

Getting It Right, Once and for All –

PASSOVER – the

Honest Answer!

For over three thousand years, the Jews have observed the Passover at the close of Nisan 14 and beginning of Nisan 15. They have been entrusted by Almighty God with preserving His sacred calendar. Were it not for them, the world would be in total ignorance of the proper year, months, and new moons. Is it then really conceivable that they corrupted and forgot the right day to observe PASSOVER? Let's understand the plain, pure TRUTH!

William F. Dankenbring

Controversy continues to rage over just when Passover should be observed. Many people believe that Passover should be observed at the beginning of Nisan 14. Some believe that the Jews kept it then, and Jesus and His disciples, but in later generations the Jews departed from this original date.

Can we understand the truth? Can we get to the bottom of this question? Has God given us enough evidence so that we can settle this question, once and for all?

Of course He has! God would not issue a command to His people, and then leave it a matter of confusion and personal interpretation as to how and when we should carry out that commandment!

A man recently wrote me a letter stating, “You should look at the Jewish Encyclopedia and you will find the Passover and Unleavened Bread are indeed separate from each other from the beginning, but became merged several hundred years ago by man.”

He contends that the Jews and we are wrong on Passover and the original Passover was separate from Unleavened Bread (as per the Jewish Encyclopedia). But that same encyclopedia says Passover came from an ancient Canaanite festival. Using only a Jewish *Encyclopedia* to build a whole doctrine is wrong.

Notice! The Encyclopedia Judaica says: “Passover, a spring festival, beginning on the 15th day of Nisan, lasting seven days . . .” It adds, under “critical view,” that “The feast of Passover consists of two parts: The Passover Ceremony and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Originally both parts existed separately; but at the beginning of the Exile they were combined.” Notice – that is the

“critical view” – the view of scholarly “critics,” not Bible believers. It is based on human thinking, supposition, and assumption and reasoning. The same “critical view” tells us “not originally a pilgrimage feast, but a domestic ceremony.” Yet the Scriptures are very plain. Deuteronomy, written by Moses, says plainly: “You may NOT sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates . . . but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide, THERE you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight [literally, “between the two evenings”], at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt” (Deut.16:5-6).

Do you trust the “critical view” or the Biblical view?

The “critical view” also says, “Originally the Passover was celebrated by transient breeders of sheep and goats, later by the Israelites, to secure protection for their flocks prior to leaving the desert winter pasture for cultivated regions. . . . The oldest literary record in Exodus 12 already presupposes the Passover. Hence the old nomadic custom is ‘historicized’ by being connected with the main event in the Israelite salvation history, the Exodus” (Passover, vol.13, p.170).

Do you believe that nonsense? Or the Bible itself? Paul wrote, “All *Scripture* is given by inspiration of God [God breathed], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Tim.3:16-17).

Which do you believe? The Scriptures, which are the “truth” (John 17:17) and “cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Or the Jewish Encyclopedia?

History and the Scriptures show the Jews ALWAYS kept the Passover at the END of Nisan 14, eating the lamb on Nisan 15. They NEVER killed the lambs on Nisan 13, or beginning of Nisan 14, and ate them that very night! The Jewish historian Josephus states plainly that they kept the Passover in his day (70 A.D.) in the same way it was kept in the beginning! He wrote: “Whence it is that we do still offer this sacrifice *in like manner to this day*, and call this festival *Pascha*, which signifies *the feast of the Passover*; because on that day God passed us over, and sent the plague upon the Egyptians; for the destruction of the first-born came upon the Egyptians that night” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, bk.II, chap.XIV, sec.6).

The Passover was ALWAYS eaten at the END of the 14th, on the 15th, after being killed late on the afternoon of the 14th. Josephus, who states that the Jews “do still offer this sacrifice *IN LIKE MANNER TO THIS DAY*”!

What could be clearer than that?

The Jews have historically, for thousands of years, observed them on a particular day, and give substantial reasons for doing so, in accordance with both history and Scripture. Those who criticize the Jews, and accuse them of falling into error on the observance of Passover, have never addressed adequately the question of why Jesus and the disciples really observed the VERY SAME DAYS AS THE JEWS DID, and never once in the gospels did Jesus ever rebuke or criticize the Pharisees, the leading religious group of Jewish thinkers, for any “error” concerning when to keep the Passover! Nor did the apostles in the book of Acts; nor did any of the apostles in any of the epistles of the New Testament!

Their silence on such a mighty point is “deafening” in what this fact discloses to us; their “silence” on this subject speaks volumes of truth, if we only have the “ears” to hear it, to listen, to discern, to open up our minds and THINK about it!

Of course Jesus would address no point WHERE THERE WAS *NO CONTROVERSY* BETWEEN HIM AND THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF THAT TIME!

Moses’ Seat of Authority

It is very clear that the Pharisees were the dominant religious group in Israel during the time of Christ. History shows that they controlled the religious practices and beliefs of the people. Even the Sadducees had to give in to their religious teachings and demands, lest they be rejected and abhorred by the multitudes, lose face and lose their offices.

Jesus said plainly, “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees SIT IN MOSES' SEAT. SO YOU MUST OBEY THEM AND DO EVERYTHING THEY TELL YOU. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice WHAT THEY PREACH” (Matt.23:1-3).

Does this sound as if JESUS was rebuking the Pharisees for their doctrine concerning the holy days, particularly Passover? Of course not! Was He accusing them of being in blatant, indefensible, callous ERROR on what day and at what time they observed this major annual holy day of God? Obviously not!

Rather, He was telling His own disciples, in effect, “DO AS THEY SAY, but not as they do.” That is, OBEY THEIR TEACHING as to the Law of God, but don’t follow their selfish, evil practices of hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and spiritual wickedness.

Obviously, from this statement of Jesus, we should see clearly that the Pharisees indeed held accurately to the “letter of the law” of God. It was in the “spirit of the law” that they fell dramatically short of the mark!

Josephus and Passover

The Jewish first century historian Josephus was a Pharisee. He tells us of the origin and history of the Passover. In *Antiquities of the Jews* he writes: “Whence it is that we do still offer this sacrifice *in like manner to this day*, and call this festival *Pascha*, which signifies *the feast of the Passover*; because on that day God passed us over, and sent the plague upon the Egyptians; for the destruction of the first-born came upon the Egyptians that night” (*Ant.*, bk.II, chap.XIV, sec.6).

Notice – Josephus tells us that the Jews observed the Passover “in like manner” as it was instituted in his own day, which was New Testament times! Josephus says further, “and they offered the sacrifice which was called the *Passover*, on the fourteenth day of the same month [Nisan], and feasted seven days” (*Ant.*, bk.XI, chap.IV, sec.8).

When did they slay the Passover lambs? Josephus explains, in *Wars of the Jews*, “So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, *from the ninth hour to the eleventh [i.e. from 3-5 PM in the afternoon!]. . .*” (Bk.VI, chap.9, sec.3).

Notice that Josephus, an eyewitness expert in the law, and well acquainted with Jewish history, says plainly that this observance was done “IN LIKE MANNER” in his day as it was done at the Exodus itself! In other words, at the Exodus, the Passover sacrifices were also offered up between 3-5 PM in the afternoon of Nisan 14! There was NO CHANGE in the date or in the time of offering!

Says the *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, “That night was to be much observed unto the Lord, when he smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, but passed over the houses of the Israelites, where the blood had been sprinkled and the inmates were standing, staff in hand, awaiting the deliverance promised by the Lord. The festival began on the 14th of Abib at evening, that is, in the beginning of the 15th day, with the sacrificial meal (Lev.23:5-6). A lamb or kid was slain between the evenings, that is, toward sunset (Exo.12:6; Deut.16:6; cf. between the ninth and eleventh hours, *Jos.War*, 6,9,3)” (“Passover,” p.705).

The *Commentary on the Old Testament*, by Keil and Delitzsch, points out, “The expression in Deut.16:6, ‘at (towards) sunset,’ is sufficient to show that the boundary line between the two evenings is not to be fixed precisely at the moment of sunset, but only somewhere about that time. The daily evening sacrifice and the incense offering were also to be presented ‘between the two evenings’ (Exo.29:39, 41; 30:8; Num.28:4). Now as this was not to take place exactly at the same time, but to precede it, they could not both occur at the time of sunset, but the former must have been offered before that. Moreover, in later times, when the paschal lamb was slain and offered at the sanctuary, it must have been slain and offered before sunset, if only to give sufficient time to prepare the paschal meal, which was to be over before midnight” (vol.1, page 328).

The Scribes and Pharisees

The Pharisees trace their spiritual lineage to the scribes and religious leaders in the days of Ezra the scribe and Nehemiah, the governor of Israel. Says Funk and Wagnall's *New Encyclopedia*:

“Pharisees, so-called ‘Jewish sect,’ more correctly a Jewish school, probably dating as a distinct body, or party, from the 2nd century B.C. . . . Their chief tendency was to resist all Greek or other foreign influences that threatened to undermine the sacred religion of their fathers, and they most emphatically took their stand upon divine law. They originated as the Hasidim, becoming known as the Pharisees when John Hyrcanus was high priest of Judea . . . The Pharisees wished public affairs, the state, and all its political doings to be directed and measured by the STANDARD OF DIVINE LAW, without any regard for the priestly and aristocratic Sadducees or the heroes and statesmen who had brought the Syrian wars to a successful issue. . .” (vol.19, article “Pharisees”).

By the time Jesus of Nazareth appeared on the scene, the Pharisees were still the dominant religious school or party in Judea. But they had become largely a wicked and self-righteous group of religious tyrants and legalistic administrators. They focused on the letter of the law, and ignored the spirit of the law.

Jesus rebuked them, not for their correct understanding of the laws and holy days of God, but for their “appearance” of religion (Matt.23:5), their vanity and pride (vs.6-12), their pretense to holiness (verse 14), their greed (vs.15-21), their extortion and excess (v.25), and their hypocrisy and iniquity (vs.27-29). He called them a “generation of vipers” and asked how they could escape the “damnation of hell?” (verse 33).

Why did Christ condemn them? Jesus never once mentioned any “sin” of theirs concerning such an important matter as the correct date for the annual Passover! NOT ONCE! His complete silence on this subject shows us He accepted their teachings concerning the calendar and annual holy day observances at that time! In fact, in every instance in the Gospels where we read of Jesus Himself observing the holy days of God, He did so WITH THE JEWS and the LOCAL COMMUNITY, who all observed the days and set feasts according to the reckoning of the Pharisees!

This should be as plain as the nose on our faces!

How long will we have to argue, and debate, and wrestle over these issues? Why can't people get it straight? Why won't ministers and churches own up to their error, and admit their mistakes, and repent, and CHANGE?

Of course, only PEOPLE can repent! Churches as such are mere corporations of men, run and led by men. If the MAN at the top repents and changes, or several men at the top, THEN and only then can a whole “church” change!

Unfortunately, this means that a lot of nice, sincere, wonderful people will remain DECEIVED and in ERROR, because their LEADERS refuse to repent and change! They will have to learn their lessons the hard way – through the “school of hard knocks,” or the Great Tribulation!

"From Even to Even"

Since there is so much controversy and misunderstanding about the time to keep the Passover, with a number of people, let us go into the subject more thoroughly.

First, notice! God says, “There you must sacrifice the Passover IN THE EVENING, WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN , ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF YOUR DEPARTURE FROM EGYPT. Roast it and eat it . . .Then in the MORNING RETURN TO YOUR TENTS. FOR SIX DAYS EAT UNLEAVENED BREAD and on the SEVENTH DAY HOLD AN ASSEMBLY to the Lord your God and do no work” (Deut.16:6-8).

Notice! The Passover is the **SAME THING AS THE ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR DEPARTURE FROM EGYPT** – not twenty-four hours earlier! That very night they were to eat it, and then, beginning immediately (not twenty-four hours later), they were to eat unleavened bread for **SIX** days, plus the last day of Unleavened Bread when they were to hold an assembly.

It should be obvious here that “in the evening” of the 14th of NISAN has to mean at the ending of the day, toward sunset – for this Scripture speaks of 7 days of unleavened bread, beginning with the Passover night – not eight days!

According to Exodus 12:6, the Passover lamb was to be slaughtered “between the two evenings,” on the 14th of Nisan. According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, this meant between the ninth and eleventh hours of the day – our 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM – or obviously **BEFORE SUNSET, NOT AFTER SUNSET!**

Notice! Josephus writes, “So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover, **WHEN THEY SLAY THEIR SACRIFICES, FROM THE NINTH HOUR TO THE ELEVENTH . . .**” (*Wars of the Jews*, VI, ix, 3).

This period of time was before the setting of the sun – or late afternoon – of whatever day it occurred on. Since the Bible says specifically that it was to occur on the 14th of Nisan or Abib, then it had to be **AT THE END OR CONCLUSION OF THE DAY**, for God said each day began at sunset and ended at sunset (Lev.23:32).

Notice how God Himself defines a day. Concerning the Day of Atonement, God says, “It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: **IN THE NINTH DAY OF THE MONTH AT EVEN, FROM EVEN UNTO EVEN**, shall ye celebrate your Sabbath” (Lev.23:32). Now, if the “ninth day at even” meant the **BEGINNING** of the ninth day, till “even” at the beginning of the next day, then the Day of Atonement would have been the **NINTH DAY** of Tishri. But God plainly says it was to be celebrated “on the **TENTH DAY** of this seventh month” (verse 27).

How plain! Therefore counting from the “ninth day of the month at even” meant from the **CLOSE** of the ninth day! Therefore, when God says to celebrate the Passover “in the fourteenth day” of the first month **AT EVEN**” (Lev.23:5), He must mean the same period of time -- at the **CLOSE** of the fourteenth day!

Let us simply allow the Scriptures to interpret the Scriptures. What could be more simple than that?

Exodus 12:18 adds further proof to this matter. Here God said, “In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, **FROM THE EVENING OF THE FOURTEENTH DAY UNTIL THE EVENING OF THE TWENTY FIRST DAY**” (NIV Bible). God calls this the “Feast of Unleavened Bread” (v.17). It begins after sunset of the 14th day and lasts till sunset after the 21st day – a total of seven days. Here again, as in Deuteronomy 16, and Leviticus 23, the expression “at even” refers to

the END or CLOSE of the 14th! Clearly it is referring to the same time of day – the hours before the close of the day, not the hours beginning a NEW day after sunset!

The Hebrew word *ereb* can refer to the period of time from late afternoon until dark. The context shows how it must be interpreted in each case where it is used. The expression “between the two evenings,” however, is more focused and only can refer to the period of time BEFORE SUNSET, not after.

Notice, now, the proof!

"Between the Two Evenings"

The daily “evening sacrifice” of the Jews was offered, also, “between the two evenings” (Numbers 28:4); and it was the same day as the “morning sacrifice” (verse 3). If the morning sacrifice, therefore, occurred on Nisan 20, let us say, then the evening sacrifice, offered “between the two evenings,” was also on Nisan 20 – the same day! But for that to be true, it would have to have been offered BEFORE SUNSET – NOT AFTER SUNSET, BEFORE COMPLETE DARK!

The Jews always knew this. That is why Josephus so clearly said the Passover was killed between 3:00 and 5:00 PM in the late afternoon! According to history, that is also the time of the evening sacrifice!

Writes Bo Reicke, in *The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible from 500 B.C. to A.D. 100* –

“Twice a day they [the priests in the Temple] performed a burnt offering (Hebrew ‘ola’) on behalf of the community; for the Jews this offering was, so to speak, the ‘ordinarium’ (Hebrew *tadid*, ‘permanent’). They performed this offering at the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard before the east facade of the Temple by slaughtering a yearling lamb at dawn and another at the ninth hour (about three o’clock; Acts 3: 1) and burning all but . . . the skin (Exo.29:38-42; Mishna Tam.iii.2-5; iv.I-12)” (p.166).

The second male lamb was offered “between the two evenings,” at the same general time as the Passover sacrifice. When was this? The New Testament itself gives us the unmistakable, clear answer!

Notice! In the book of Acts, we read: “One day Peter and John were going up to the temple AT THE TIME OF PRAYER – AT THREE IN THE AFTERNOON” (Acts 3;1, NIV). That is quite plain, isn’t it?

Concerning the ministration of the daily sacrifices in the Temple, Josephus, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, wrote:

“ . . . and anyone may hence learn how very great piety we exercise towards God, and the observance of his laws, since the priests were not at all hindered from their sacred ministrations, by their fear during this siege, but did still TWICE EACH DAY, in the morning and ABOUT THE NINTH HOUR [3:00 PM], OFFER THEIR SACRIFICES ON THE ALTAR; nor did they omit those sacrifices, if any melancholy accident happened, by the stones that were thrown among them; for although the city was taken on the third month, on the day of the fast. . . when Caius Antonius and Marcus Tullius Cicero were consuls, and the enemy then fell upon them, and cut the throats of those that were in the temple, yet could not those that offered the sacrifices be compelled to run away, neither by the fear they were in of their own lives, nor by the number that were already slain, as thinking it better to suffer whatever came upon them at their very altars, than to omit anything that their laws required of them; and that this is not a mere brag, or an encomium to manifest a degree of our piety that was false, but is the real truth” (Bk. XIV , IV , 3).

The *Cyclopaedia of Biblical. Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, by John McClintoch and James Strong, volume II, published in 1874, declares of the daily sacrifice:

“Daily sacrifice: . . . was a burnt-offering of two year-old lambs, which were daily immolated in the name of the whole Israelitish people upon the great altar; the first lamb early (as soon as it became light, Mishna, Tamid, iii, 2), the other AT EVENING (MORE DEFINITELY, ‘BETWEEN THE TWO EVENINGS’; according to Pesach, v, 1, the eve-offering was sacrificed as a rule BETWEEN THE EIGHT-AND-A-HALF AND THE NINE-AND-A-HALF HOUR {2:30-3:30 PM}, but on Sabbath-eve and Passover-eve [14th Nisan] one hour earlier; Josephus, Ant xiv, 4,3, designates 'about the ninth hour' as the time; comp., however, Jonathan's Targum, Gen. xlix, 27 . . .” (p.644).

The *Mishnah, A New Translation*, by Jacob Neusner, declares in Pesahim 5:1:

“A. The daily whole offering [of the afternoon][generally] slaughtered at half after the eighth hour [after dawn, about 2:30 P.M.] and offered up at half after the ninth hour [about 3:30 P.M.].

“B. On the eve of Passover, [the daily whole offering] was slaughtered at half after the seventh hour [1:30 PM] and offered up at half after the eighth hour [2:30 PM].

“C. whether on an ordinary day or on the Sabbath.

“D. [If, however,] the eve of Passover coincided with the eve of the Sabbath [Friday] , it was slaughtered at half after the sixth hour [12:30 P.M.] and offered up at half after the seventh hour [1:30 P.M.].

“E. and [then] the Passover offering [was slaughtered] after it”
(*The Mishnah*, p.236-237).

“Between the Two Evenings”

The real center of the controversy has raged around the expression “between the two evenings.” Some claim this expression meant the space between the setting of the sun and the moment when the stars become visible, or when darkness sets in.

Says the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, however:

“Tradition, however, interprets the phrase ‘between the two evenings’ to mean FROM AFTERNOON TO THE DISAPPEARING OF THE SUN, THE FIRST EVENING BEING FROM THE TIME WHEN THE SUN BEGINS TO DECLINE FROM ITS VERTICAL OR NOONTIDE POINT TOWARDS THE WEST; and the SECOND FROM ITS GOING DOWN AND VANISHING OUT OF SIGHT, which is the reason why the DAILY SACRIFICE might be KILLED AT 12:30 P.M. ON A FRIDAY. . . But as the Paschal lamb was slain after the daily sacrifice, it generally took place from 2:30-5:30 P.M. ..We should have deemed it superfluous to add that such faithful followers of Jewish tradition as Saadia, Rashi, Kimchi, Ralbag, etc. , espouse this definition of the ancient Jewish canons . . . Now Rashi most distinctly declares, ‘From the sixth hour[=12 o’clock] and upwards is called “between the two evenings,” because the sun begins to set for the evening. Hence it appears to me that the phrase “between the two evenings” denotes the hours between the evening of the day and the evening of the night. The evening of the day is from the beginning of the seventh hour [=immediately after noontide], when the evening shadows begin to lengthen, while the evening of the night is at the beginning of the night’ (Commentary on Exo.12:6). Kimchi says almost. literally the same thing: “Between the two evenings” is from the time when THE SUN BEGINS TO INCLINE TOWARDS THE WEST,

WHICH IS FROM THE SIXTH HOUR [=12 o'clock] AND UPWARDS. It is called *erevim* ["evenings"] because there are TWO EVENINGS, for from the time that the sun begins to decline is one evening, and the other evening is after the sun has GONE DOWN, and it is the space between which is meant by "between the two evenings" Eustathius, in a note on the seventeenth book of the Odyssey, shows that the Greeks too held that there were two evenings, one which they called the latter evening, at the close of the day; and the other the former evening, which commenced immediately after noon. . ." (*McClintock and Strong*, vol. VII, 1877, p.735).

Therefore, when God said that the Passover was to be sacrificed "at the going down of the sun" (Deut.16:6), He obviously meant – as every faithful Jew knows – during the late afternoon, when the sun is declining or descending in the Western sky. This sacrifice was done during daylight – not after dark! It was done while the sun was *STILL* "going down" in the sky – not AFTER it had already "set," or disappeared beneath the western horizon!

That is precisely and exactly what the Scriptures so clearly say! Will we believe them? Will we be willing to accept the clear Word of God? God commanded, "There you must sacrifice the Passover IN THE EVENING, WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN" – not after it has ALREADY GONE DOWN! (Deut16:6).

WHEN Did Israel Leave Egypt?

Those who believe Passover is at the beginning of the 14th, and 24 hours later Israel left Egypt, have a serious problem with several verses in the Bible. Notice! We read this plain and remarkable statement:

"The people of Israel broke camp at Ramses THE MORNING AFTER THE PASSOVER, ON THE 15TH DAY of the first month. They departed by an uplifted hand in plain view of all the Egyptians" (Num.33:3, New Berkeley Version).

"And they departed from Ramses in the first month, on the 15th day of the first month; on the MORROW AFTER THE PASSOVER the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians " (KJV).

This verse states plainly that it was the MORNING – at DAY BREAK – when Israel left Egypt, in the SIGHT of all the Egyptians – not at night at all! It was "ON THE MORROW" after the Passover itself, which occurred at night! This clearly means mere HOURS between the Passover itself, and the "MORROW" or "MORNING" when they departed, and broke camp!

This only makes plain old good horse sense, because as the Scriptures state, their bread was not even leavened; they did not have time for the leavening process to occur in their dough (see

Exodus 12:34, 39). Obviously, their dough would easily have become leavened if they had tarried in Egypt for the space of a whole day, before departing!

The Jewish Encyclopedia

The *Jewish Encyclopedia* is also very plain concerning the time of the Passover, and the expression “between the two evenings.” We read:

“The Passover lamb was killed, in the time of the second temple, in the court where all other ‘kodashim’ were slaughtered, in keeping with the Deuteronomic prescription . . . the time ‘between the two evenings’ (‘ben ha-arbayim’) was construed to mean ‘after noon and until nightfall,’ the killing of the lamb following immediately upon that of the ‘Tamid,’ the burning of the incense, and the setting in order of the lamps, according to daily routine. . . The animal (paschal lamb) was slain on the eve of the Passover, on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan, after the Tamid sacrifice had been killed, i.e., at THREE O’CLOCK, or, in case the eve of the Passover fell on Friday, at two” (“Passover,” p.548-556).

The Passover was an extremely important festival for every religious Jew. Josephus tells us that upwards of 250,000 lambs were slain during the Passover festivities during his day, one for every ten people in Judea. Bo Reicke, in *The New Testament Era*, explains:

“A special form of private communion sacrifice was the Passover sacrifice, for which yearling male lambs or kids were used. To deal with the thousands of animals slaughtered at the same time, the priests stood in lines between the fence and the altar, passed bowls holding the blood, and had their colleagues at the end of the lines empty the bowls at the foot of the altar (Mishna Pes. v. 6) .Then the worshiper’s lamb was flayed and carried out in its skin; it was roasted on a spit within the city AND EATEN IN A ROOM AFTER SUNDOWN .Ten to twenty people shared the meal, having joined together for the festival as a household, according to the law. . .” (p.16).

How clear that the Passover was historically always observed at the END of Nisan 14, and beginning of Nisan 15 – just as the Jews do, to this very day. How sad it is that so many “Christian” churches get all confused, and attempt to keep it at the *beginning* of Nisan 14 instead. Why do they do this? There is one simple reason for the confusion. It due to an error in understanding due to

misreading one particular text concerning Christ's last days involving the Passover. Let us examine the time sequence of events.

The Gospel of John

The apostle John records this event: “Now *before the Feast of the Passover*, when Jesus knew that HIS HOUR HAD COME that He should depart from this world, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And *supper being served* [“ended” is a poor translation; my Bible margin says, “*during supper*”], the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus . . . *rose from SUPPER . . .*” (John 13:1-4).

Notice! This was “*before the Feast of the Passover*”! Therefore it could not have been the traditional, normal *Passover!* Supper was still being served when Jesus arose to wash the disciples' feet. John nowhere calls this meal a “Passover.” He simply calls it “supper.”

At this supper they ate regular “bread,” because the Feast had not yet begun (verse 1). The Greek word for “bread” used for this evening's bread is *artos* and normally refers to leavened bread unless qualified otherwise with a modifier. The Greek word for *unleavened bread* is *AZUMOS*. The bread Jesus and the disciples ate this evening was the kind that one would “dip” into a gravy, as a “sop.” Jesus told John, when he asked Him who would betray Him, “It is he to whom I shall give a *piece of bread* when I have *dipped* it” (John 13:26). “And having *dipped the bread*, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now *after the piece of bread*, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, What you do, do quickly” (verse 27).

The next verse explains that no one knew why Jesus said this to Judas. “For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, 'Buy those things *we need for the Feast,*' or that he should give something to the poor” (verses 28-29).

Now if this was the PASSOVER DINNER, doesn't it seem strange that the disciples thought Jesus was *sending Judas away from the Passover, right in the middle of it, to BUY GROCERIES FOR THE FEAST?*

That makes no sense at all!

If this was the Passover, then the markets would have been closed, and certainly no shopping would be allowed to interrupt the very Passover dinner itself! The very fact that the disciples had such a thought in their minds indicates plainly that they knew this meal itself was not the Passover, but indeed was a very special meal eaten together as a “love banquet.”

Now notice Luke 22:14: “And when the *hour had come*, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.” This compares with John 13:1: “Now *before the Feast of the Passover*, when Jesus knew *His hour had come* that He should depart from this world to the Father . . .” In neither passage does it say that the “hour” of the Passover had come! Rather, it was the “hour of His betrayal” that had come. Jesus knew that this night would be His last with His disciples, until after His forthcoming death and resurrection.

“With Fervent Desire . . . THIS Passover”

Now we come to the most enigmatic, perplexing verse of all. This is the verse which is the

most misunderstood verse in all the New Testament, I believe. Notice! We have been studying this subject in context, bringing together all the related Scriptures. Now we come to Luke 22, verses 15-16. Here Jesus said to the disciples:

“With *fervent desire* I have desired to eat *this Passover* with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

What was He talking about? What did He mean by saying “THIS Passover”? There are only two possibilities:

- 1) He meant the upcoming Passover that very year, which had not yet arrived, as this statement was made “before the feast of the Passover” (John 13:1).
- 2) He meant that very meal that evening which they were partaking of – even though it was served with regular “bread,” makes no mention of lamb, or bitter herbs, which were required for a Passover meal.

Let's take a spiritual microscope to this verse, and analyze it very carefully. Let's notice what it *does* say as well as what it *does not* say.

What, then, did Jesus mean when He said, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat *this Passover* with you before I suffer”? The word for “desire” in this verse is an unusual word, *epithumia* in the Greek, and means “a longing, especially for that which is *forbidden*” (see *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, #1939).

The word for “desire” in this verse is very important to understanding the context of Jesus' words. Says *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, “desire, craving, longing,” “specifically for what is *forbidden*.” This is the “strongest expression of intense desire,” whether good or bad, says the Jamieson, Fausset, Brown *Critical-Experimental Commentary*.

What a difference a little word makes!

In other words, Jesus here was saying He desired to eat the normal, traditional Passover with His disciples, that year, but He knew that such a thing will be *impossible* – that it was *forbidden* – that for Him to fulfill God's PLAN He must be dead and in the grave the evening the Passover would be eaten, and therefore it was *forbidden* and *impossible* for Him to eat that Passover with them!

Suppose a man was talking to a friend in the world, and told him a few days before Thanksgiving Day, “With desire I have desired to celebrate *this Thanksgiving* with you before I leave, but unfortunately I have to take a long trip and won't be here for the holiday. I won't be able to keep Thanksgiving with you until many years from now.”

In other words, it is nothing more than *pure speculation or assumption* to conclude that this verse “proves” Jesus was eating the Passover that very evening! This verse proves nothing of the kind – in fact, when understood, the Greek word for “desire” here proves the very opposite!

The *Critical-Experimental Commentary* points out:

“The *last meal one is to partake of with his family or friends before his departure even for a far distant land, in all probability never to see them again, is a solemn and*

fond one to any thoughtful and loving person. The last meal of a martyr, of Jesus with his friends in the truth, before being led forth to execution, is *still more touching*. But faint are these illustrations of the emotions with which Jesus now sat down supper with the Twelve. All the sweetness and all the sadness of His social intercourse with them, from the day that He first chose them to be with Him, were now to be **concentrated and heightened to their utmost intensity** during the brief hour or two of this their last meal together. But *this was no common meal, nor even common passover.*”

Paul and the Passover

The apostle Paul bears witness to this fact He admits, when on trial before the Sanhedrin, “I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6). He admitted that concerning the law of God, they had “the righteousness that is by the law” (Rom.10:5). He admitted that they were “zealous for God” (verse 2). Paul himself had been a strict Pharisee up until his conversion.

Paul wrote to the Philippians, “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; IN REGARD TO THE LAW, A PHARISEE; as for zeal, persecuting the Church; as for LEGALISTIC RIGHTEOUSNESS, FAULTLESS” (Phil.3:4-6).

Now consider! If the Pharisees had been observing Passover and Pentecost ON THE WRONG DAY, AT THE WRONG TIME, then Paul could not have been “faultless” concerning the law, and the righteousness that comes from obedience to the law! This Scripture then proves beyond any doubt that the PHARISEES WERE CORRECT as to the days they observed as God’s annual festivals and holy days!

Paul -- as a Pharisee, “Blameless” Concerning the Law

The Amplified Bible has Paul's words this way: “Circumcised when I was eight days old, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew [and the son] of Hebrews; AS TO THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW I was of [the party of] the PHARISEES . . . and by the LAW’S STANDARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS – [supposed] justice, uprightness and right standing with God – I WAS PROVEN TO BE BLAMELESS AND NO FAULT WAS FOUND WITH ME.”

In no way could Paul have said such a thing, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, as a part of Holy Scripture, UNLESS IT WERE TRUE! – and that means that as a Pharisee, observing the holy day of PASSOVER when the Pharisees said that it was to be observed, was COMPLETELY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW OF GOD!

What could be more plain and clear than that?

According to the MOFFATT translation, Paul actually said he was “a Pharisee as regards the Law,” and “IMMACULATE BY THE STANDARD OF LEGAL RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

Again, such a claim would have been the height of folly and sin, foolishness and deception, IF the Pharisees had been observing PASSOVER on the wrong days!

Says one commentary, "Jesus found the scribes and Pharisees scrupulously keeping the details of the law, besides their added traditions. **THEY ZEALOUSLY OBSERVED THE FESTIVALS**, including the festival of unfermented cakes, but Jesus condemned them, for, because of their hypocrisy, they had lost sight of the real significance of these . . . arrangements of Jehovah for their blessing" (*Aid to Bible Understanding*, article "Festival of Unfermented Cakes", p.578).

Jesus' Example

Jesus and His disciples kept the same Passover as the Jews around them. They observed the same Passover as did the Pharisees. While He was yet a child, we read, "EVERY YEAR his parents went up to Jerusalem for the **FEAST OF THE PASSOVER**. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, **ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOM**" (Luke 2:41-42).

After Jesus began His ministry, we read, "When it was almost time for the **JEWISH PASSOVER**, Jesus went up to Jerusalem" (John 2:13). "Now while he was in Jerusalem at the **PASSOVER FEAST**, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name" (verse 23).

Jesus made no secret of observing the same Passover festival as the Jews kept. We read, "When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there" (John 4:45). There is no hint or indication whatsoever in these accounts that Jesus kept the Passover at any other time than all the Jews did. All were in agreement. Both the Sadducees and Pharisees kept it at the **END** of Nisan 14, beginning of Nisan 15, as they killed the sacrifice and ate the roasted lamb that night, after sunset.

So where in their febrile imaginations do people come up with the idea that Jesus and His disciples kept the Passover a night **EARLIER** than the Jews all around them did?

"When it was almost time for the **JEWISH PASSOVER**, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, 'What do you think? Isn't he coming to the Feast at all?' But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him" (John 11:55-57).

Even at the risk of His life, Jesus observed the holy days of *God!* The Pharisees knew this; they knew He observed the **LAWS** of God. They knew when and where to expect Him.

After that final last supper with His disciples, Jesus was arrested and taken into custody. The Jewish high priest questioned Him, and one of the officials struck Him in the face (John 18:19-24). Then they took Him to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. "By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover" (John 18:28). Obviously, they had not yet partaken of the Passover, although by now it was morning, after sunrise, of the 13th of Nisan. Why? They were going to be observing it the next afternoon (of the 14th), and eating of it during the following evening, after sunset, at the beginning of Nisan 15th.

Later that day, about noon, Pilate brought Jesus out “and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the DAY OF PREPARATION OF PASSOVER WEEK, about the sixth hour [noon]” (John 19:14).

The 10th to the 14th days of Nisan were known as the “Days of Preparation,” because during them the Passover lambs were selected (on Nisan 10), kept in reserve, and then sacrificed (on the afternoon of the 14th). All leaven was removed from all the homes in Judea by mid-day on the 14th. That evening, as the 15th of Nisan came, they celebrated the Passover seder, a long, wonderful, Passover meal, with family. The Jewish leaders, knowing that the evening was fast approaching, asked Pilate to have the bodies of Jesus and those crucified with Him to be taken down and buried before the onset of the High Sabbath. As the apostle John records, “Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath” (John 19:31).

The Evidence Is Conclusive

All the evidence shows us overwhelmingly that the Passover was killed at the end of the 14th of Nisan or Abib. It was killed at the same time, the very moment, when Jesus Christ Himself died for our sins! (Matt.27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46).

What could be plainer?

Jesus Christ Himself set us an example, and He observed the same Passover throughout His life as did the Jews. And He said to the people of His day, these remarkable words:

“You shall know the truth; and the truth
will set you free” (John 8:32).

The Passover is the first of God’s annual holy days. It should be observed by Christians as well as Jews, with an understanding of its FULL meaning, and it should be kept at the appropriate, God-appointed TIME – at the end of Nisan 14 and beginning of Nisan 15 – since the original Passover lambs were killed in the afternoon of Nisan 14, then roasted over a fire on a spit, and then eaten on Nisan 15, the first day of the FEAST of Unleavened bread.

Indeed, what could be plainer? May God help us all to get it right – and do it right – and do what is righteous and pleasing in His sight!

It’s high time we come out of spiritual Babylon, “confusion,” and do exactly what God commands, with no questions, doubts, and no if’s, and’s or but’s. There is no excuse for failing to observe the true Passover, and not to do it precisely as God commands, and at the time He says it is to be observed! Do not allow any man or church or supposed leader come between you and the truth of God! Do not fear men or their presumed “authority” or pontifications. Fear God!

Let us rejoice in keeping the Passover holy day the right way, at the right time, and deeply appreciate God’s revealed truth about the Passover, and show our appreciation by our obedience!