical day? What is the Biblical usage of “morrow” (Hebrew: *mochorath*)?

Genesis 19:32 [The elder daughter of Lot said,] “Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.”<sup>33</sup> So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.<sup>34</sup> It happened on the next day [“on the morrow” (KJV) / *mochorath*] that the firstborn said to the younger, “Indeed I lay with my father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go in *and* lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.” [Here the night and morrow are part of the same 24-hour day.]

Judges 6:37 “ ‘look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and *it is* dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.’ <sup>38</sup> And it was so. When he rose early the next morning [on the morrow / *mochorath*] and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.”

Exodus 18:12 “Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God. And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God. <sup>13</sup> And so it was, on the next day [on the morrow / *mochorath*], that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening.”

Leviticus 7:15 “The flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day it is offered. He shall not leave any of it until morning [*boqer*]. <sup>16</sup> But if the sacrifice of his offering *is* a vow or a voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he offers his sacrifice; but on the next day [morrow / *mochorath*] the remainder of it also may be eaten;” [Here the “morning” and “the next day” (morrow) are used to refer to overlapping periods of time. The peace offering could not be eaten on the morrow / morning after it was offered unless it was a vow or voluntary offering.]

1 Samuel 11:9 “And they said to the messengers who came, “Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh Gilead: ‘Tomorrow [Hebrew *machar*], by *the time* the sun is hot, you shall have help.’ ” Then the messengers came and reported *it* to the men of Jabesh, and they were glad. <sup>10</sup> Therefore the men of Jabesh said, “Tomorrow [*machar*] we will come out to you, and you may do with us whatever seems good to you.” <sup>11</sup> So it was, on the next day [the morrow / *mochorath*], that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and killed Ammonites until the heat of the

day. And it happened that those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.” [Here “the morrow” doesn’t even wait for sunup to arrive, but includes the time of the morning watch (2-6 a.m.).]

See also Leviticus 19:5-6; 23:10-16; Numbers 11:32; 1 Samuel 5:2-4; 30:17; Jonah 4:7.

In analyzing the 33 uses of the word *mochorath* in Scripture, it appears that it essentially means the next normal period of wakefulness. Numbers 11:32 says: “And the people stayed up all that day, all *that* night, and all the next day [*mochorath*], and gathered the quail....” Clearly, “all the next day” follows the night, which would have been completely unnecessary if *mochorath* began with sunset as some have claimed. Additionally there are five verses (Exodus 32:6; Judges 6:38; 21:4; 1 Samuel 5:3,4) which describe people rising “early” during this time period called *mochorath*, and yet this is 8-10 hours or more *after* the Hebrew day begins (not terribly early if *mochorath* started at sunset). Numbers 33:3, then, shows that the Israelites left the morning after they ate the Passover, and proceeded on their journey during the daylight hours:

Numbers 33:3 “They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day [on the morrow / *mochorath*] after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians.”

Joshua 5:11-12 says: “And they ate of the produce of the land on the day [morrow / *mochorath*] after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain on the very same day. <sup>12</sup> Now the manna ceased on the day [morrow / *mochorath*] after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.” In conjunction with Leviticus 23:10-15, these verses indicate that the Israelites, upon entry into the Promised Land, ate of the produce of the land during the daylight of the 15<sup>th</sup>. (For an explanation of this see the article about Pentecost at [cgsf.org](http://cgsf.org).) If the Passover lambs were slain at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, the eating

of the produce would have been 36 or more hours later, and the expression “[*mochorath*] after the Passover” would not be appropriate. The way early 14<sup>th</sup> supporters try to get around this problem is to claim that “Passover” refers to the entire 24-hour day of the 14<sup>th</sup>. But this does not match the Scriptural usage of the word “Passover”.

### **What was the Passover?**

It is certainly possible to read some verses which refer to the “Passover” as applying to a day. But this is always an interpretation. There are no verses which require this meaning. In fact, the Hebrew word *pesach* (Passover) is never used in Scripture to name the 24-hour day of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Many passages clearly use this word as the name of the lamb being slain and eaten (cf. Deuteronomy 16:2, 2 Chronicles 30:18). Others, as in the phrase “keep the Passover” (cf. Numbers 9:2-14, Deuteronomy 16:1, Joshua 5:10), also have nothing to do with the day per se, but rather refer to that same sacrificial offering. In the phrase “keep/kept the Passover”, the word for “keep” is always the Hebrew *‘asah*. This is a different word than those normally used to describe “keeping” a Sabbath or holy day (*shamgar* meaning observe, and *chagag* meaning celebrate). The word *‘asah* deals with making and doing, and refers to the sacrifice, not the day. To “keep” the Passover was to make or do the Passover sacrifice. Like the Wave Sheaf, the Passover, although offered at a specific period of time, was not a daylong event. In Numbers 9:7, for example, the focus of the Israelite’s concern in “keeping the Passover” was not in observing a day, but in being “kept from presenting the offering of the LORD at its appointed time”. Verses such as Leviticus 23:5 and Numbers 28:16 say the Passover was to occur **on** the 14<sup>th</sup>, not that it was the 14<sup>th</sup>. Today, we also focus on “the Passover” as a ceremony, not a day.

Some feel that since the Passover sacrifice was named because the Lord “passed over” the Israelites, that these two events must have occurred on the same calendrical day. But nothing in the Scriptures requires that the Lord “passed over” in the same calendrical day that the Passover lambs were slain, only that the destroyer passed over in the same night that the sacrifice was eaten.

Although by the time of the New Testament it is obvious that the term “Passover” had come to apply not only to the sacrifice, but to the entire seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, none of the Old Testament Scriptures, with the exception of Ezekiel 45:21, require that the word *pesach* refer to **any** period of time, let alone the day of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Rather, the Hebrew *pesach* (defined in Exodus 12:8-11 as a lamb which is eaten) is used almost exclusively to describe the sacrifice with its accompanying rites and ceremonies (cf. Numbers 9:3).

This is not to deny the fact that the Scriptures do speak about a day in association with the Passover. Exodus 12:17; 13:3-4 and Deuteronomy 16:3 draw attention to one particular day to be remembered as an everlasting ordinance. The day being spoken about, and the event being commemorated, is the day God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, the day clearly defined in Numbers 33:3-4 as the 15<sup>th</sup> of Abib. Some point to Exodus 12:14 as an indication that the day of the passing over (which they presume to be the 14<sup>th</sup>) is a feast day as well. Yet at the same time, early 14<sup>th</sup> supporters generally argue quite vociferously that the 14<sup>th</sup> is not a holy day; and except for the ceremony observed at the beginning of the day, the day is not treated in any special manner. Exodus 12:14 does indeed speak about a day to be kept as a feast and memorial. But it does not specify which day of the month that is. It could be referring to the day of the passing over, as spoken of in verses 12-13, or it could mean the day of departure from Egypt described in verses 15-17. Or both. If the Passover sacrifice occurred at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> then the “passing over” actually occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and the feast day established in verse 14 would be the same one commanded in verse 17, namely the first day of Unleavened Bread. Exodus 12:14, therefore, cannot be used to define the day of the Passover sacrifice as a feast day. It merely defines the day of the

passing over and / or the day of departure as a feast day without stating on which day of the month those things occurred.

### **Rameses and the Preparation Time**

Proponents of the early 14<sup>th</sup> Passover generally feel that time was required after the Passover meal

for the Israelites to spoil the Egyptians, gather their belongings, journey to Rameses and still leave on the 15<sup>th</sup> (Numbers 33:3). The assumption seems to be that Rameses was a specific place, probably the treasure city the Israelite slaves built (Exodus 1:11). But this treasure city is usually translated with a different spelling (Raamses in the KJV and NKJV) because the Hebrew vowel points are different. There are no Scriptures that say the people journeyed to “Raamses”, but rather that they journeyed *from* “Rameses”. (*Strong’s* lists both names under the same number but notes the differences in both spelling and pronunciation.) As defined in Genesis 47:11, Rameses (using the same vowel points as in Exodus 12:37) was another name for Goshen. Simply put, the children of Israel began their journey to Succoth, not from the treasure city of Raamses, but from their homes in Rameses (Goshen) on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Abib (Numbers 33:1-5).

If the original Passover had been killed at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, we would find the Israelites suffering from severe sleep deprivation. In the early 14<sup>th</sup> view, they would have gotten up on the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> and killed the lamb and eaten the Passover when the sun went down that night. The excitement, terror and commotion of their Egyptian neighbors would permit little or no sleep that night as they began their preparations to leave. The Egyptians’ urgings, and the Israelites’ (alleged) preparations and travels to the city of Raamses would have left no time for sleep during daylight of the 14<sup>th</sup>. And they could not sleep when they arrived at the city, but had to begin leaving for Succoth. We are looking here at 48 to 60 hours with little or no sleep for several million people with this scenario, as opposed to the 36 hours or less the late 14<sup>th</sup> sacrifice requires.

There are also food-related problems with the idea that the Israelites gathered at Raamses, the city. Exodus 12:37-39 says that they left without having time to prepare any food, and implies that they did not stop to bake their still unleavened dough until arriving at Succoth. If they went to Raamses first, they would have gone hungry because they took no leftovers and had no other food prepared. Also, if they carried dough all the way from their homes to the city of Raamses and then on down to Succoth before baking it, that dough would surely have had time to begin to

naturally ferment and become leavened. Yet verse 39 clearly says it was not leavened for want of time. So not only do the Scriptures indicate that they left from the *land* of Rameses, rather than from the treasure city, but the logistics of going to such a city make such a claim very problematic.

In Exodus 11, the plague of the firstborn is announced and described. In verse 1, God makes it plain that this would be the last plague, and that not only would Pharaoh let them go, but that they would be driven out. In preparation for this, the people were told to “borrow” gold, silver and clothing (v.2-3, KJV). (Some have argued that the Egyptians would not have been willing to give these things to the Israelites until after the distress of the death of their firstborn. But verse 3 refutes that objection showing that God made good on His promise at the burning bush to give the Israelites favor in the spoiling of the Egyptians (Exodus 3:21-22). Since only the women are mentioned there, it’s even possible the women were busy “plundering” the Egyptians long before the men were told to get involved.) In verses 4-8, Moses gives his final warning to Pharaoh, relating many details of what was to follow. The time of the plague was stated to occur at midnight (v.4). And in verse 8, Moses angrily declares that although he and the Pharaoh would not see each other again (Exodus 10:27-29), Pharaoh’s servants would come to Moses after the firstborn died begging the Israelites to leave.

All of these details about what would occur surrounding the death of the firstborn were well known. They had been communicated to the Israelites in advance according to God’s instructions as recorded in Exodus 12. Verse 11 says the people were told to keep their shoes on and be dressed and ready to go, even with their staff in hand, and to eat the lamb in haste. Verse 28 says the people followed instructions. The Lord passed over at midnight, as He promised (v.29), and the Egyptians rose up to discover the tragedy. Pharaoh sent his orders to Moses and Aaron that night, as Moses had predicted (v.31-32), and the Egyptians urged the people to leave in haste (v.33). They were not only grieved, but many of them were certainly angry. They were in no mood to listen to Israelite slave arguments that they weren’t coming out until the sun was up, that they had to gather their belongings,

including all the stuff that belonged to the Egyptians, and that they would first have to journey to a city many maps place *north* of the land of Goshen, away from the wilderness they had stated all along they were heading to. Rather, the Israelites grabbed their kneading bowls full of dough (v.34), and the clothing, gold and silver they had already collected from the Egyptians (v.35-36), and hurriedly began their journey directly to Succoth along with their flocks and herds (v.37-38). Verse 39 reiterates that “they were driven [other translations read thrust or pushed] out of Egypt and could not wait [tarry].” The children of Israel were packed and ready to go immediately, as instructed, leaving early in the morning while it was still night.

Exodus 12:42 contains the phrase, “night to be much observed”, which is routinely used in reference to the amazingly Passover-like feast which the Church has long observed on the eve of the 15<sup>th</sup>. This phrase, however, is a King James English expression. Other translations render this as a “night of solemn observance” or a “night of vigil” or a “night of watching”. The concept of the Israelites keeping a vigil, or watching, does not describe a jubilant journey out of the land of Egypt. It is far more descriptive of what they were doing as they awaited the death of the firstborn and word that they were to leave.

### Story Flow and Timing

Those who wrote the Bible have been said to be a bit rambling in their presentation at times. Sometimes, however, this inability to stick with one subject is an unjustified accusation. Exodus 12 is perhaps one such place. Those who take the early 14<sup>th</sup> view see the first 13 verses (and probably verse 14 as well) as applying to the Passover. Verses 15-20 describe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Then Moses goes back to the Passover in verses 21-36, then Unleavened Bread again in verses 37-42, then back to Passover for verses 43-50, finally ending with Unleavened Bread again in verse 51. But try reading this chapter sometime viewing the Passover as a sacrifice (not a day) occurring at the very end of the 14<sup>th</sup> with the succeeding events and commandments pertaining to the Feast day of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Suddenly this chapter takes on a cohesive, logical presentation.

The same is true of chapter 13. Why does Moses start out with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and then wander back to the significance of the firstborn in verses 11-13? Then in verse 14, when future generations ask about this significance, he makes reference first to coming out of Egypt, then goes back to killing the firstborn in verse 15, and back to coming out in verse 16. Those who insist on separating these two events by up to 24 hours would have to reply that that’s just the way Moses wrote it. It does not present an insurmountable problem, perhaps, but when it is understood that the original Passover meal, the death of the Egyptian firstborn and the Israelites’ flight from their homes in Goshen all occurred during the night portion of the 15<sup>th</sup>, it makes the Scriptures far more logical, adds tremendously to the meaning of the Feast day itself, and spares Moses some unjustified criticism.

If we go back to Exodus 12:51 again, we see an interesting term: “the selfsame day” (KJV) or “that very same day” (NKJV). This has usually been used to refer back to verse 41 and the understanding that the Israelites came out of Egypt exactly 430 years after the circumcision covenant. But perhaps we have overlooked the obvious possibility that verse 51 gives additional information, saying plainly that the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt on the very same day that they ate the Passover — the very same day that the firstborn were killed. Indeed the Hebrew phrase for “selfsame day” (*zeh-‘etsem yowm*) is often used in reference to events happening within one particular day (cf. Genesis 7:13-16; Leviticus 23:10-14,16-21; Deuteronomy 32:48).

Later Passovers raise interesting timing considerations as well. 2 Chronicles 35 contains the story of a Passover in Josiah’s reign. After mentioning the slaughtering of the Passover in verse 11, verse 12 then speaks of burnt offerings as being dealt with afterward, concurrently with the roasting of the lambs and boiling of other offerings in verse 13. Verse 14 says: “Then afterward they prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron, *were busy* in offering burnt offerings and fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron.”

The priests were busy with extra burnt and peace offerings. Because they were preoccupied with these things, the priests had no time before “night” to prepare their own Passover meals. The Levites did it for them. They did the same for the musicians and gatekeepers (v.15). Here 37,600 Passover lambs and 3,800 cattle were killed, offered and prepared for dinner “before night”. Considering that “night” in the broadest sense begins with sundown, the sacrificing would have to have been before sundown. But even if one chooses to view “night” in a more limited sense, as beginning with the onset of darkness at the end of twilight, there would have been far too much to accomplish in the short 60-90 minutes between an after-sundown sacrifice and the end of twilight. It takes time to slaughter, skin and clean an animal, and several hours to roast a whole lamb before one could begin to “prepare portions”. Clearly, in context, Josiah’s Passover occurred in the afternoon.

### Law of the Offerings

Some of those who support the early 14<sup>th</sup> timeframe for the Passover sacrifice feel that God commanded what has been referred to as a “domestic Passover” — one that was to be kept in homes without the involvement of the priests or temple. Certainly there was a “domestic” element in the first Passover. There was no tabernacle and no priesthood, and the circumstances surrounding it were unique.

But what about succeeding Passover sacrifices, when there were both ordained priests and a tabernacle? A careful reading of Leviticus 1–7 will show that whenever any animal was offered in sacrifice, it was to be brought to the door of the tabernacle/temple. When it was an individual bringing the offering, he was to kill the animal *himself*, while the priests had the job of offering the blood of the sacrifice at the altar (cf. Leviticus 1:2-9). The burnt offerings were not eaten by anyone. Some of the sin and trespass offerings were eaten by the priests. The only offerings of which the common people ate were the peace offerings. Unless the peace offering was for a vow or a voluntary offering, it had to be consumed before morning, just like the Passover offering (Leviticus 7:15-16).

The law regarding “domestic” sacrifices is found

in Leviticus 17: “<sup>3</sup> Whatever man of the house of Israel, kills an ox or lamb or goat in the camp, or who kills *it* outside the camp,<sup>4</sup> and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer an offering to the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people,<sup>5</sup> to the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they offer in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to the priest, and offer them *as* peace offerings to the LORD.” In short, “domestic” sacrifices were prohibited. Verse 11 explains why: “For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul.”

In Deuteronomy 12, Moses describes where offerings were to be made after entering the Promised Land (v.5-11). God was going to put His name on a particular place (eventually, Jerusalem), and all offerings were to be brought there. Prior to Jerusalem, sacrificing occurred at the bronze altar in such places as Gilgal, Shiloh and Gibeon (1 Samuel 1:24-25; 1 Chronicles 16:39-40). Once again, the instructions are the same. Some animals could be killed and consumed at home (vv.15,20-22), but not sacrifices. And again, the chief reason was that the blood of a sacrifice had to be poured out on the altar (v.27), unlike the blood of a locally-butchered non-sacrificial animal which was to be poured on the ground like water (vv.16,23-24).

In Deuteronomy 16, Moses uses terminology similar to that of Deuteronomy 12 for the Passover: “<sup>2</sup> Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to put His name....<sup>5</sup> You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which the LORD your God gives you;<sup>6</sup> but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight [at even, KJV], at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt.<sup>7</sup> And you shall roast and eat *it* in the place which the LORD your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents” (Deuteronomy 16:2-7). The Passover, too, had to be brought to God’s altar. It could not be offered in a domestic setting.

The first Passover observance after leaving Egypt is described in Numbers 9. It immediately followed the dedication of the tabernacle, and was kept with all of its rites and ceremonies (v.3), some of which are described in verses 11 and 12. In verse 13, it says: “But the man who *is* clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of the LORD at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin.” If the Passover were strictly domestic, no offering would be brought anywhere, and being on a journey would not necessarily prevent anyone from keeping it.

In Exodus 23:14-17, the three feast seasons are described. Then verse 18 says: “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning.” Exodus 34:22-24 is a parallel passage, again describing the three feast seasons, with verse 25 confirming: “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning.” Here the statement about the fat is replaced with a specific reference to the Passover. These verses clearly show that the term “My sacrifice” is referring to the Passover sacrifice, and state that, as with all other sacrifices, the blood of the Passover was to be offered before God. This is what made the sacrifice an offering.

Various Passovers are described in 2 Chronicles and Ezra, and they were all carried out at the temple, and according to the sacrificial laws described in the books of Moses: “They stood in their place according to their custom, according to the Law of Moses the man of God; the priests sprinkled the blood [of the Passover lambs] *which they received* from the hand of the Levites” (2 Chronicles 30:16). Verse 17 goes on to explain an unusual occurrence at Hezekiah’s Passover — that the Levites killed the lambs for the people who were not clean. Those who were unclean were not normally permitted to offer the Passover at all, as we saw in Numbers 9, but Hezekiah interceded with prayer on their behalf (v.18-20), and the Levites killed the lambs for them. (This was already a “second Passover”, and there would be no further opportunity to offer the Passover that year, v.2. These men may have been clean in time

to eat the sacrifice, since the meal was eaten after sundown. But the sacrificing was done before sundown, and because they were “unclean until even”, they were not clean in time to offer the sacrifice themselves.) Those who were clean were expected to kill their own lambs as usual, but they still had to do it at the temple. As explained above (cf. Leviticus 17, Deuteronomy 12), the law of Moses required that all sacrifices were to be brought to the temple, and that the blood had to be offered at the altar, no matter who killed the animal (v.16). The Passover in Josiah’s day in 2 Chronicles 35 is similarly described, with verse 11 stating: “and they slaughtered the Passover offerings; and the priests sprinkled *the blood* with their hands [sprinkled the blood handed to them (NIV)], while the Levites skinned *the animals*.”

Those who believe the Passover was a “domestic” sacrifice apparently feel that the blood of the Passover lamb was either of no consequence and could be poured onto the ground as with the blood of any hunted animal (Leviticus 17:13), or perhaps that the blood could somehow be offered in their “domestic” setting. But the Scriptures, as quoted above, clearly prohibit this, and every example in the Bible demonstrates that such was not done after the departure from Egypt. The blood of every sacrifice was symbolic of Christ’s blood and was to be offered on God’s altar. There is no indication the Passover was an exception to this. On the contrary, the Passover sacrifice was the principal sacrifice representing Christ, and its blood was an integral part of the service. In the original Passover, the blood of the lambs was placed on the doorframes to secure deliverance of the firstborn from death, and subsequently freedom from bondage for all the Israelites. In succeeding Passovers, the blood of the sacrifice (the Passover being the only universally required personal sacrifice) was offered on God’s altar. Similarly, for us to be spared from the wages of sin in spiritual Egypt, the blood of our Passover sacrifice, that of the Lamb of God, had to be offered before the Father in the heavenly temple: “[Christ] entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood [shed at Passover], thus securing an eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12, RSV). (See also Hebrews 9:11-28; 12:18-24; 1 Peter 1:2,18-19; Colossians 1:19-20).

## New Testament

The Scriptures show that Christ died at 3 p.m. toward the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Those who understand that the Passover sacrifice was always killed on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> take Paul's description of Christ as our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7) literally. In a similar manner, either Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, or more likely His selection by the Father (John 12:28), may have occurred on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month, foreshadowed by the day of the selection of the Passover lambs in Egypt. Jesus is also seen as the fulfillment of the wave sheaf, which was cut immediately after sundown following the Sabbath, at the time when Christ was resurrected, and waved the following morning, at the time Christ made His brief ascension to the Father to be accepted as the first of the firstfruits.

But some feel it was more important that Jesus eat the Passover meal than that He personally fulfill the symbolism of the Passover sacrifice. They acknowledge that He may coincidentally have been killed at the same time the Jews were erroneously keeping "their" Passover, and perhaps see some symbolism there, but are forced to dismiss the greater meaning of Christ as the *literal* Passover sacrifice, offered at the correct time. God did not establish the time of the Old Testament Passover just because some 1500 years later He would eat it at that time of day with His disciples on the night He was betrayed. God established the time of the Passover to foreshadow the actual sacrifice of Christ — with the Passover lambs in Egypt slain at the very same time of day that the blood of the Lamb of God was to be shed for the sins of the world.

John's use of the term "the Jew's Passover" is sometimes pointed to as evidence that theirs was an unauthorized observance. Yet John's reference to the "Jew's Feast of Tabernacles" (John 7:2) causes no such concern for those who keep God's feasts, even though some use these same Scriptures and same argument to support their claim that all these feasts are "Jewish" and don't need to be kept. John was addressing a Roman world years after the temple was destroyed, and identifying these things as "Jewish" was not an indication that they were obsolete or un-Biblical.

Much is made of the idea that the Feast was properly called the Feast of Unleavened Bread

and the Passover was completely separate, so that references to the Feast as the Passover are viewed as further indications of the erroneous beliefs of the Jews. Yet in Ezekiel 45:18,21 we read: "Thus says the Lord GOD... 'In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten.'" When the Jews in the New Testament time period referred to the feast of unleavened bread as "the Passover", they were merely following the example set by God Himself hundreds of years earlier.

Although I am well aware of the arguments used to get around the many New Testament Scriptures which refer to the Passover as being after the crucifixion and/or equivalent to the Days of Unleavened Bread (primarily that the gospel writers were writing in and about the confused world of their day), I would like to mention them here anyway. Luke 22:1 states rather matter-of-factly that the Days of Unleavened Bread were called the Passover. In Acts 12:3-4, Herod imprisoned Peter *during* the days of Unleavened Bread, with the intention of placing him on trial *after* Passover. In Matthew 26:2, Jesus referred to the Passover being two days later, and Mark 14:1 says both the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread were two days later. Indications from the chronology are that this was on a Monday afternoon, which would have matched a Wednesday afternoon Passover sacrifice. John 13:1 says the events in the upper room were before the feast of the Passover. The Jews "did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover" later (John 18:28). John 19:14 says that Jesus' crucifixion took place on the Preparation Day of the Passover. And in Luke 2:41-43, John 2:23 and John 6:4 the New Testament writers refer to the "feast of the Passover" in a manner quite different than our twentieth-century church tradition.

Did Jesus observe the Old Testament Passover on the eve of the fourteenth? No lamb is specifically mentioned. Since the blood of the sacrifice had to be offered at the temple, it may have been impossible, without the support of the priesthood, for the disciples to fulfill that requirement. And if a lamb had been slain after sundown, there would not have been enough time to roast and eat it, and

still have time for all of the other things that are recorded as having taken place on the night Jesus was betrayed. (This is further discussed in Part 2 of this paper.) The normal Passover was a family event, yet there is no indication that the female disciples, wives, mothers or children, many of whom were specifically mentioned as being in Jerusalem, were present that night. Some have pointed out that there is no evidence of any controversy over Jesus attempting to observe the Passover a day early. This is a good indication that He didn't keep a Passover that night. (Similarly, there is no condemnation that the Jews were wrong in their observance, and apparently no historic controversy that newly converted Jews were being asked to begin observing one of the premier Jewish events on a different day, in conflict with unconverted family members. In Luke 2:42, Jesus Himself is said to have observed the Passover as a child according to custom, not in some way different than the rest of the Jews.)

Most of the New Testament passages concerning Passover do not support the concept of the Passover being at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. The book of John points exclusively to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> when it mentions the Passover. And even most references in the other gospels, as cited earlier, point to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>. A few passages do seem to strongly favor the concept that Jesus observed the Passover at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. But is this concept as strong in the original Greek as it is in English? Here are a few observations:

In Luke 22:15 Jesus is quoted as saying: "With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer". The Greek words here for "desire" and "desired" (*epithumeo* and *epithumea*) are used in 51 other verses, and *in every case* carry with them the concept of a great longing for something that either should not or cannot always be attained. In most cases the words are translated as "lust" or "covet", and imply a wrong desire. Here are a few other examples: "In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they **will desire** to die, and death will flee from them" (Revelation 9:6). "For I am hard pressed between the two having a **desire** to depart and be with Christ, *which is far better*" (Philippians 1:23). "And we **desire** that each one of you show the same diligence to the full

assurance of hope until the end" (Hebrews 6:11; history shows that the majority were not so diligent, and this desire remains unfulfilled). "This *is* a faithful saying: if a man desires the position of a bishop, he **desires** a good work" (1 Timothy 3:1; the verses that follow clearly show this desire is not available to all who want it). Jesus may have been telling the disciples that He longed to keep the Passover with them, but that this was not going to be possible, as the very next verse (Luke 22:16) seems to say.

Six verses (Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14,31,42) call the 14<sup>th</sup> the "preparation" (Greek *paraskeue*), and this Greek word is used exclusively for the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib in Scripture. John 19:14 specifically calls it "the Preparation Day of the Passover". The concept of "preparing" for the Passover was apparently quite important. Many verses talk about the disciples "preparing" (Greek *hetoimazo*) for the Passover on this very "Preparation Day" (Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7-8), but the Scriptures do not seem to indicate much, if any, thought was given to the task by the disciples before sundown at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup>. It seems strange that such a significant event was brought up by the disciples when it was almost too late to do anything about it, if indeed they were to eat the Passover at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Perhaps instead they were preparing for an event that they knew would not take place until the *end* of the 14<sup>th</sup>.

In Mark 14:14 (and Luke 22:11) Jesus is quoted as saying: "Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?" (KJV). The NKJV is less certain, saying "in which I **may eat** the Passover"; Goodspeed says "where I **can eat** the Passover". The Greek verb *phago* (to eat) is in the subjunctive mood here, indicating that the future activity spoken about is not certain to occur.

Matthew 26:18 records Jesus as saying: "I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples." The Greek word *poieo*, translated here as "will keep", is used 576 times in the New Testament, and is translated using the verb "to keep" only four times in the KJV. It's primary meaning is "to make" or "do", like the Hebrew word '*asah*. And, like the Hebrew '*asah*, Thayer's lexicon indicates that the Greek *poieo* can

also mean to “make ready” or “prepare”, as in Matthew 22:2, Mark 6:21, Luke 14:12,13,16 and John 12:2. The context of Matthew 26:18 indicates that preparation was the issue at hand, and it is

evident that Jesus spent a considerable amount of time during the course of His last night *preparing* both Himself and His disciples for the traumatic Passover Sacrifice which was to follow.

## Conclusion

The issue of *when* Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, broke the bread which symbolized His body and passed around the cup which depicted His blood is not in question. That Jesus did these things on the night He was betrayed, on the evening that began the fourteenth day of Abib, is evident from the Scriptures.

The matter of controversy has primarily focused around the question, “When did the Israelites departing Egypt kill their Passover lambs?”, or “When was the Old Testament Passover observed?”, and, by extension, “Was Jesus’ last supper a Passover sacrifice?”

It has been said, “Don’t believe me; believe what you find in your own Bible.” Despite the seemingly endless stream of words presented over decades in an attempt to prove that the Passover was originally slain at the beginning of the fourteenth day of Abib, the Scriptural evidence simply does not support this view. Instead, what I find in my own Bible is that the Passover was sacrificed “on the fourteenth day at even.” Letting the Bible interpret the Bible, and with careful examination of all the related Scriptures, that means something quite different than “on the eve of the fourteenth”.

Primary proof for the early 14<sup>th</sup> rests with the supposition that the Israelites (instructed to remain inside until morning) had to remain in their homes until the sun rose. But there is no support in Scripture for the restrictive view that morning in Hebrew was limited to daytime. The Hebrew word for “morning” is definitely used to include time before sunrise, and there is sufficient evidence to show

that it included time before dawn as well, just as in English and Greek. The Israelites departed Egypt during the early morning hours of the very same night in which they ate the Passover.

The expression for “between the evenings” may be interpreted by some translators to be “twilight”, but the Scriptural usage shows otherwise. “Between the evenings” included the time of the evening sacrifice, normally offered around 3 p.m., and coinciding with the time of Jesus’ death.

Finally, in the night Jesus was betrayed, there simply was not enough time to kill a lamb after sunset and roast and eat it before all of the other things that happened that night. And it was not possible for Jesus to eat a Passover sacrifice while simultaneously fulfilling the timing of the Passover by being that sacrifice. God Himself established the time of the Passover in Egypt. It was a “shadow” (Hebrews 9:28–10:1) prophesying when the Lamb of God would be slain, and serves as additional proof that Jesus was the Messiah.

All of the arguments used to support the idea that the Old Testament Passover was at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> have more than adequate explanations that support the *end* of the 14<sup>th</sup>. When the terms for *morning*, *morrow*, *evening*, and *between the evenings* in the Passover accounts are understood according to the ways they are used elsewhere in the Bible, there can be little doubt about the timing of the Old Testament Passover sacrifice. The lambs were slain on the fourteenth day of Abib in the afternoon.

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