

WAS THE "LAST SUPPER" THE PASSOVER MEAL?

Several conflicting opinions exist regarding the meal that took place on the last night of Christ's life. Many people believe that Yeshua ate a Passover meal with his disciples, as the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke appear to indicate. Others disagree, pointing to John's Gospel, which clearly shows that this "last supper" occurred **before** the Passover feast. Is there a way to reconcile the two differing accounts? Can both accounts be correct?

To fully understand this topic, let's examine the Gospel reports of Yeshua's final meal. First, we'll look at John's account of the "last supper." Many scholars believe that John wrote his Gospel late in the first century, long after the Synoptic Gospels had been written. By the time John wrote, Gentiles likely composed a significant portion of the Church.

Probably because of the number of Gentile converts in the Church and the anti-Jewish bias that had begun to take root, John's Gospel is different from the Synoptic Gospels. John went to great lengths to emphasize Christ's heritage. He stressed that Yeshua was a Jew who routinely kept Jewish customs, including the observance of God's commanded feast days (Lev. 23). John refers to at least three Passovers during the ministry of Christ (John 2:13; 6:4; 19:14), including his final one. He also mentions the Feast of Tabernacles, known by the Jews as *Sukkot* (John 7:2), the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, which the Jews called *Hoshanah Rabbah* (John 7:37), and the Feast of Dedication, commonly known as *Chanukah* (John 10:22).

Let's review the beginning of John's account of the "last supper," which is found in chapter 13 of his Gospel:

JOHN 13:1 Now **before the Feast of the Passover**, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. 5 Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. (*NASU*)

John shows that the "last supper" took place on the same night Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ (John 13:21-30). The first verse plainly states that this was "before the feast of the Passover," which lasts for seven days (from Nisan 15 through Nisan 21). John is obviously referring to the same night described by the other three Gospel writers (Matt. 26; Mark 14; Luke 22). John goes on to reiterate several times that these events took place **before** Passover. Clearly, the Passover meal traditionally eaten on the evening of Nisan 15 had not yet been observed.

JOHN 13:21 When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me. 26 . . . It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. 27 Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." 28 But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. 29 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. 30 Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night. (*NKJV*)

JOHN 18:28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but **that they might eat the Passover.** (NKJV)

JOHN 19:14 Now **it was the Preparation Day of the Passover**, and about the sixth hour. And he [Pilate] said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" (NKJV)

JOHN 19:31 Therefore, because **it was the Preparation Day**, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the **Sabbath** (for **that Sabbath was a high day**), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. (NKJV)

JOHN 19:42 So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' **Preparation Day**, for the tomb was nearby. (NKJV)

The Jews reckoned days from sunset to sunset. As you can see, John points out repeatedly that the "last supper," the betrayal by Judas, and Yeshua's trial and crucifixion all occurred **before** the Passover, on the Preparation Day. But exactly when was the Preparation Day?

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary says that the Preparation Day for the Passover was from the evening (end) of Nisan 13 until the evening (end) of Nisan 14 (p. 411). E.W. Bullinger, in Appendix 156 to *The Companion Bible*, states: "Wednesday, Nisan 14th (commencing on Tuesday at sunset), was 'the preparation day', on which the crucifixion took place" (p. 180).

As shown in John 19:31 above, the day following the Preparation Day was an annual high Sabbath, the First Day of Unleavened Bread, which fell annually on Nisan 15. God commanded the Israelites to observe this high Sabbath every year:

EXODUS 12:16 "On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat; that only may be prepared by you. 17 So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall **observe this day** throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance." (NKJV)

LEVITICUS 23:6 "And on the **fifteenth day** of the same **month** [Abib, later called Nisan] is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; **seven days you must eat unleavened bread.** 7 **On the first day you shall have a holy convocation;** you shall do no customary work on it." (NKJV)

Now let's examine the accounts of this event recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke in the Synoptic Gospels and compare them with John's version.

MATTHEW 26:17 **Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread** the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to **prepare** for You to eat the Passover?" 18 And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'" 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they **prepared the Passover** [*hetoimasan to pascha*]. 20 When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. 21 Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." (NKJV)

MARK 14:12 **Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb**, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and **prepare**, that You may eat the Passover?" 13 And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. 14 Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the

Passover with My disciples?" 15 Then he will show you a **large upper room**, furnished and prepared; **there make ready for us.**" 16 So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they **prepared the Passover** [*hetoimasan to pascha*]. 17 In the evening He came with the twelve. 18 Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, **one of you who eats with Me will betray Me.**" (*NKJV*)

LUKE 22:7 **Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed.** 8 And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and **prepare the Passover** for us, that we may eat." 9 So they said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare?" 10 And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. 11 Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, **Where is the guest room** where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" 12 Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; **there make ready.**" 13 So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they **prepared the Passover** [*hetoimasan to pascha*]. 14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. 15 Then He said to them, "**With fervent desire I have desired** [*epithumia epethumesa*] to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (*NKJV*)

First, let's note the timing of these events. Matthew says it was "the first of Unleavened Bread." On the surface, this appears to contradict John's account, which plainly states that the "last supper" occurred before the Feast of Passover. However, Mark and Luke add an additional detail that helps clarify the time. Mark says it was "the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover"; Luke states it was "the day of Unleavened Bread when the Passover must be killed."

The Bible tells us in Exodus 12:6 that the Passover lambs were to be killed "between the evenings" on the Nisan 14. The Jews have traditionally interpreted "between the evenings" to mean "in the afternoon."

[For an in-depth discussion of this phrase, refer to "[What Does 'Between the Evenings' Mean?](#)" and "[Exodus 12-When Was the First Passover?](#)"]

The Jews at the time of Christ killed the Passover lambs on the afternoon of Nisan 14. In *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus records that in the first century, the Passover lambs were slaughtered "from the ninth hour till the eleventh" (bk. 6, ch. 9, sec. 3), which corresponds to our 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Obviously, the day Matthew and Mark call the "first day of Unleavened Bread" is the same day that John calls the "the Preparation Day of the Passover." *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* says that the 14th of Nisan was "called until the evening the preparation for the Passover" (p. 411). As shown below, all three Synoptic Gospels confirm that Yeshua was crucified on the "Preparation Day," Nisan 14.

MATTHEW 27:62 On the next day [Nisan 15], which followed the **Day of Preparation**, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate. (*NKJV*)

MARK 15:42 Now when evening had come, because it was the **Preparation Day**, that is, the day before the [high] Sabbath, 15 Joseph of Arimathea . . . went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. (*NKJV*)

LUKE 23:54 That day was the Preparation, and the [high] Sabbath drew near. (*NKJV*)

Going back to the Synoptic accounts of the meal, Matthew and Mark show that the disciples came to Yeshua just as the Preparation Day (Nisan 14) was beginning, which would have been at sunset. They asked him **where** he wanted them to prepare to eat the Passover meal, which would occur the next night (see John 18:28 above). Luke records that in response to their question, Yeshua instructed Peter and John

how to find the place where they should prepare to eat the Passover on the night of Nisan 15. He told them the owner of the house would show them a large furnished upper room. Mark and Luke both state that it was there, **in that room**, that they were to prepare for the Passover (Mark 14:15; Luke 22:12).

As you can see from all three accounts (Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7-9), the disciples waited until the **beginning of Nisan 14** to ask Christ **where** to prepare the Passover. If the time between sunset and dark on the 14th was the correct time to slay the Passover lambs, as some erroneously teach, why would they have waited so very late to question Christ about preparing for the meal? Or if the Passover meal would not take place for at least another 24 hours, why would they prepare for it **that evening**?

In Jacob Neusner's translation of the Jewish ***Mishnah***, we can see why the disciples would have been concerned with preparing for the Passover that evening, even though it wouldn't be eaten until the next night.

PESAHIM 1:3 **A.** R. Judah says, "They seek out [leaven] (1) on the night of the fourteenth, (2) on the fourteenth in the morning, and (3) at the time of removal." **B.** And sages say, "[If] one did not seek out [leaven] on the night of the fourteenth, he may seek it out (1) on the fourteenth. **C.** "If he did not seek it out on the fourteenth, let him seek it out (2) at the appointed time [11 a.m. to 12 noon on the fourteenth]. **D.** "[If] he did not seek it out at the appointed time, let him seek it out (3) after the appointed time [to nightfall]." (p. 230, *The Mishnah: A New Translation*)

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary confirms how the Jews prepared for the observance of the Passover:

On the evening of the 13th Nisan [as that day ended and Nisan 14 began], which, until that of the 14th, was called the "*preparation for the Passover*" (John 19:14), every head of a family searched for and collected by the light of a candle all the leaven. Before beginning the search he pronounced the following benediction: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast sanctified us with thy commandments, and hast enjoined us to remove the leaven." After the search he said, 'Whatever leaven remains in my possession which I cannot see, behold, it is null, and accounted as the dust of the earth.' (p. 411, "Festivals,")

The phrase "prepare the Passover" found in Matthew 26:19, Mark 14:16, and Luke 22:13 comes from the Greek phrase ***hetoimasan to pascha***. According to ***Strong's Concordance***, the root Greek verb ***hetoimazo*** means "1) to make ready, prepare 1a) to make the necessary preparations, get everything ready . . . drawn from the oriental custom of sending on before kings on their journeys persons to level the roads and make them passable." Clearly, the reason the disciples questioned Yeshua about **where** they were going to eat the Passover meal was because Jewish custom required that the location be prepared by removing the leaven from it on the night of Nisan 14.

As mentioned earlier, the Jews ate the Passover meal on the night of Nisan 15, which was the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Exodus 12:15 commands the Israelites to remove all leaven from their dwellings and prescribes the penalty for eating leavened bread during this feast.

EXODUS 12:15 "For a seven-day period shall you eat matzos [unleavened bread], but on the previous day [the Preparation Day] you shall nullify the leaven from your homes; for anyone who eats leavened food - that soul shall be cut off from Israel, from the first day [Nisan 15] to the seventh day [Nisan 21]." (*Stone Edition Tanach*)

When the disciples questioned Christ about where they were going to eat the Passover meal the next night, they still did not fully understand that he would be **dead** then! Christ would not be able to eat the Passover because he was destined to be sacrificed as **our** Passover (I Cor. 5:7). But instead of explaining **then** that he would be in the grave when the time came to eat the Passover lamb, he simply told them **where** to prepare to eat the Passover meal. After Peter and John had deleavened the room and made ready for the upcoming feast, Christ used their final meal together on the night of the 14th to instruct his disciples one last time before his death.

Luke 22:15 has been used to support the assertion that Christ and his disciples ate the Passover meal. In this Scripture, Yeshua says "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." The Greek phrase translated "with fervent desire I have desired" is *epithumia epethumesa*. It literally means "with desire I desired."

The first word of this phrase, *epithumia*, is a noun. According to the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, usually this word " has the ambivalent sense, *desire, strive for, long to have/do/be* something." It can also be "used for (forbidden) desire " (p. 27, vol. 2). Christ uses *epithumia* in this sense in Luke 22:15.

In the article "The Lord's Supper," the *New Bible Dictionary* says that ". . . Lk. 22:15 may be read as an unfulfilled wish" (p. 707). Christ truly longed to eat that coming Passover with his disciples, but his desire could not be realized! It was forbidden because it would have destroyed the plan of God, since Christ was destined to be sacrificed as our Passover lamb on the afternoon **before** the Passover meal.

In his Bible translation, Ferrar Fenton accurately captures the meaning of Christ's words in these verses:

LUKE 22:15 "And He said to them: **I have longingly desired** [epithumia epethumesa] to eat this Passover with you before My suffering; 16 **however**, I tell you that **I shall not eat of it**, until it can be administered in the Kingdom of God." (*The Holy Bible in Modern English*)

The meal that Yeshua and the disciples ate was obviously a preparatory meal, not the Passover meal itself. Jewish scholar David H. Stern writes of this meal:

The Last Supper is considered by most scholars to have been a Passover meal or *Seder*. Many *Pesach* themes are deepened, reinforced and given new levels of meaning by events in the life of *Yeshua* the Messiah and by his words on this night. However, Joseph Shulam has suggested that it may not have been the *Seder* but a *se'udat-mitzvah*, the celebratory banquet accompanying performance of a commandment such as a wedding or *b'rit-milah*.

Here is the background for his argument. When a rabbi and his students finish studying a tractate of the Talmud, they celebrate with a *se'udat-mitzvah* (also called a *se'udat-siyum*, 'banquet of completion,' i.e., graduation). The Fast of the Firstborn, expressing gratitude for the saving of Israel's firstborn sons from the tenth plague, has been prescribed for the day before *Pesach*, Nisan 14, at least since Mishnaic times. When it is necessary to eat a *se'udat-mitzvah*, this takes precedence over a fast. With a modicum of foresight a rabbi can plan to complete a tractate on Nisan 14 and thus avoid having to fast; doing so is not construed as cheating, and in fact it has become the custom.

The tradition of the Fast of the Firstborn dates at least from Mishnaic times. But, Shulam reasons, if it goes back a couple of centuries more to the time of *Yeshua*, and if the *si'udat-siyum* custom applied in the first century to the completing of any course of study, then *Yeshua* might have arranged to have himself and his *talmidim* finish reading a book of the *Tanakh* on Nisan 14. Or, since *Yeshua* knew he was going to die, he may have regarded it as appropriate to complete his disciples' earthly "course of study" with a banquet. This solution would also resolve the perceived conflict between *Yochanan* [John] and the Synoptic Gospels over the timing of the Last Supper. (p. 77, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*)

In *The Companion Bible* comment on Luke 22:15, Bullinger states that the last supper Christ and the disciples ate was "not the eating of the Lamb, but the *Chagigah* or feast which preceded it . . ." (p. 1500). He goes on to explain that "it follows, therefore, that the Lord being crucified on 'the preparation day' could not have eaten of the Passover lamb, which was not slain until the evening of the 14th of Nisan (i.e. afternoon). . . . Thus it is clear, that . . . no 'Passover lamb' could have been eaten at the 'last supper' on the previous evening" (p. 180, Appendix 156).

None of the four Gospels mentions a lamb being eaten at the "last supper." The time had not yet come to slay the Passover when Christ and his disciples ate their last meal together.

In addition, Deuteronomy 16:2, 5-6 shows that the disciples would have also had a problem with **where** to slay a Passover lamb, had they desired to kill one.

DEUTERONOMY 16:2 Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the Lord thy God, of the flock and the herd, **in the place which the Lord shall choose to place his name there.** 5 Thou mayest **not** sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee: 6 But at the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season [Aviv, see Deu. 16:1] that thou camest forth out of Egypt. (**KJV**)

God, through Moses, gives instructions regarding the proper place to sacrifice the Passover in this Scripture. As shown above, God did not allow that the Israelites to sacrifice the Passover anywhere they wanted, but only at the place where He chose to put His name. During Christ's life, the Temple in Jerusalem was the place where God had placed His name, and that's where the Jews slew the Passover lambs in accordance with this command.

Raymond F. McNair of the Global Church of God writes in his article "When Should the True Passover Be Observed?" that Christ's disciples "certainly could not have gone into the Temple at the beginning of the 14th of Abib to have the priests and Levites assist them in the sacrifice of their Passover lambs. Why not? Simply because the Jews (who then controlled the Temple ritual) would not have permitted anyone to kill their Passover lambs approximately 21 hours before they allowed, and supervised, the killing of Passover lambs in the court of the Temple!" (p. 11, *Global Church News*, March-April 1996,).

Christ and his disciples obviously could not have eaten a Passover lamb with their meal that night. The Scriptures clearly state that Christ was our Passover (I Cor. 5:7). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record that Christ died at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.). This is the same time that Josephus records the slaughter of the Passover lambs commenced. Christ fulfilled the symbolism of the Passover lambs exactly by giving his life just as the unblemished Passover lambs began to be slain on the 14th of Nisan!

CONCLUSION

We can see that the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) do not conflict with John's account of the "last supper" when understood correctly. A careful study of all four Gospels shows that Yeshua and the disciples did **not** eat the Passover meal. There was no way they could have, since the time had not yet come to sacrifice the Passover lambs. They simply prepared for the Passover by de-leavening the location they planned to use for the Feast. Afterward they ate some type of celebratory or preparatory meal on the evening of Nisan 14. At this supper, Yeshua instituted the New Covenant symbols of the bread and wine. After the meal, Judas Iscariot rose and left to betray Christ. When approached with an open mind and the belief that the Scriptures cannot be broken (John 10:35), we **can** reconcile all these accounts.

Bryan T. Huie
August 22, 1997

Revised: March 21, 2002

<http://users.aristotle.net/~bhuie/po-eat.htm>

WHAT DOES "BETWEEN THE EVENINGS" MEAN?

A lot of disagreement exists in the end-time Church of God regarding the proper time to observe the Passover. Many, if not most, believe that the Passover lambs were originally slain on the 14th of Abib (later called Nisan) right after sunset, with the Passover meal being eaten later on the night of 14 Abib. They base this belief on Exodus 12:6:

EXODUS 12:6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it **in the evening** [בֵּין הַעֲרָבִים] (KJV)

The Hebrew phrase **beyn ha'arbayim** (בֵּין הַעֲרָבִים) is translated as "in the evening" above. However, the literal translation of this expression is "between the evenings," as Jay Green's English rendering of the Old Testament, entitled *A Literal Translation of the Bible (LTB)*, shows:

EXODUS 12:6 And it shall be for you to keep until the fourteenth day of this month. And all the assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it **between the evenings** [בֵּין הַעֲרָבִים] (LTB)

Most modern versions of the Bible render **beyn ha'arbayim** either as "at twilight" or "at dusk." This phrase occurs 11 times in the Old Testament (Exo. 12:6; 16:12; 29:39; 29:41; 30:8; Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:3, 5, 11; 28:4, 8). The first occurrence, Exodus 12:6, is in reference to the time God commanded the Passover lambs to be slain. Those who believe that the Passover lambs were killed on 14 Abib between sunset and total darkness reckon the first evening as sunset and the second evening as nightfall.

But is this interpretation correct? Does **beyn ha'arbayim** refer to this brief period of time? Is there any way to clearly define "between the evenings" from the Bible?

In reality, the debate over the timing of the original Passover sacrifice and meal boils down to one very basic question: What is meant by the Hebrew phrase **beyn ha'arbayim**? What time period does "between the evenings" cover?

Anciently, the Samaritans believed that "between the evenings" was the time from sunset to dark. Because of this belief, they sacrificed the Passover just after sunset, as 14 Abib was starting. They then ate the Passover meal later on the night of the 14th. Allegedly, the Sadducees held the same views on Passover as did the Samaritans.

On the other hand, the Jews have always reckoned "between the evenings" as the afternoon, literally the time between the decline of the sun after noon (the first evening) until the setting of the sun to end the day (the second evening). Therefore, until the destruction of the Second Temple, the vast majority of observant Jews killed the Passover on the afternoon of the 14 Abib, and ate the Passover meal later in the night, at the start of 15 Abib.

There is really no need to debate this issue, for the Bible clearly tells us when "between the evenings" is. In Exodus 29:38-41, God gives Israel instructions regarding the daily sacrifice:

EXODUS 29:38 And this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs daily, sons of a year; 39 the one lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the **second** [hasheni] lamb you shall offer **between the evenings**

[*beyn ha'arbayim*]. 40 And a tenth of fine flour anointed with beaten oil, a fourth of a hin, and a drink offering, a fourth of a hin of wine, for the one lamb. 41 And you shall offer **the second** [*hasheni*] lamb **between the evenings** [*beyn ha'arbayim*]; you shall do it like the morning food offering and its drink offering, for a soothing fragrance, a fire offering to Jehovah. (*LTB*)

Although many English translations render *hasheni* as "the other" in verses 39 and 41, any good Hebrew concordance will show you that it literally means "the" (*ha*) "second" (*sheni*). Most Church of God members accept that the Eternal reckons days from sunset to sunset (cf. Lev. 23:27, 32). The divine instructions shown above make it clear that the priests were to offer two lambs every day. God told Moses that the first lamb was to be sacrificed in the morning, and the second lamb was to be sacrificed "between the evenings." To be the **second** offering of the day, the lamb sacrificed "between the evenings" had to be slain **before** sunset!

If "between the evenings" occurs anytime **after** sunset, then this command could **not** have been properly carried out by the Israelites. At sunset, the old day has ended and the new day has begun. So under the Samaritan definition of "between the evenings," the evening sacrifice would be **first** and the morning sacrifice **second**!

The Jews, however, correctly understood what God meant by *beyn ha'arbayim*. According to noted Jewish historian Alfred Edersheim, "Ordinarily it [the evening sacrifice] was slain at 2.30 P.M., and offered at about 3.30" (p. 174, updated ed., *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*).

The preceding passage of Scripture alone should define "between the evenings" for us. Yet God also inspired another event to be recorded in the eighteenth chapter of I Kings to help His end-time people correctly understand when "between the evenings" occurs.

To recap the story, the prophet Elijah had King Ahab of Israel assemble the people of Israel on Mount Carmel. He challenged the people, saying, "If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him" (I Kings 18:21). Elijah then proposed a test to identify the true God. The prophets of Baal were to sacrifice a bull for a burnt offering and call on their god to consume the offering with fire. Let's pick up the story in I Kings 18:26:

I KINGS 18:26 So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal **from morning even till noon**, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made. 27 And so it was, **at noon**, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." 28 So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. 29 And **when midday was past**, they prophesied **until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice**. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention. (*NKJV*)

Notice the time element distinctly laid out in the Scriptures above. The prophets of Baal spent from morning until the time of the evening sacrifice trying to get an answer from their god. From Exodus 29:38-41, as well as Numbers 28:1-8, we know that the evening sacrifice was to be offered "between the evenings." So, at a minimum, this passage shows that "between the evenings" is sometime past noon.

Having given the prophets of Baal plenty of time, Elijah took his turn at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. He repaired God's altar, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the altar. He then had the people pour water in a trench around the altar and drench the sacrifice three times. Let's pick the story up again in verse 36:

I KINGS 18:36 And it came to pass, **at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice**, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. 37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again." 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!" 40 And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!" So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there. (**NKJV**)

The Bible specifies that this mighty miracle occurred "at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice" (i.e., between the evenings). Now let's examine the rest of the story to see if we can determine when this time was:

I KINGS 18:41 Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain." 42 So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, 43 and said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." So he went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing." And seven times he said, "Go again." 44 Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, "There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.'" 45 Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. 46 Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. (**NKJV**)

Generally, there is about 45-60 minutes from the time the sun goes down until total darkness. If the Samaritan definition of **beyn ha'arbayim** is correct, all the following events detailed in I Kings 18 had to have occurred "between the evenings" at the time of the evening sacrifice, a period of declining visibility:

- The repair of God's altar by Elijah (I Kings 18:30-32).
- The digging of a trench around the altar which would hold approximately 5 1/2 gallons (2 "seahs") of water (I Kings 18:32).
- The piling of wood on the altar (I Kings 18:33).
- The cutting of the sacrificial bull in pieces and the placement of it upon the altar (I Kings 18:33).
- The pouring of four pots full of water on the sacrifice and wood **three** separate times (I Kings 18:33-35).
- Elijah's prayer to God, resulting in fire which consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the altar, and the water in the trench around the altar (I Kings 18:36-38).
- The capture of the prophets of Baal by the people of Israel (I Kings 18:40).
- The execution of the **450** prophets of Baal by the Brook Kishon (I Kings 18:40).
- Elijah's message to King Ahab to eat and drink because rain was coming (I Kings 18:41).
- Elijah's **climb** to the top of the **1,600+ ft.** Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:42).
- Elijah sending his servant to look toward the sea **seven** different times (I Kings 18:43).
- The **sighting** by his servant on the seventh look of "**a cloud as small as a man's hand rising out of the sea**" (I Kings 18:44).
- The **blackening** of the sky due to **clouds (not night!)** as heavy rains began to fall (I Kings 18:45).

Even if we conservatively assume that Elijah made all the preparations for the sacrifice (I Kings 18:30-35) **before** the time of the evening sacrifice, common sense should tell us that there is no way the remaining events (I Kings 18:36-45) could have taken place between sunset and total darkness. The facts of the above story just don't support the Samaritan interpretation of "between the evenings."

CONCLUSION

Clearly, the Samaritan definition of ***beyn ha'arbayim*** contradicts the Bible and must be rejected. Yeshua told the Samaritan woman at the well that the Samaritans did not know what they worshiped (John 4:22). However, in the same verse, he stated that the Jews did know the God they worshiped. Should we follow the Samaritans in this matter, or should we follow the example of the Jews, who were entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2)? The answer should be clear to those humble enough to cast aside their preconceived beliefs and take God at His word.

Bryan T. Huie

April 21, 1997

Updated: June 26, 2005

EXODUS 12 - WHEN WAS THE FIRST PASSOVER?

Historically, there has been disagreement regarding the chronology of events at the first Passover. Today, most of the Sabbath-keeping Churches of God believe that the Israelites slew the Passover lamb in Egypt after sunset on Abib 14. The common teaching is that they ate the Passover meal on the night of the fourteenth, and that the destroyer killed the Egyptian firstborn later that night about midnight. I will show that the Israelites slew the Passover on the afternoon of Abib 14, and then ate the Passover meal on the night of Abib 15, a few hours before God sent the death angel to kill the firstborn.

Most Worldwide Church of God offshoots generally believe the Passover scenario adopted by Herbert W. Armstrong or a slight variation of it. Mr. Armstrong taught that the slaughter of the Passover lambs, the eating of the Passover meal, and the death of the firstborn all occurred after sunset on Abib 14. With some minor differences, most who believe this theory propose the following general chronology of events for the Egyptian Passover:

- (1) The Israelites killed the Passover lambs between sunset and dark, in the early hours of Abib 14;
- (2) They roasted the lamb and put the blood on their two doorposts and on the lintel;
- (3) They ate their Passover meal before midnight, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs;
- (4) The death angel passed over at midnight on Abib 14, killing the firstborn of Egypt;
- (5) The Israelites remained in their houses until dawn, burning the inedible remains of their Passover lambs before morning;
- (6) They spoiled the Egyptians of their gold, silver, and clothing during the daylight portion of Abib 14; and
- (7) The Israelites then departed Rameses by night on Abib 15, shortly after the sun went down.

The belief that the Passover lambs were killed just after sunset, as Abib 14 was beginning, is based on the Hebrew phrase *beyn ha'arbayim* (בֵּין הָעֲרָבִים):

EXODUS 12:6 "And it shall be for you to keep until the fourteenth day of this month. And all the assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it **between the evenings** [*beyn ha'arbayim*]." (*A Literal Translation of the Bible*)

As shown above, *beyn ha'arbayim* literally means "between the evenings." Most of the Churches of God interpret this phrase as "between sunset and dark." Many translations of the Bible render the Hebrew phrase *beyn ha'arbayim* as "dusk" or "twilight." Additionally, many modern scholars have construed this Hebrew phrase to mean from sunset to dark. But is this the correct interpretation of *beyn ha'arbayim*?

The entire argument over the timing of the original Passover rests on the true meaning of *beyn ha'arbayim*. If "between the evenings" means from sunset to dark, then the eating of the Passover meal and the death of the firstborn would have taken place on the night of Abib 14.

On the other hand, if the Jews have been right in reckoning ***beyn ha'arbayim*** as the period from afternoon until sunset, the Israelites would have slain the Passover on the afternoon of Abib 14. They would then have eaten the Passover meal on the night of Abib 15, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The death angel would have killed the firstborn at midnight on the fifteenth.

To fully understand this topic, we have to determine which interpretation of ***beyn ha'arbayim*** is correct. How can we prove what God meant by "between the evenings?" Does the Bible itself give us any clues?

Exodus 29:38-41 records the instructions God gave Moses regarding the daily sacrifices Israel was commanded to offer. Let's look at that injunction closely in *A Literal Translation of the Bible* by Jay Green, which is found beside the Hebrew text in *The Interlinear Bible*:

EXODUS 29:38 "And this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs daily, sons of a year; 39 the one lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the **second** lamb you shall offer **between the evenings** [*beyn ha'arbayim*]. 40 And a tenth of fine flour anointed with beaten oil, a fourth of a hin, and a drink offering, a fourth of a hin of wine, for the one lamb. 41 And you shall offer the **second** lamb **between the evenings** [*beyn ha'arbayim*]; you shall do it like the morning food offering and its drink offering, for a soothing fragrance, a fire offering to Jehovah." (*A Literal Translation of the Bible*)

The Israelites reckoned days from sunset to sunset. God makes it clear that Israel was to offer two lambs every day. The first lamb was sacrificed in the morning, and the second lamb was sacrificed "between the evenings." To be the second offering of the day, the lamb sacrificed "between the evenings" had to be slain before sunset!

If "between the evenings" occurs anytime **after** sunset, then the Israelites could not have carried out this command in the manner God prescribed. At sunset, the old day has ended and the new day has begun. Defining ***beyn ha'arbayim*** as the period from sunset to dark makes the evening sacrifice first and the morning sacrifice second according to the way the Israelites delineated a "day." Therefore this definition of "between the evenings" must be rejected because it contradicts the Scriptures!

Obviously ***beyn ha'arbayim*** must be a period during the daylight portion of the day. The Jews have always reckoned it to be from the decline of the sun after noon until the setting of the sun. Indeed, history shows that at the time of Messiah, the Jewish priests fulfilled God's command by offering the evening sacrifice between 2:30-3:30 in the afternoon.

Jewish scholars generally define the phrase ***beyn ha'arbayim*** to mean "the afternoon," as shown below:

at twilight Hebrew ***ben ha-'arbayim*** literally means "between the two settings." Rabbinic sources take this to mean "from noon on." According to Radak, the first "setting" occurs when the sun passes its zenith just after noon and the shadows begin to lengthen, and the second "setting" is the actual sunset. (p. 55, vol. 2, *The Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary*, "Exodus")

At dusk From six hours (after noon) and upward it is called **הערבים בין**, when the sun declines towards the place of its setting to become darkened. And the expression **בין הערבים** appears in my sight (to refer to) those hours between the "evening" of day and the "evening" of night; the "evening" of day is at the beginning of the seventh hour, from (the time that) "the shadows of evening are stretched out" (Jer. 7.6), and the "evening" of night is at the beginning of night. (p. 102, vol. II, *The Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary-A Linear Translation Into English*)

at dusk. Better, *towards even* (M. Friedlander); lit. 'between the two evenings'. According to the Talmud, the 'first evening' is the time in the afternoon when the heat of the sun begins to decrease, about 3 o'clock;

and the 'second evening' commences with sunset. (p. 254, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, ed. Dr. Joseph H. Hertz)

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus tells us that in the first century, before the destruction of the Temple, the Passover lambs were slaughtered "from the ninth hour till the eleventh" (6.9.3, *The Wars of the Jews*). This time corresponds to our 3:00-5:00 p.m. Obviously most of the Jews in Yeshua's day understood that "between the evenings" meant from the going down of the sun at noon until the setting of the sun at sunset. Therefore, they slaughtered the Passover lambs in the afternoon of Abib (then called Nisan) 14.

Going back even further, we have the witness of the *Book of Jubilees*, which dates to the mid-second century B.C. Fragments of ten different Hebrew manuscripts of this book have been found in the Qumran caves; however, the text we have comes from four Ethiopian translations, and a sizable fragment translated into Latin. The *Book of Jubilees* contains valuable information on how the Jews kept the Passover two hundred years before Yeshua.

Remember the commandment which the Lord commanded thee concerning the passover, that thou shouldst celebrate it in its season on the fourteenth of the first month, that thou shouldst kill it **before it is evening**, and that they should eat it by night on the **evening of the fifteenth** from the time of the setting of the sun. For on this night - the beginning of the festival and the beginning of the joy - ye were eating the passover in Egypt . . .

Let the children of Israel come and observe the passover on the day of its fixed time, on the fourteenth day of the first month, **between the evenings**, from the third part of the day to the third part of the night, for two portions of the day are given to the light, and a third part to the evening. This is that which the Lord commanded thee that thou shouldst observe it **between the evenings**. And it is not permissible to slay it during any period of the light, but during the period bordering on the evening, and let them eat it at the time of the evening, until the third part of the night, and whatever is left over of all its flesh from the third part of the night and onwards, let them burn it with fire . . . (*The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, Jubilees 49:1-2, 10-13, R.H. Charles)

To support their beliefs, those who teach that Passover falls totally on Nisan 14 allege that the Jews redefined *beyn ha'arbayim* to suit their own purposes sometime between Ezra and the appearance of Yeshua the Messiah. In taking this position, they are forced to reject all the available historical evidence and the inspired definition of "between the evenings" found in Exodus 29:38-41. They admit that the Jews were killing the Passover on the afternoon of Nisan 14 at the time of Yeshua, but they maintain that this practice was incorrect. These people further claim that Yeshua correctly observed Passover according to the Sadducean method, keeping it a day earlier than the Pharisees and rest of the Jewish nation.

However, no historical testimony exists to confirm this theory. It is based on the assumption that at the "last supper," Yeshua was following the Sadducean (and Samaritan) custom of observing the Passover beginning at sunset on Nisan 14. This view originated to explain the alleged discrepancies between John's account of the "last supper," which clearly shows that it was before Passover, and the Synoptic versions, which seem to indicate that the "last supper" was the regular Passover meal. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see "[Was The 'Last Supper' The Passover Meal?](#)"

As I said, no evidence exists to support this theory. But is there a way to disprove it? Yes, we can refute the Sadducean Passover hypothesis from the Bible! A careful reading of Mark 15:1 in conjunction with John 18:28 shows that the Sadducees also ate the Passover meal on the night of Nisan 15.

MARK 15:1 Immediately, in the morning, the **chief priests** held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led him away, and delivered him to Pilate. (**NKJV**)

JOHN 18:28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might **eat the Passover**. (**NKJV**)

In its article "Sadducees," ***The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*** says: "The Sadducees are mentioned by name in the NT only about a dozen times . . . but it must be remembered that when mention is made of the **chief priests**, practically the same persons are referred to" (p. 741). The Sanhedrin council Mark records Yeshua being taken before included both Pharisees and Sadducees. These are the same men who delivered Messiah to Pilate early on the morning of Nisan 14.

None of those who brought Yeshua to Pilate would enter the Praetorium. Why? John clearly states the reason: They wanted to be ceremonially clean so they could partake of the Passover meal, which was eaten on Nisan 15 after sunset! Even if the Sadducees believed Passover fell totally on Nisan 14, John shows that they were not observing it then!

If the Sadducees believed that they should eat the Passover meal on the night of Nisan 14, why didn't they eat it then? ***The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*** tells us the reason:

By the time of Jesus they [the Sadducees] included the families who supplied the high priests, as well as other wealthy aristocrats of Jerusalem. Most members of the Sanhedrin, the central judicial authority of Jewish people, were Sadducees. Thus, the Sadducees were the party of those with political power, those allied with the Herodian and Roman rulers, but they were not a group with influence among the people themselves. The views of the Pharisees prevailed among the common people, so that even though the two groups differed with regard to items in the laws of purity and details of temple procedure during the feasts, **the Sadducean priests were compelled to operate according to the Pharisees' views**. (p. 902, "Sadducees")

The Sadducees were politically motivated; they kept the Pharisaic (and Scriptural) Passover because they feared a public backlash if they didn't. Regardless of what the Sadducees personally believed about the timing of the Passover, the Bible shows that they followed the same custom as the rest of the nation.

History shows that the Pharisees controlled the Temple rituals at the time of Yeshua. You never find Yeshua criticizing the Jews or the Pharisees for keeping Passover on the wrong day. Indeed, the Bible plainly records that Yeshua and his parents customarily kept the Passover in Jerusalem with the rest of their countrymen (Luke 2:41-42; John 2:23; 11:55-56).

Yeshua corrected the Pharisees on many issues where they were wrong. Would he have neglected to correct them on such a vitally important issue if they were keeping Passover on the wrong day? Not likely! Yet instead of correction, just before the Passover feast we find him telling his disciples and the multitudes that "the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do . . ." (Matt. 23:1-3). It's absurd to think that Yeshua would tell the people to follow the Pharisees if they were observing Passover at the wrong time!

On the other hand, it's also strange that the scribes and Pharisees never criticized Yeshua or his disciples for keeping the Passover on a different day from them. Would their leaders have overlooked such an obvious point of disagreement when they were seeking a way to discredit and ultimately destroy Yeshua? Probably not. In this matter, the silence of Scripture is very revealing.

We have further evidence from Paul that the first century Jewish interpretation of *beyn ha'arbayim* is the correct one. In Philippians 3:5-6, Paul describes his Jewish background; he says that he was "concerning the law, a Pharisee . . . concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Paul could not have truthfully said that he was blameless regarding the law if he had observed the Passover at the wrong time as a Pharisee. This inspired Scripture indirectly proves that the Pharisaic interpretation of *beyn ha'arbayim*, which the Jews observed in killing the Passover, was the correct one!

Regarding the origin of the two different interpretations of the phrase *beyn ha'arbayim*, the *New Bible Dictionary* notes:

The phrase "between the evenings" in Ex. 12:6 (also Ex. 16:12; Lv. 23:5; Nu. 9:3,5,11) has been accorded two variant interpretations, according to variant community practice - either between 3 p.m. and sunset, as the Pharisees maintained and practised (cf. Pesahim 61a; Josephus, BJ 6. 423); or, as the Samaritans and others argued, between sunset and dark. The earlier time, as Edersheim points out, allows more leeway for the slaughtering of the innumerable lambs, and is probably preferred. (p. 882, "Passover")

Alfred Edersheim, a noted nineteenth-century Jewish scholar, has this to say about *beyn ha'arbayim*:

The lamb was to be killed on the eve of the 14th, or rather, as the phrase is, "between the two evenings" (Exod. 12:6, Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:3,5). According to the Samaritans, the Karaite Jews [eighth century A.D.], and many modern interpreters, this means between actual sunset and complete darkness (or, say, between six and seven P.M.); but from the contemporary testimony of Josephus (*Jew. Wars*, 6.423), and from the Talmudic authorities, there cannot be a doubt that at the time of our Lord, it was regarded as the interval between the sun's commencing to decline and his actual disappearance. This allows a sufficient period for the numerous lambs which had to be killed, and agrees with the traditional account that on the eve of the Passover the daily evening sacrifice was offered an hour, or, if it fell on a Friday, two hours, before the usual time. (p. 165, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, updated ed.)

So we can see that at the time of Messiah, primarily two opinions existed regarding the interpretation of "between the evenings" as it applied to Passover. The Pharisees taught that the lamb had to be slaughtered on the afternoon of Nisan 14. The Samaritans believed that they should kill the Passover lamb between sunset and dark, at the beginning of Nisan 14.

Whom should we look to for our interpretation of *beyn ha'arbayim*, the Samaritans or the Pharisees? Did the Samaritans have the truth regarding this matter? Let's see what Yeshua himself said to a Samaritan woman about the spiritual knowledge and understanding of the Samaritans.

JOHN 4:22 "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. (NKJV)

Messiah clearly told the Samaritan woman at the well that the Samaritans did not know what they worshiped. In the same verse, he affirmed that the Jews did know the God they worshiped, because they had the true religion.

According to Yeshua, the Pharisees were the successors to Moses. When they expounded on when to keep the feasts of God from the Torah, Yeshua told his disciples and the people to observe the Pharisaic commands. He never told the people to follow the teachings of the syncretistic Samaritans or the materialistic Sadducees! II Kings 17:22-34 shows the origin of the Samaritans and their illicit religious practices. Just like most Christian denominations today, the Samaritans had a little of the truth mixed with much error. Yeshua confirms in Matthew 23:1-3 that it was the Pharisees, **not** the Sadducees or the Samaritans, who were the authoritative religious teachers of his day.

When we look at this topic objectively with an open mind, the evidence is overwhelming that *beyn ha'arbayim* is the period between noon and sunset. Therefore, the Israelites must have killed the Passover lambs in Egypt on the afternoon of Abib 14 and then eaten the Passover meal sometime on the night of Abib 15, before midnight. This time sequence will become more obvious as we examine the rest of the Exodus chronology.

Now let's look at how God told the Israelites to eat the Passover:

EXODUS 12:8 Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire; its head with its legs and its entrails. 10 You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 11 And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So **you shall eat it in haste**. It is the Lord's Passover. 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. (*NKJV*)

Those who believe in a Passover falling totally on Abib 14 have trouble explaining why God instructed the Israelites to eat the Passover in haste. As you can see from this passage, they were to have their belongings packed and be dressed and ready to move out quickly. Yet, there was no need for them to eat the Passover in haste, with their belts and sandals on and their staffs in their hands, if they were not going to leave Egypt until almost a full day later, on the night of Abib 15. So why did God give them these explicit instructions? Is it because He intended for them to leave soon after the death of the firstborn?

Additionally, those who believe that the death angel passed through Egypt on the night of Abib 14 make a major issue of the Israelites not leaving their houses until dawn. They contend that per Moses' instruction found in Exodus 12:22, none of them dared venture out of their homes until morning, because to do otherwise would have meant coming out from under the protection of the lambs' blood! But do the Scriptures teach this?

EXODUS 12:13 Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. (*NKJV*)

When the death angel went through the land, he looked for the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts of the houses. When he saw it, he passed over that house! In Exodus 12:13, the phrase "when I strike" implies a definite time. When did the destroyer strike?

EXODUS 12:29 And it came to pass **at midnight** that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. (*NKJV*)

The Scriptures show that the death angel killed the firstborn at midnight. Once the destroyer had gone through Egypt, the tenth plague was over. It does not appear that there was any danger to the Israelite firstborn after the death angel had passed through the land.

Now what does the Bible show happening after the death of the firstborn?

EXODUS 12:30 So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. 31 Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel.

And go, serve the Lord as you have said. 32 Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also." 33 And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." (NKJV)

The Scriptures clearly record that Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron that night, soon after the death of the firstborn. Although some try to make the case that Moses and Aaron ignored Pharaoh's summons, the text strongly suggests that they appeared before him. Pharaoh commanded Moses to take the Israelites out of the country, and he also asked Moses to bless him before he left. All the Egyptian people, who rose that night after the plague, urged the people to leave in haste, because they feared that they would also be killed if the Israelites remained in their land.

So what happened next? Did the Israelites ignore the order of Pharaoh and the pleas of the surviving Egyptians and spend the entire next day gathering gold, silver, and clothing from the grieving Egyptians as they prepared to bury their dead? Not according to the Bible!

EXODUS 12:34 So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. 35 Now the children of Israel **had done** according to the word of Moses, and they **had asked** from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. 36 And the Lord **had given** the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. 37 Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. 38 A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds; a great deal of livestock. 39 And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because **they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait**, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves. (NKJV)

The Scriptures clearly show that the Israelites left hurriedly! Not only did Pharaoh and the Egyptians urge them to leave, the Bible says they actually drove the Israelites out of Egypt, just as God had foretold (Exo. 11:1). They were forced to leave without having had time to prepare any food for their journey. Following God's instructions, they were dressed, packed, and ready to go quickly. They did not even have time to unpack their kneading bowls and prepare bread before the Egyptians expelled them!

Going back to a point raised earlier, did the Israelites wait until first light to leave their houses, or were they expelled during the night? The Scriptures do not conclusively tell us either way. On the surface, Deuteronomy 16:1 seems to indicate that Pharaoh expelled them before dawn, while it was still dark.

DEUTERONOMY 16:1 "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God **brought you out of Egypt by night.**" (NKJV)

However, this Scripture may not literally mean that the Israelites left at night. The phrase "the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night" could refer to the event that caused their release, the death of the Egyptian firstborn. After all, it was this tenth plague that finally caused Pharaoh to free them. Even after the Israelites began traveling, they probably were not out of Egyptian territory for several days. So a figurative meaning for this verse is quite possible; yet whether this verse is literal or figurative, the few hours we are talking about does not materially affect the chronology.

Despite whether the Israelites left their houses a few hours before dawn or as the sky was lightening in the east, Numbers 33:3 tells us that the Israelites departed from Rameses (also known as the land of Goshen, see Gen. 47:5-6,11) on the fifteenth of Abib. They were forced to obey the command of Pharaoh and the exhortations of the frantic Egyptians and start their journey out of slavery that night or just as the day was dawning. This was just a few hours after the death of the Egyptian firstborn.

NUMBERS 33:1 These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron. 2 Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the Lord. And these are their journeys according to their starting points: 3 **They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month;** on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians. 4 For the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had killed among them. Also on their gods the Lord had executed judgments. 5 Then the children of Israel moved from Rameses and camped at Succoth. (NKJV)

Moses conclusively records in the passage above that the Israelites began their journey out of Egypt on Abib 15. They left from their area of residence, Rameses (Goshen), shortly before dawn or at the first light of the day. During the daylight portion of the fifteenth, they watched the Egyptians bury their dead as they triumphantly traveled to Succoth.

Some teach that after the death of the firstborn, the Israelites spent the entire daylight portion of Abib 14 spoiling the Egyptians of gold and silver. What about these claims? Are they valid? Do the Scriptures support this scenario? Let's look at when this command was given, and when it was carried out.

EXODUS 11:1 And the Lord said to Moses, "I will bring yet one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether. 2 Speak **now** in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor, articles of silver and articles of gold." 3 **And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.** Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people. (NKJV)

From the statement in Exodus 11:3 that "the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians," it's evident that the plundering occurred before the tenth plague. It had already happened before the Egyptians expelled the Israelites. That's why in many translations of the Bible, the account of the plundering detailed in Exodus 12:35-36 is in the past tense ("had done," "had asked," "had given").

I am sure that I have not covered every possible objection one could raise about the timing of the first Passover. Hopefully, though, I have shown that the overwhelming majority of the evidence proves that the Passover lambs were slain on the afternoon of Abib 14, with the Passover meal being eaten on the night of the fifteenth. According to the Bible, the actual sequence of events for the first Passover is as follows:

- (1) The Israelites plundered the Egyptians of gold, silver, and clothing **before** the death of the Egyptian firstborn, probably during the morning hours of Abib 14 (Exo. 11:2-3).
- (2) The congregation of Israel slew the Passover lambs in the afternoon of Abib 14, "between the two evenings." Afterward, the blood was collected and put on the lintel and doorposts of the Israelites' houses (Exo. 12:6-7).
- (3) At sunset, as Abib 15 began, the Israelites went indoors and prepared the Passover meal - lamb roasted in the fire, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread had begun at sundown (Exo. 12:8, 17).
- (4) The Israelites ate the Passover meal in haste on the night of Abib 15. According to God's command, they ate it with their belts on their waists, their sandals on their feet, and their staffs in their hands. They were ready to move out quickly (Exo. 12:11).

- (5) After the Passover meal was finished, the remains of the lambs were burned according to God's instructions (Exo. 12:10).
- (6) At midnight, the death angel went throughout the land of Egypt, killing all the firstborn except those protected by the blood of the lambs (Exo. 12:12, 29).
- (7) Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron soon after the tenth plague struck. He ordered the Israelites to leave the country. The surviving Egyptians also strongly urged them to leave quickly; they feared that they would all be killed if the Israelites remained (Exo. 12:30-33).
- (8) The Egyptians essentially drove the Israelites out of the land of Rameses (Goshen) during the night or early morning of Abib 15 (Exo. 12:34, 37; Num. 33:3; Deu. 16:1).
- (9) As they boldly traveled out of Rameses toward Succoth during the daylight portion of Abib 15, the Israelites observed the Egyptians burying those killed by the previous night's plague (Num. 33:3-4).
- (10) After they reached Succoth, the Israelites camped and baked unleavened bread from the dough they had brought out of Egypt. It was unleavened because they were driven out of Egypt hurriedly. They hadn't had time to prepare provisions for themselves (Exo. 12:37-39; Num. 33:5).

This is the sequence of events that the Bible reveals for the first Passover and the beginning of the Exodus. As shown above, the chronology advanced by those who believe the Passover fell completely on Abib 14 has serious flaws. It ignores some Scriptures and contradicts others.

Many believe that by partaking of the wine and bread on the night of Nisan 14, they are keeping the New Testament Passover at the same time the Old Testament Passover was kept. However, the original Passover was **not** eaten on the fourteenth! God commanded the Israelites to keep the Passover as a feast to the Lord throughout their generations. It was to be kept as an everlasting ordinance (Exo. 12:14, 24). Did Yeshua change the time for observing the Passover?

MATTHEW 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." (*NKJV*)

Yeshua fulfilled the symbolism of the Passover by dying on the afternoon of Nisan 14 at the same time the lambs had been sacrificed for centuries. But nowhere does the New Testament record that Yeshua changed the date for the "night to be much observed" (Exo. 12:42), the night God ordained for eating the Passover meal. Since the original Passover, this meal has celebrated the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt. For Christians, it celebrates our deliverance from bondage to sin in spiritual Egypt, Satan's world.

Bryan T. Huie
February 23, 1997
Revised: July 24, 2004