

United Church of God, *an International Association*



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The Passover of Exodus 12

Doctrinal Paper

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The timing of the Passover of Exodus 12 is one of the oldest controversies of the Bible. Was the Passover lamb slain late on the afternoon of the 14th of Abib¹ and eaten the night of the 15th or was it slain shortly after sunset at the beginning of the 14th and eaten that same evening? Each view has its supporters. The United Church of God, *an International Association*, teaches the observance of the New Testament Passover on the evening at the beginning of the 14th, following the example of Jesus Christ.² On the night prior to His death, Christ observed what is called the Passover in the synoptic Gospels and instituted the symbols of bread and wine as well as foot washing.

The first mention of the name or term *Passover* in Scripture is found in Exodus 12:11. Instructions in the previous verses describe the killing, roasting, eating and disposing of the lamb. This lamb “without blemish” is defined as “the LORD’s Passover.”

“Your **lamb** shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take **it** from the sheep or from the goats” (Exodus 12:5).

“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” (Exodus 12:11).

The pronoun *it* as found in the verses between 5 and 11 refers back to the noun *lamb*. This is an important point in any study of the Exodus 12 Passover. It is clear that the term *Passover* takes on a much broader meaning later on, but it is important to establish the meaning as it is introduced in Scripture. The term *Passover* is defined here as a reference to the lamb itself. Whether one is discussing the sacrifice of the lamb or the eating of the lamb, the term *Passover* is the appropriate term based on its introduction in Exodus 12. With any study of this type, Scripture must be the final authority and not tradition, history or scholarly sources. Other documents are important in any study paper, but they must be given a lesser role to that of Scripture.

Modern Jewish practice and a considerable volume of Jewish writing support the belief that at the time of the Exodus the Israelites ate the Passover lamb and departed from Egypt all in the same night—the 15th. But there are others who believe that the lambs were slain at the beginning of the 14th (at “twilight”) and eaten the same night, one full day prior to the departure from Egypt. Which view does the Bible support? We know that Christ condemned the Jewish leaders of His day along with many of their traditions. Therefore, we must go to Scripture to find the evidence as to the evening on which these events took place. But even here, we will see there are difficulties. Either explanation seems to be fraught with problems. It is the view presented here that the preponderance of evidence supports the slaying of the lambs in Exodus 12 in the evening (or more correctly “between the two evenings”) at the beginning of the 14th. Critical examination of numerous papers espousing divergent views, along with considerable study and research, has led to this conclusion.

¹Hebrew name for the first month of the Hebrew calendar (Exodus 12:2). It is also called Nisan.

²Doctrinal Study Paper: “Passover in the New Testament Church, *A Christian Responsibility*.” April 1997.

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It is important to note that whether the Passover of Exodus 12 was eaten on the night of the 14th or the night of the 15th is a question of history and chronology. The proper understanding of the timing of the Passover in the Old Testament is not listed as one of the fundamental beliefs of the United Church of God as defined in the Constitution. Our fundamental belief on the subject of the Passover is quite short and simply states: “We believe in observing the New Testament Passover on the night of the 14th of Abib, the anniversary of the death of our Savior.”³ The purpose of this study paper is to review the evidence from the Bible, along with any additional historical and scholarly works that may be helpful.

This question has been a point of discussion and division for many years. Members of the Church of God should participate in the Passover service with confidence that it is indeed being done properly. In the very chapter where the Passover is being discussed in the New Testament, the apostle Paul makes a clear statement about the Church. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, we are told to follow [or imitate] Paul as he follows [or imitates] Christ. Our ultimate example in all things is Jesus Christ. There is simply no question but that Christ observed an event that He and His disciples called the Passover on the evening before His death. It was during this evening that Christ gave us the example to follow of washing the feet of the brethren and partaking of the bread and the wine. We “imitate” this example today. Paul even makes reference to “the same evening that He was betrayed.” This was the evening that the Corinthians were observing. Paul condemned their approach to that evening, but he did not condemn the timing, nor did he instruct them to follow the example of the Pharisees of that day. It is our belief that this evening was clearly the evening beginning the 14th and not the evening beginning the 15th.

When approaching this subject there are some basic points that need to be examined. It is commonly believed that the Jewish community maintained the correct timing and observance for the Passover over the approximately 1,450 years between the Exodus and the time of Christ and that they have continued with this correct date down to the present time. This premise assumes two things: (1) a continuous observance of the Passover during this time period (from the Exodus to the time of Christ); and (2) a uniform observance within the Jewish community during the first century (Second Temple period). Can these assumptions be proven from the Bible and history?

Observance of the Passover in the Old Testament

Was there a consistent and continuous observance of the Passover from the time of Moses to the time of Christ? The Bible shows that the answer to this question is “no.” A brief overview of the term *Passover* as mentioned in the Old Testament will confirm this answer. The following is a summary of the references to “Passover” in the Old Testament presented chronologically:

Exodus 12 This is the very first Passover observance. This was unique and resulted in the death of the firstborn among the Egyptians and a saving of the firstborn among the Israelites. The instructions for this Passover involved several activities that were never repeated. The blood was

³*Constitution, United Church of God, an International Association, Article 2.1.11.*

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put on the doorposts; we are told that the LORD passed over the homes of the Israelites; and the lamb was to be eaten in haste.

Exodus 34:25 “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning.” Clearly the Passover was never to be taken with leavening, nor was it to be left until the morning. Unleavened bread was eaten with the Passover because of the nature of the sacrifice. In Leviticus we find that no leaven was to be present in any of the sin offerings that were brought to the tabernacle (Leviticus 2:11; Leviticus 6:17; and Leviticus 10:12). Therefore, the eating of unleavened bread with the Passover lamb is associated with the sacrifice, and not necessarily the day in which it was eaten. We also find that Passover, while not a Holy Day, is called a Feast.

Leviticus 23:5 The Passover is declared to be “on the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight.”

Numbers 9:5 The children of Israel kept the Passover on the 14th day of the first month “at twilight” while in the wilderness. Instructions are given for those who are unclean to take a second Passover on the 14th day of the second month.

Numbers 28:16 “On the fourteenth day of the first month *is* the Passover of the LORD.”

Deuteronomy 16:1-6 These verses appear to describe a change in the procedures for the Passover. This would be approximately 40 years after the Passover of Exodus 12. Now we seem to be told that the lamb must be slain “where the LORD chooses to put His name” and not “within any of your gates.” We are told here that the Passover was to be sacrificed “at twilight, at the going down of the sun.” (These verses and the ensuing controversy will be addressed later in this paper.)

Joshua 5:10-11 Upon arrival in the land of Canaan, the Israelites kept the Passover on the 14th day of the first month “at twilight.”

2 Chronicles 30:5 “So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem, **since they had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner.**”⁴ King Hezekiah restored the Passover. Some refused to come to Jerusalem. “So the runners passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun; but they laughed at them and mocked them. Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem” (*2 Chronicles 30:10-11*). Both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were observed in the second month. There is no biblical statement to support keeping Unleavened Bread in the second month, but there is for the Passover.

2 Chronicles 30:15-18 “Then they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* on the fourteenth *day* of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought the burnt offerings to the house of the LORD. They stood in their place according to their custom, according to the Law of Moses the man of God; the priests sprinkled the blood *received* from the hand of the Levites. For *there were* many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves;

⁴Bold added for emphasis throughout.

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therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover *lambs* for everyone *who was not clean*, to sanctify *them* to the LORD. For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written.” In this account we are told that the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were kept in the second month. Lambs were slain for those who “had not sanctified themselves.” We can assume that those who had sanctified themselves killed their own lambs and the Levites killed the rest.

2 Chronicles 30:23 “Then the whole assembly agreed to keep *the feast* another seven days, and they kept it *another* seven days with gladness.” In addition to keeping the Passover and the Feast in the second month, the assembly agreed to keep a second seven days! No wonder the statement is made in verse 26: “So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, *there had* been nothing like this in Jerusalem.”

2 Kings 23:22 “Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah.” King Josiah (some 60 years after Hezekiah) also restored the proper observance of the Passover. Pagan sacrifices and practices had become common in Judah during this time period.

2 Chronicles 35:18-19 “There had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet; and none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josiah kept, with the priests and the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept.” It would appear that no Passover (or at least none such as this) had been kept during Josiah’s first 17 years.

Ezra 6:19-20 “And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth *day* of the first month. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them *were ritually* clean. And they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.” We now arrive at the conclusion of the Old Testament. Once again, the Passover is restored after many years of non-observance. Notice in this example it appears that the Levites slaughter all the lambs. This is the first time we find such an example.

A summary of the examples of Passover in the Old Testament reveals great diversity. We find there were many years of non-observance, as well as a year when both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were kept in the second month. Actually, that year *two* Festivals of Unleavened Bread were kept in the second month. We find that the lambs were slain by the head of each household (Exodus 12), by the assembly of people (2 Chronicles 30) and by the Levites (Ezra 6). The lambs were slain in the individual homes (Exodus 12), evidently at the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 16), at the first temple in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30) and at the Second Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 6). If these examples were indicative of the Passover during this time period, it would appear there were few “normal” Passovers. Each seemed to have its own unique aspects.

Scripture shows that there was inconsistency in the Old Testament when it came to observing the Passover. Was this acceptable to God? Clearly the non-observance and the pagan aspects of worship in Judah and Israel were not pleasing to God, but we find no repercussions from God for the various types of Passovers that were observed in the Old Testament. Even when

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they were clearly out of line in their observance, Hezekiah prayed for the people and there were no repercussions.

Scriptural Evidence for the 14th

The term *Passover* is associated with the 14th day of the first month in Scripture:

Exodus 12:6 "...keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month."

Leviticus 23:5 "On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight..."

Numbers 9:3 "On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight..."

Numbers 9:5 "And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day..."

Numbers 9:11 "On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight..."

Numbers 28:16-17 "On the fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover."

Joshua 5:10 "...kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month..."

2 Chronicles 30:15 "Then they slaughtered the Passover lambs on the fourteenth day..."

2 Chronicles 35:1 "...Passover lambs on the fourteenth day of the first month."

Ezra 6:19 "...kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month."

Ezekiel 45:21 "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month..."

Leviticus 23:5-6 "On the fourteenth *day* of the first month at twilight *is* the LORD's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread." Passover is **on the 14th** and the First Day of Unleavened Bread is **on the 15th**.

Exodus 12:26-27 "And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It *is* the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.' So the people bowed their heads and worshiped." The name *Passover* is derived from the time when the LORD "passed over the houses" of the Israelites. Some scholars claim that the name *Passover* is from an unknown source. Passover was on the 14th. Isn't it logical that the "passing over" also occurred on the 14th?

Numbers 33:3-4 "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." Israel left by night on the day *after* the Passover. *Verse 4*: "For the Egyptians were burying all *their* firstborn, whom the LORD had killed among them." It is illogical to believe the Egyptians began burying their dead the same night they died.

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."

Exodus 12:22 "And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that *is* in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning." Morning does not mean night, but means dawn. If Moses had intended to make a reference to "morning watch" instead of "morning" there is

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another term he would have used (Exodus 14:24). No one was to go out of his home until the morning, therefore, in order to leave by night, Israel must have left the next night.

Exodus 12:37-38 “Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock.” This would equal 2 to 3 million people, plus “a great deal of livestock.” Several hours would be required to organize them into “armies” as the scripture states (Exodus 12:41).

Sequence of Events

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p>SUNSET (<i>Ba erev</i>)</p> <p>“Between the two evenings” (<i>Bein ha arbayim</i>; Ex. 12:6)</p> <p>Lamb kept “until the fourteenth” (Ex. 12:6)</p> | <p>Passover meal eaten “that night” (Ex. 12:8)</p> <p>Firstborn of Egypt killed at midnight (Ex. 12:29)</p> <p>Pharaoh sends for Moses by night—after midnight, but not called morning (Ex. 12:31). No record of Moses going to see Pharaoh that night.</p> <p>Israel remains inside till morning (Ex. 12:22)</p> | <p>SUNSET (<i>Ba erev</i>)</p> <p>Remains of meal burned in morning (Ex. 12:10)</p> <p>Israel baked unleavened cakes for trip (Ex. 12:39)</p> <p>Joseph’s remains collected for trip (Ex. 13:19)</p> <p>Israel gathers at Rameses by “armies”; “hosts”; “divisions” (Ex. 12:41; Num. 33:1)</p> <p>Spoil the Egyptians (Ex. 12:35)</p> <p>Firstborn being buried as Israel gathers to leave (Num. 33:3-5)</p> | <p>Night to be Much Observed (Ex. 12:42)</p> <p>Israelites march to Succoth, about 20 miles from Rameses (Ex. 12:37; Num. 33:1-3)</p> <p>Left Egypt by night, 430 years to the selfsame day (Ex. 12:40-42; Deut. 16:1)</p> <p>600,000 men, equal to 2 to 3 million people, plus a mixed multitude, and “very much cattle” (Ex. 12:37-38)</p> | <p>Israelites camp at Succoth on the First Day of Unleavened Bread (Num. 33:1-3; Ex. 12:37)</p> <p>Seven days of Unleavened Bread began at sundown the previous evening (Ex. 12:16)</p> <p>Six days of Unleavened Bread follow the Passover, then a seventh day is a Holy Day (Deut. 16:6-8)</p> |
| 13 th | 14 th PASSOVER | | 15 th FIRST DAY OF U.B. | |

The chart above provides support for the 14th by showing all of the activities that took place before the Israelites departed from Rameses. On the other hand, the following statements are important elements if one is to prove that the Passover lambs of Exodus 12 were eaten on the night of the 15th:

“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” (Exodus 12:11).

“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” (Exodus 12:39).

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The idea of being dressed for a journey while eating the Passover gives support to the departure of Israel on that same night. This idea supports the Passover being eaten on the evening of the 15th, since Scripture tells us clearly that they departed Egypt by night on the 15th. We are also told that the Israelites were “driven out of Egypt” before the dough could become leavened. This is a part of the evidence supporting a Passover meal on the 15th and departure from Egypt the same night. Viewing these verses in isolation leads to an incomplete picture. More evidence is offered in this chapter that must be taken into consideration.

Let’s follow the series of events that are described in the few verses of Exodus 12 and see if there isn’t support for a different conclusion.

- The lamb was selected on the 10th day of the first month and kept up until the 14th day. In English the word “until” will often not include the ending event, especially when time is being referenced. This is not always true in the usage of the word *until* in its Hebrew origin. It can include the end marker, but it doesn’t have to. In *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament* under the Hebrew word translated most often “until” the phrases “even to” or “as far as” are given as definitions.⁵ More often than not in Scripture, this Hebrew word *does not* include the end marker. For example, there are many references in Scripture that if an individual was unclean, he was to be unclean *until* evening (i.e. Leviticus 11:24-25). Clearly when the sun set and the evening began the individual was no longer unclean. This is the same Hebrew word that is translated “until” in Exodus 12. Which is meant in Exodus 12? This is open to interpretation and cannot be conclusively shown. If the Passover was slain and eaten on the evening at the beginning of the 14th, then the word *until* would not include the entirety of the 14th. If the Passover was slain at the end of the 14th and eaten on the night of the 15th, then “until the fourteenth” would include the 14th. This verse is generally interpreted according to one’s accepted premise regarding the Passover of Exodus 12.
- The lamb is slain on the 14th “in the evening.” This phrase will be examined in the next section. Unless one interprets “in the evening” to mean between noon and sunset (or noon and dark) then there is a serious problem with an afternoon sacrifice. There is no biblical support for evening to mean afternoon. While there are some difficulties in understanding the timing of the “evening sacrifice,” it would seem to be an unusual way of defining evening by using the term afternoon. We do have a scriptural reference in the book of Judges that uses all three terms in English—morning, afternoon and evening.

Judges 19:8-15. “Then he arose early in the **morning** on the fifth day to depart, but the young woman’s father said, ‘Please refresh your heart.’ So they delayed until **afternoon**; and both of them ate. And when the man stood to depart—he and his concubine and his servant—his father-in-law, the young woman’s father, said to him, ‘Look, the **day is now drawing toward evening**; please spend the **night**. See, the **day is coming to an end**; lodge here, that your heart may be merry. Tomorrow go your way early, so that you may get home.’”

⁵Richard Whitaker, Editor, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

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However, the man was not willing to spend that **night**; so he rose and departed, and came to opposite Jebus (that *is*, Jerusalem). With him were the two saddled donkeys; his concubine *was* also with him. They *were* near Jebus, and the **day was far spent**; and the servant said to his master, ‘Come, please, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it.’ But his master said to him, ‘We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners, who *are* not of the children of Israel; we will go on to Gibeah.’ So he said to his servant, ‘Come, let us draw near to one of these places, and spend the **night** in Gibeah or in Ramah.’ And they passed by and went their way; and the **sun went down** on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. They turned aside there to go in to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the open square of the city, for no one would take them into *his* house to spend the **night**.”

This section of Scripture gives some insight into the use of terms in the Old Testament. The traveler and his concubine were asked to stay beyond the morning (Hebrew *boqer*)⁶ and into the afternoon (combination of Hebrew words “*natah*” [to incline] and “*yowm*” [day or heat], reference to past mid-day, the heat of the day).⁷ The afternoon is described as being “toward evening.” The Hebrew for evening here is “*arab*” and it is translated “darkened” in Isaiah 24:11.⁸ The afternoon is not the evening, but “toward evening.” Evening is associated with darkness or night. We also see that the day ends with the sun going down and evening beginning. After the sun went down, they stopped in Gibeah to spend the night. Evening is associated with darkness and night, morning is associated with day, and afternoon is “toward evening.” Let’s continue with the events from Exodus 12.

- After the lamb is slain in the evening (“between the two evenings,” “twilight”) blood is placed on the doorposts to be seen by the LORD, permitting the homes to be “passed over.”
- The lamb is roasted within the home and prepared for the meal. This would be sometime between darkness and midnight. Everyone is dressed and ready for a trip—loins girded and shoes on their feet (Exodus 12:11). The lamb is roasted with fire, with the head and legs attached (Exodus 12:9). Unleavened bread and bitter herbs are eaten with the lamb or goat (Exodus 12:8). No one is to go out of his home until morning.
- About midnight the firstborn of the Egyptians are slain (along with the firstborn of their cattle). Pharaoh sends for Moses after midnight (but how long after midnight?) and instructs the Israelites to get out of Egypt. At daybreak, the remainder of the lamb is burned and the Israelites begin gathering at Rameses. They depart from Rameses at night, the day after the Passover (Numbers 33; Deuteronomy 16; Exodus 12:37). They were thrust out.

⁶Strong, James *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN – New York, NY: Abingdon Press) Copyright 1890.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

Meaning of the Hebrew Words

In Exodus 12:6 the Hebrew phrase translated “twilight” is *bein ha- ‘arbayim*. The lambs were to be slain during twilight or “between the two evenings”—the literal translation of *bein ha- ‘arbayim*. Jewish tradition claims that this was between noon and sunset. But the true meaning of this ancient phrase is in dispute. The term twilight means: “*evening twilight*; time of concealment; of refreshment; of stumbling, in dim light.”⁹ Twilight is not in the afternoon, but it is when the light grows dim, after sunset, but before complete darkness. There are various opinions about the duration of this time period (noon to sunset, noon to darkness, between sunset and darkness).

- The phrase *bein ha- ‘arbayim* is translated as: “dusk” by the JPS (Jewish Publication Society); “between dusk and dark” in the New English Bible; and “between sunset and dark” in the Moffatt Bible. *Brown-Driver-Briggs*: “between the two evenings, i.e. prob[ably] between sunset and dark.”¹⁰
- “At twilight, Hebrew *bein 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 actual sunset. Josephus testifies that the paschal lamb was slaughtered in the temple between 3 and 5 p.m.”¹¹
- “At twilight, Hebrew *bein ha- ‘arbayim* is ambiguous. The translation ‘twilight’ understands it as designating the period of time between sunset and nightfall, approximately one and one-third hours in duration. As a dual form *‘arbayim* expresses two ‘settings:’ sunset and a later ‘setting’ that follows—nightfall. Mekhilta Bo’ 5 presents the view of Rabbi Nathan that *bein ha- ‘arbayim* is the time after the sun begins to incline toward the west, after the sixth hour of the day. In a hypothetical twelve hour day that begins at 6:00 a.m. and concludes at 6:00 p.m., this would mean that the time period called *bein ha- ‘arbayim* begins at noon. Mishnah Pesachim 5:1 tells us that during the period of the Second Temple, the paschal sacrifice was offered on the altar at approximately nine and a half hours into the day, immediately following the second daily offering (tamid), which was scheduled earlier on Passover eve. . . . There is no similar information available about practices in earlier periods of antiquity.”¹²
- *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*: “(*bein ha ‘arbayim* lit., ‘between the two evenings’; NIV, ‘at twilight’) has given rise to a much discussed question that is explained in two ways:

⁹Richard Whitaker, Editor, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*The JPS Torah Commentary*, Exodus, (Philadelphia – New York – Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society) 1991.

¹²*The JPS Torah Commentary*, Exodus, (Philadelphia – New York – Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society) 1991.

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(1) between sunset and dark (Aben-Ezer, Qaraites, Samaritans, KD) or (2) between the decline of the sun (three to five o'clock) and sunset (Josephus, *Mishna*, and modern practice). Deuteronomy 16:6 fixes the time at 'when the sun goes down,' the same time set for the lighting of the lamps in the tabernacle ([Exodus] 30:8) and the offering of the daily evening sacrifice ([Exodus] 29:39). Later custom necessitated moving this time up to allow the Levites to help everyone with their sacrifice. . . ."

To view the term "*bein ha- 'arbayim*" as meaning between sunset and darkness (twilight, between the two evenings, after sunset) is consistent with the view of many scholars, but, of course, not all agree. With this explanation of the term, the Passover of Exodus 12 could only be sacrificed in the evening as the 14th was beginning (after sunset but before complete darkness).

In Exodus 12:18 the Hebrew word translated "at even"(KJV) is *ba- erev*. This differs from the form of *erev* used in verse 6 (*bein ha- 'arbayim*). The meaning of *ba- erev* is: "n.[m.] (sun)set, evening — 1. a. *evening*, orig[inally] *sunset*, and hence per[haps]. לְעֵתָּה ע' at the time of sunset; usu[ally]. ע' alone = *time of sunset, evening*: עָרַב in the evening = *every evening*; לְפְנוֹתָ ע' at the turn of evening."¹³

In Exodus 12:22 the Hebrew word for "morning" is *boqer*. The meaning of this word is: "n.m. morning — 1. *morning* (of point of time, time at which, never during which, Eng. *morning* = forenoon): a. of end of night (opp. לַיְלָה). b. implying the coming of dawn, and even daylight. c. of coming of sunrise cf: ב' וְעָרַב i.e. places of sunrise and sunset. d. of beginning of day."¹⁴

- *Genesis 1:3-5* "Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening [*erev*, darkness, night] and the morning [*boqer*, light, day] were the first day." Morning is used in Scripture to refer to the light portion of a day. The Hebrew word for night is *layil* (לַיְלִיל). It is used as a synonym for the Hebrew *erev*, which is normally translated "evening."
- A day is defined as "an evening and a morning." The evening begins at sunset according to Joshua 8:29 "And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree **until evening**. And as soon as **the sun was down**, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree." Sunset marks the beginning of evening and the end of a day. It also marks the beginning of a new day. The Sabbath begins at sunset (that is Friday evening when the sun goes down). It should also be noted that this is another case where the term *until* does not include the end marker (evening).

We see from the above that there are actually three words (or phrases) that are loosely translated "evening" in the Old Testament. These can be summarized as follows:

¹³Richard Whitaker, Editor, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

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1. In the King James or Authorized Version (AV), we find the English word *evening* (Genesis 1:5). This is the Hebrew word *'erev*. This is actually a very general term and refers to the darkness and is called evening.
2. Next we find the expression “at evening” or “at even” (Exodus 12:18). This is the Hebrew expression *ba 'erev*. In general it means sunset.
3. The third expression is translated in the AV as “in the evening” (“twilight” in the NKJV). This expression is found in Exodus 12:6. In Strong’s we find the same number assigned to the term “at even” in both verse 6 and verse 18, but these are two different expressions in Hebrew. In verse 6 we find *bein ha- 'arbayim*. It means “between the two evenings.” While there is some dispute, in general scholars accept that the literal and ancient meaning of this expression is “the time between sunset and darkness.” The following are just a few of these scholarly sources: *Gesenius*,¹⁵ *Brown-Driver-Briggs*,¹⁶ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*,¹⁷ Merrill Unger and William White, Jr. in *Smith’s Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament*¹⁸ and the *Jewish Soncino Commentary*.¹⁹

The Logistical Problem

In addition to the difficulty with the meaning of the Hebrew words, there is a serious logistical problem. How could 2.5 to 3 million Israelites, plus a mixed multitude, plus all their cattle and other livestock, depart from Egypt in the early morning hours of the 15th? It seems clear in Scripture that the Israelites began their journey from Egypt by night on the 15th day of the first month (Numbers 33:3; Deuteronomy 16:1; Exodus 12). They left from Rameses, a city somewhere in Goshen (Exodus 12:37). A departure such as this could not have been accomplished in a night when you remained indoors until at least after midnight. It would take a whole day (12 hours) to get everyone (people, mixed multitude and livestock) organized into “orderly ranks” (Exodus 13:18).

The Israelites consisted of 600,000 men, not counting women, children and a mixed multitude (Exodus 12:37-38). This group would be roughly equal to the population of the city of Chicago (city proper population—2.7 million). If they were lined up in a column one mile wide, it would still be at least five miles long. If it were a half mile wide, then the line would have been 10 miles long. At the rate of two and a half miles per hour, it would take two (to four) hours for everyone to pass a single point and 10 (to 12) hours to make the trip to Succoth, where they camped during the daylight portion of the 15th.

¹⁵Between the two evenings—sunset and darkness (page 552) 1847.

¹⁶“probably between sunset and dark” (page 788), 1906.

¹⁷The interval between sunset and darkness, 1956.

¹⁸“Period between sunset and darkness, twilight” (page 71), 1980.

¹⁹“Period of approximately one-and-a-third hours between sunset and the disappearance of the light. . .”

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According to the U.S. Army's Quartermaster General, for a group this size (2.5 to 3 million) to camp, it would require an area of roughly 750 square miles! If the Israelites were all living in the same area of Goshen when the Exodus occurred, there was still a considerable distance to travel when spreading the word to leave. It would seem impossible to gather people from an area so large (750 square miles) in darkness over a period of two or three hours. Even if people were prepared to leave, this would still seem impossible to accomplish in the suggested time frame (after midnight, but before dawn on the 15th).

Scripture tells us that every Egyptian household had a least one dead. A conservative estimate would place the dead firstborn between 1 and 1.2 million. We are told that the firstborn of the livestock died as well. With over 1 million corpses and hundreds of thousands of dead animals, it seems highly unlikely that the Egyptians could have thrust the Israelites out in the middle of the same night that this tragedy occurred. They were burying their dead as Israel prepared to leave Egypt (Numbers 33:1-4). Who buries their dead after midnight and before sunrise? One should also consider the elaborate burial rituals that existed in Egypt during this time period. Is it possible all this could be done in the hours after midnight and prior to sunrise?

Philo, an Alexandrian Jew who was a contemporary of Christ, gives an interesting view of these events in his writings. While there is a bit of editorializing, he does seem to support the idea that the death of the firstborn and the Exodus from Egypt did not occur on the same night. Below are two specific quotes from his writings:

Pascha, on which the whole nation sacrifices, each individual among them, not waiting for the priests, since on this occasion the law has given for one special day in every year, a priesthood to the whole nation, so that each private individual slays his own victim on this day.²⁰

And each house is at that time invested with the character and dignity of a temple, the victim being sacrificed so as to make a suitable feast for the man who has provided it and of those who are collected to share in the feast. . . . And this universal sacrifice of the whole people is celebrated on the fourteenth day of the month.²¹

When Does a Day Begin?

One of the controversial aspects of this issue has to do with the beginning of a day. Does the day begin at sunset or does it begin with darkness? The answer to this would seem to be a matter of perspective. *The Jewish Book of Why* states the following:

In the Jewish calendar all days begin at nightfall (of the evening before the actual day in question) and extend for twenty-four hours. So as not to desecrate the Sabbath by miscalculating the time night actually falls, it has become customary to usher in the Sabbath early. Candles are

²⁰*The Works of Philo*, The Decalogue, chapter XXX, section 159, p. 532, (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.) 1993.

²¹*The Works of Philo*, The Special Laws, II, chapter XXVII, sections 148-149, page 582, (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.) 1993.

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lighted at sundown, usually eighteen minutes before sunset and approximately forty minutes before nightfall.²²

Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin sheds more light on this subject in his comprehensive book on Jewish practices:

The Sabbath day ends, not at sundown when the sun sets, but at nightfall when the stars come out. Nightfall begins when at least three stars are visible in the heavens. . . . The time between sundown and nightfall is traditionally neither day nor night. In Hebrew it is called ‘between the two suns’ (*bayn hashmashot*). Since its status is doubtful, it is automatically attached to the Sabbath, so that there shall be no question of Sabbath violation. The period of Friday evening is also attached to the Sabbath for the same reason.²³

This is an interesting admission by Rabbi Donin that the period of time “between the two evenings” is of doubtful status. Does it belong to the day prior or to the new day that is beginning? To be safe when it comes to a Sabbath the Jews attach it to both ends of the day. This provides an interesting problem when it comes to the 15th of Nisan. Remember this is the First Day of Unleavened Bread, and therefore a Holy Day or Sabbath. This would mean that the 15th would begin at sunset at the end of the 14th. If this were the case, then any argument that the lambs were slain after sunset at the end of the 14th, without violating the requirement that the slaying be **on** the 14th, would not be valid. Based on this understanding, unless the lambs were killed in the middle of the afternoon (as Josephus claims), they would not be killed on the 14th. If one waited until sunset as Deuteronomy 16 shows, then it would already be the 15th, but Scripture says the Passover (or at least some portion of the Passover) must be observed on the 14th.

After reviewing all the facts, the simplest explanation is that a day begins at sunset. This can be shown from Scripture. The idea that a day begins with sunset is shown in Genesis 1 (evening and morning were the first day, etc.) and also in Leviticus 23. The Day of Atonement begins “at evening” on the ninth and continues until the evening of the tenth. Here we have an example where the word “at evening” (*ba erev*) in the Hebrew means “at sunset.” In Joshua 8:29 we have a clear example of evening beginning after the sun has set (“And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree”).

In the book *Jewish Holidays and Festivals* by Dr. Isidor Margolis, we have another confirmation that a Holy Day (or Sabbath) begins and ends at sunset.

The Sabbath is observed from sundown of the sixth day (Friday), to sundown of the seventh day (Saturday). We begin every Jewish holiday at sundown because the Torah tells us that when God created the world He considered the evening as the beginning of the day.²⁴

²²Kolatch, Alfred J., *The Jewish Book of Why*.

²³Donin, Rabbi Hayim Halevy, *To Be a Jew* (New York, New York: Basic Books, Inc.) 1972. Page 85.

²⁴Margolis, Dr. Isidore, *Jewish Holidays and Festivals* (A Citadel Press Book: Carol Publishing Group) 1962.

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In the book *Karaite Anthology: Excerpts From the Early Literature* by Leon Nemoj, we have Samuel Ben Moses al-Magribi (1434 C.E.) being quoted:

The common day begins after the sinking of twilight and continues until its next sinking; this is the day as reckoned for the purpose of offering the sacrifice. The legal day begins with sunset and lasts until the next sunset.²⁵

In this statement we have the acknowledgement of a “common day” and a “legal day.” It is the legal day that we find in Scripture. The Day of Atonement, the Sabbath, etc., all begin at sunset. Clearly there is a period of overlap that may be assigned to either day. This may explain why the daily sacrifice could be made at sundown (on a common day) and still be considered a part of the previous day, yet the Passover can be sacrificed at sundown and be a part of the day just beginning. Passover, although not a Sabbath, is a Festival (Exodus 34:25; Leviticus 23).

The statement about “morning and evening” sacrifices has been used to support the idea that “evening” can refer to the afternoon. While it is true that this became the accepted view during the Second Temple period, one must ask whether this was the same view found earlier in history. Edersheim says no.

According to general agreement the morning sacrifice was brought at the “third hour,” corresponding to our nine o’clock. But the preparations for it must have commenced more than two hours earlier. . . The evening sacrifice was fixed by the Law (Num. 28:4, 8) as “between the evenings,” that is, between the darkness of the gloaming and that of the night. But at the time of our Lord the evening sacrifice certainly commenced much earlier. Josephus puts it down (Ant. 14.65) as the ninth hour.²⁶

Edersheim’s book seems to support a change in the timing of the evening sacrifice. He acknowledges the general definition of “between the two evenings” as between sunset and dark. But in actual practice during the Second Temple period, the evening sacrifice took place in the middle of the afternoon. Should we define the Hebrew term based on this practice of the Jews during the Second Temple period? If the Hebrew term for “between the two evenings” means between “sunset and darkness,” then we must conclude that the Passover sacrifice in Exodus 12 was slain at this time, which makes it at the beginning of the 14th and not the end. The fact that this was not the normal practice later in Jewish history should not alter our understanding of Exodus 12.

In Edersheim’s classic work on temple practices we find confirmation that a legal day began at sunset.

²⁵Al-Magribi, 2:1, *Karaite Anthology: Excerpts From the Early Literature* as translated by Leon Nemoj; page 199.

²⁶Edersheim, Alfred, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers) 1994. Page 108.

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Formally, the Sabbath commenced at sunset on Friday, the day being reckoned by the Hebrews from sunset to sunset. As no special hour for this was fixed, it must, of course, have varied not only at different seasons, but in different localities.²⁷

The understanding that a day begins with sunset is also confirmed by B'nai B'rith on their Internet site:

The Jewish day begins and ends at sundown. Thus, all holidays begin at sundown of the day preceding the date shown and end at sundown of the (last) day shown.²⁸

While there may be some discussion about the beginning of regular days, virtually all sources agree that the Sabbath and Holy Days begin at sunset. (The 15th of Nisan is a Holy Day—the First Day of Unleavened Bread—therefore, must begin at sunset.) The Bible also confirms in the book of Joshua that the evening begins at sunset. We are told that a day consists of evening and morning in Genesis 1. By combining these biblical principles, we feel safe in saying that a day officially begins when the sun sets and evening begins.

Deuteronomy 16

One of the most controversial sections of Scripture in reference to the Passover is found in Deuteronomy 16. Did Moses drastically change the manner of observing the Passover? Or is Deuteronomy 16 addressing the “Passover sacrifices” which were offered during Unleavened Bread? Or is it addressing both the sacrifices offered during Passover and the sacrifices offered during the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

The book of Numbers reveals that Passover was observed during the 40 years wandering in the wilderness. The tabernacle was set up within a year of the Israelites leaving Egypt (Exodus 40:17). It provided a central place for all of the worship ceremonies required by the Old Covenant.

Scholars have made much over the variance between the instructions God gave Israel for killing and eating the Passover in Exodus 12 and the instructions that are given in Deuteronomy 16. The instructions in Exodus 12 call for the Israelites killing, roasting and eating a lamb or kid goat in their homes. But in Deuteronomy 16:2 the Israelites are commanded to sacrifice the Passover from the flock or the herd. (It should be noted that the word “herd” is limited to cattle.) Does this now mean that one could choose a lamb or goat or calf to sacrifice for the Feast of Passover? Or is verse 2 an inclusive statement that includes the sacrifices that are offered for the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Furthermore, the original instructions called for the lamb to be killed, roasted and eaten at home, whereas these instructions command the Israelites to kill, roast and eat the sacrifice in the place where the LORD chooses (Deuteronomy 16:6, 7). How can all of this be reconciled?

²⁷*Ibid.* Page 138.

²⁸*The Jewish Holidays* by B'nai B'rith @ Internet site <http://bnaibrith.org/caln.html>.

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The book of Deuteronomy summarizes the law reminding the children of Israel of their history, calling and duty as a prelude to entering the Promised Land. Summaries often present slight variances from the detailed narrative. Moreover, the book of Deuteronomy focuses on the Israelites' duties in the Promised Land.

A cursory reading of Deuteronomy might cause one to wonder if chapter 16 is at variance with the instructions that God gave Moses for the observance of the first Passover in Egypt. It should be noted at this point that when God gave Moses the original instructions for observing the first Passover in Egypt, no priesthood or systematic system of worship existed. The book of Deuteronomy, especially chapter 16, describes how the observance of Passover was altered in order to accommodate the formalized system that God revealed to Moses in the mount (Exodus 24:18; 25:9). The place and manner of offering sacrifices were altered to accommodate the new system. Passover is only mentioned four times in the book of Deuteronomy, and all four appear in the 16th chapter.

The book of Deuteronomy provides instructions for observing the feasts after the Israelites are settled in the Promised Land. The Israelites would no longer be wandering around in the desert and pitching the tabernacle at various places. In commanding Israel to appear before Him at the place He chooses, God did not list each feast day. The Feast of the Passover is observed on the 14th day of Abib and the observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the 15th day of Abib. Sometimes both feasts are referred to as "Passover." At other times, both feasts are referred to as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Since the Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are observed on consecutive days it is obvious that they were observed in the same place. That is, where God had chosen to place His name. Even though a specific feast day is not specified in the command to appear before the Lord three times in the year, it can be concluded that Israel was commanded to keep all the feasts of the Lord in the place He chooses (Leviticus 23).

Since there are three distinct periods for observing the feasts in the place where God chooses, all the feast days are not listed in Deuteronomy 16. Moreover, since the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are observed on consecutive days, it became common practice for both feasts to be called Passover or the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was surely true by the time of Ezra. Furthermore, it is widely known and accepted as fact that Ezra edited the Torah. This is demonstrated by the fact that some of the places named in the Torah did not exist when Moses wrote it. In Deuteronomy 16 the "Passover" and "Feast of Unleavened Bread" are used interchangeably. For example, in Deuteronomy 16:16, the term "Feast of Unleavened Bread" surely includes the "Feast of Passover." It would be impossible for most of the Israelites to keep the Passover at home, as they originally did in Egypt, and then journey to Jerusalem the next day to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In the first seven verses of Deuteronomy 16 the term "Passover" is used for both the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For example in verse 1, the Israelites are

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commanded to observe the feast of Abib and keep the Passover (actually the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread) since Abib is the month that God brought Israel out of Egypt. Here the instructions are of a general inclusive nature. That is, they were to observe the month and keep the feasts that commemorated their deliverance from Egypt. Both Passover and Unleavened Bread are included. They kept the Passover on the 14th day and were delivered by night on the 15th day (Numbers 33:3). Clearly, both feasts are included in verse 1.

In verse 2 they are commanded to sacrifice the Passover unto the Lord of the flock and of the herd in the place where the Lord chooses. God originally instructed Moses to tell the Israelites to set aside a lamb for the Passover sacrifice. Did God change His mind as to what kind of animal could be sacrificed for the Passover? Could they now sacrifice from the flock or the herd for Passover? The answer should be obvious. As noted below, God had clearly specified the sacrifices for the Passover *and* for the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The instructions from Exodus 12 are very clear that the Passover sacrifice was to be either a lamb or a goat.

“Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: you shall take it out from the sheep or from the goats: And you 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” (Exodus 12:5-6).

The sacrifices for Unleavened Bread were taken from the flock and the herd (cattle).

“On the fourteenth day of the first month *is* the Passover of the LORD. And on the fifteenth day of this month *is* the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. On the first day *you shall have* a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. And you shall present an offering made by fire as a burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish.... In this manner you shall offer the food of the offering made by fire daily for seven days, as a sweet aroma to the LORD; it shall be offered besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering” (Numbers 28:16-19, 24).

It appears as though Deuteronomy is giving a different set of instructions for observing the Passover. This is difficult to understand when the instructions in Exodus and Numbers seem so clear. A review of the essential verses in this chapter will prove helpful to our study (verses 1-7 and 16).

In verse 3 the Israelites are commanded not to eat any leavened bread with the Passover sacrifice. This is consistent with the instructions that God gave Moses before they observed the original Passover in Egypt. Then they are commanded to eat unleavened bread for seven days. This too is consistent with the instructions that God gave Moses in Exodus 12:15:

“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.”

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In verse 4, the Israelites are commanded to rid themselves of leavened bread for seven days. This is also consistent with Exodus 12:15.

In verse 4, they are also commanded not to keep the flesh of anything that is sacrificed on the first day overnight. The obvious question here is, which “first day” is referred to? This sacrifice on the first day is referring to the Passover sacrifice. As we have previously noted, the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread are being discussed in these verses. (Once again it should be noted, that Moses is providing a summary of the instructions that had been previously given.) We know it is the Passover sacrifice because it is sacrificed at even, literally between the two evenings. The sacrifices offered during the Feast of Unleavened Bread were offered at different times. Moreover, just as the Israelites were instructed in Exodus 12:10 not to let any flesh remain until morning, the same instructions are given here. The portions that were not edible were burned the next morning.

The change that is noted in verse 5 is the most controversial. That is, they were commanded not to sacrifice the Passover in their gates, though Deuteronomy 16 does not state precisely where the slaying was to take place nor who was to do the slaying. As previously noted, when God gave Moses the original instructions for observing the Passover, there was no formalized priesthood or central place of worship. After Israel was settled in the land, they were commanded to go to the place where God had placed His name to observe the feasts. But that should not be construed to mean that after temple worship was established, they were forbidden from eating the lamb in their dwellings (temporary or permanent), even though it might have been slain at the temple. So, in practical terms there is really no contradiction between the original instructions for observing the Passover and the instructions for observing the Passover after temple worship was established. The only difference is the fact that they were commanded to go to the temple to have the lambs slain.

Verse 5 does not prohibit a domestic ceremony as long as it is in the confines of the tabernacle or, later, the temple in Jerusalem (the place where God has placed His name). No mention is made of the tabernacle or the temple as the only location for the sacrifice. Certainly, the Passover was never eaten at the temple, but the celebrants returned to their homes or rooms where they consumed the Passover meal. There is also nothing stated in this section about who was to kill the lamb. Is it required that only the priests (or Levites) perform this service?

Traditionally, the Jews adopted the position that the lambs were to be slain at the temple and then taken to a home or room to be consumed. According to this tradition the lambs were slain on the afternoon of the 14th and eaten on the night of the 15th. We have no reason to believe that the majority of the Jews did not follow this pattern beginning during the Intertestamental period (or earlier). It is claimed that this is the one and consistent practice throughout the years.

Verse 6 is surely consistent with the instructions that God gave Moses for observing the original Passover.

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In summary, scholars are of differing opinions regarding the variations in the instructions regarding the Passover in Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 16. If Moses under inspiration from God gave new instructions to Israel regarding the Passover in Deuteronomy, then so be it. If this is simply discussing the offerings to be given on the First Day of Unleavened Bread, there is no real difficulty. The most significant changes would be from the home setting to the place God has chosen to place His name and the allowance for an animal from the herd. But this section of Scripture does not prohibit a domestic ceremony as long as it is in the confines of Jerusalem (the place where God has placed His name). There is also nothing stated in this section about who was to kill the lamb. Therefore, heads of household could still slay the lamb for their families. However, these variations cannot be used to declare the Passover to be on any particular day. Only the time is discussed (“at the going down of the sun”). But there are no dates given—neither the 14th nor the 15th—in this chapter. Deuteronomy 16 does not negate the killing of the Passover lamb at the beginning of the 14th.

Passover During the Second Temple Period

The Second Temple period began with the completion of the Second Temple in approximately 515 B.C.E.²⁹ and continued until it was destroyed by the Roman armies in 70 C.E.³⁰ Herod completely remodeled the temple during this time period, but the entire period is still referred to as the Second Temple. This temple stood for almost 600 years, during which there were many difficulties, including the desecration that occurred with Antiochus Epiphanes during the second century B.C.E. The Jewish religion that we find in the New Testament came into being during this period. Various sects of the Jews arose—Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Samaritans, etc. This period is also known as “Intertestamental,” since it covers the years between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. This is a period of about 400 years. The synagogue came into being during this time. An objective view of this era reveals many differences between what we see at the end of the Old Testament and what we find written in the Gospels. New observances such as the “Feast of Dedication” (John 10:22) have been added, synagogues now appear, the Sanhedrin now exists and there are numerous sects of the Jews.

Little that was written during this period has been preserved. The apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees were written during this time, but fail to even mention the Passover. One of the pseudepigraphal writings, the Book of Jubilees, is dated toward the mid-second century B.C.E. The author was a Palestinian Jew who wrote in Hebrew. The most notable feature of this book is the emphasis on a special 364-day calendar and the theological importance attached to it. The Book of Jubilees mentions the Passover and supports the Pharisaic position for the killing of the lambs, but this is all in the context of a solar calendar instead of a lunar one.

²⁹B.C.E. = Before the Common Era (replaces B.C.)

³⁰C.E. = the Common Era (replaces A.D.)

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Most of our knowledge of this period comes from Josephus, Philo and, of course, the New Testament. In the latter half of the 19th century, Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889) wrote *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*. This book is about the Second Temple and the practices of the Jews in the first century, during the time of Christ. He openly acknowledges that there were differences between the practices of the Jews in the first century and what we read in the Pentateuch.

I say not, whether or how far later Jewish practice may have misapprehended the original import or the meaning of the Divine ordinances. That was beyond my present task. But an accurate acquaintance with the sacrificial services at the time of Christ must not only tend to correct mistakes, but throw a fresh and vivid light upon all, and influence our views of what the Levitical ordinances were intended to be and to teach.³¹

Edersheim approaches his writing with the supposition that the temple practices of the first century can be used to interpret the ordinances that are listed in Leviticus. Is this a sound approach to the study of the Bible and history? He lists his primary sources in the preface to his book:

To have thus stated my object in this book, is also to have indicated its difficulties. Yet abundant materials for such a work, though scattered far and wide, are within our reach. Not to speak of contemporary writings, as those of Josephus and Philo, and references in the New Testament itself, we have in the *Mishnah* a body of authoritative traditions, reaching up, not only to Temple-times, but even to the days of Jesus Christ. On this source of information, of course in conjunction with the Old Testament itself, I have been chiefly dependent.³²

After this list of primary sources, he documents secondary sources such as Maimonides and the Gemara (Talmud). He also mentions Lightfoot and numerous other scholars. But when examined closely, the only sources *written* during (or before) the Second Temple period were Philo, Josephus and the Bible. Even the *Mishnah*³³ wasn't written down until the end of the second century, although, as oral tradition, it is considered to be from a much earlier time.

It is interesting to note that Edersheim was very skeptical of much of the Talmud as being an attempt to foist recent views, practices and prayers upon earlier times.

Quite a different estimate must be formed of the *Gemara* (which in a general way may be described as a twofold commentary—the Jerusalem and Babylonian *Gemara*—upon the *Mishnah*), not only from its much later date, but also from the strange and heterogeneous congeries which are found in the many folios of the Talmud, Judaism was, at the time of its compilation, already thoroughly ossified; and the trustworthiness of tradition greatly impaired

³¹Edersheim, Alfred, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services, Updated Edition*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.) 1994. Preface, page ix.

³²*Ibid.*

³³The *Mishnah* is “the basic authoritative document of rabbinic Judaism, compiled ca. A.D. 200 by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi” – Article “*Mishnah*.” *The Erdman’s Bible Dictionary*, Myers, Allen C., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1987.

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not merely by the long interval of time that had elapsed, but by the dogmatic predilections and prejudices, and by the not unnatural wish to foist comparatively recent views, practices, and prayers upon Temple-times.³⁴

Even though Edersheim wrote over 100 years ago, the only additional source that can truly be called “primary” would be the Dead Sea Scrolls. Otherwise, we are still using the same sources to try and understand the Jewish religion of the first century and why there were differences from what we read in Scripture.

Another book that describes the development of Judaism from the Old Testament to the New is *The Jewish Festivals, A Guide to Their History and Observance* by Hayyim Schauss. This book was first published in 1938. Under the discussion on the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, he provides these observations:

We must thus bear in mind that Pesach and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were originally two distinct festivals, observed at the same time. . . . Both were spring festivals, but the Feast of Unleavened Bread was observed by the entire community gathered in a holy place, while Pesach was celebrated in the home as a family festival.³⁵

We cannot be certain how long a time passed before the Jews accepted these reforms in practice and ceased to offer the Pesach sacrifice in their own homes. Nor can we be certain how long it took for Pesach and the Feast of Unleavened Bread to become as one festival.³⁶

Other sources confirm the statements by Schauss that the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were originally two separate festivals. Both Passover and Unleavened Bread are called festivals or feasts in Scripture (Leviticus 23:1, 5-6; Exodus 34:25).

The only extra-biblical evidence earlier than the 2d century B.C.E. comes from the Jewish military colony in Elephantine Egypt, whose temple was destroyed in 411 B.C.E. One papyrus letter dated to the year 419 B.C.E. (Cowley, no. 21) apparently refers to our two festivals, one following the other, the first on the 14th day of the month and the second from the 15th to the 21st days of the month, though the key terms (the names of the festivals) have to be reconstructed from a lacuna. It likewise speaks of “being pure and taking heed” and of avoiding drink. . . and leaven for seven days and of sealing up leaven in one’s chambers. Further, two inscribed Aramaic potsherds (Ostraca Berlin P 10679; Sayne 1911) briefly mention Passover (*pashā*), though it is unclear if the meaning is to “perform” something on Passover or (as is more likely) to “offer” the Passover sacrifice (see Sukenik and Kutsher 1942: 55–56). A third potsherd (Sachau, pl. 63.1, vol. 1, pp. 233–34), which may refer to Passover, mentions when a person must stop eating bread before the holiday. In thus mentioning Passover and in reminding the soldiers

³⁴Edersheim, Alfred, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services, Updated Edition*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.) 1994. Footnote, page ix

³⁵Schauss, Hayyim, *The Jewish Festivals, A Guide to Their History and Observance* (New York, New York: Schocken Books, Inc.) 1938. Page 43.

³⁶*Ibid.* Page 46.

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of its regulations, these sources attest the existence of the two festivals and their association with one another.³⁷

The *Encyclopedia Judaica* provides a possible answer.

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.³⁸

Josephus records for us the combining of the two festivals into one festival of eight days that he calls the “Festival of Unleavened Bread.”

Hence it is that, in memory of that time of scarcity, we keep for eight days a festival called the Festival of Unleavened Bread.³⁹

Today it is very clear that the Jews observe the Passover on the 15th day of the first month, having completely combined the two festivals. In spite of the many references in Scripture to the Passover being on the 14th day of the first month, the Jews keep their Seder on the evening of the 15th. Most modern references to the Jewish Passover will use the 15th as the date and not the 14th. Notice the following paragraph from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in an article on the Passover.

Passover, Hebrew PESAH, OR PESACH, in Judaism, holiday commemorating the Hebrews liberation from slavery in Egypt and the ‘passing over’ of the forces of destruction, or the sparing of the firstborn of the Israelites, when the Lord ‘smote the land of Egypt’ on the eve of the Exodus. The festival thus marks the first and most momentous event in Jewish history. Passover begins with the 15th and ends with the 21st.⁴⁰

Most scholars accept the fact that this was the standard practice during the Second Temple, but there is little firsthand information to base this conclusion on. Josephus describes the Levites and priests killing the lambs on the afternoon of the 14th and eating the meal on the night of the 15th, but Philo gives a slightly different version of these events. He writes about the Passover in the following manner:

And, therefore, they sacrificed at that time themselves out of their exceeding joy, without waiting for priests. And what was then done the law enjoined to have repeated every year as a memorial of gratitude due for their deliverance.⁴¹

³⁷Freedman, David Noel, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday) 1997, 1992. Article: “The Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread.”

³⁸*Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1971 ed., s.v. “Passover.”

³⁹Josephus, Flavius, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 2, Chapter 15, Section 1.

⁴⁰*Encyclopedia Britannica* @ Internet site <http://www.Britannica.com> © 1999. Article: “Passover”

⁴¹Philo, *Judaes, The Special Laws II. XXXVII.*

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Philo thus becomes an important primary source who validates that individuals sacrificed their own animals for the Passover during the time of the Second Temple. The normal view of scholars is that the priests (or Levites) sacrificed all the animals at the temple. In Scripture there is no prohibition to an individual holding a domestic Passover in the area of Jerusalem. (Deuteronomy 16 would appear to require the lamb be slain in the area of Jerusalem, where the Lord has placed His name, but places no requirement on *who* should do the sacrificing.)

Among the questions which are raised by the various accounts of Christ's last night with His disciples is, "Did Christ and His disciples sacrifice their own animal for the Passover on the night before He died?" Philo seems to provide precedent for this being acceptable.

One point must be made very clear. Our understanding of the practices of the Jews during this period of time comes almost entirely from the rabbinical writings of the second and third century (and later).

The sources for a description of the rabbinic period are so biased that the historical picture gained from them remains largely insecure—the very notion of a 'normative' Judaism, for example, derives from these sources. Only the rough outline of political history is sufficiently documented by non-Jewish sources. For the internal development of rabbinic Judaism, however, we are almost wholly dependent on the rabbis' own testimony, and thus on the literature of a single group within this Judaism: rabbinic self-understanding has shaped all of tradition.⁴²

It is difficult to know what really transpired during the Second Temple period by only reading the rabbinical writings. This material postdates the Second Temple by almost 200 years.

Jewish Sects of the First Century

When one reads the Bible and tries to get an idea of what the beliefs of the Jews were in the first century, he is immediately struck by the various sects that were in existence. This fact alone should testify to the difference in beliefs among the Jews of the time of Christ. The Bible mentions two primary sects: Pharisees and Sadducees. There is also mention of a third sect called the Herodians (Matthew 22:16). Josephus describes three primary sects of the Jews during the latter portion of the Second Temple:

At this time there were three sects among the Jews, who had different opinions concerning human actions; the one was called the sect of the Pharisees, another the sect of the Sadducees, and the other sect of the Essenes.⁴³

⁴²Stemberger, Gunter, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. & ed. By Markus Bockmuehl, 2nd ed., (T & T Clark: Edinburgh) 1996. Page 5.

⁴³Josephus, Flavius, *The Works of Josephus* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997. *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, Chapter 5, Section 9.

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The Bible does not mention the Essenes, but we have no reason to doubt their existence. The Dead Sea scrolls would seem to validate their presence during and even prior to the first century C.E. We can be assured that this was not the full extent of the divisions among the Jews.

Jews of every age have maintained their individuality. Modern Jewish humor would suggest that within Judaism, it has always been possible to have two Jews and three opinions. This certainly can be seen as far back as the period of the Second Temple when ‘Talmudic literature states that there were 24 sects in Israel.’⁴⁴

Until recently scholars spoke readily of a normative Judaism, as if rabbinic Judaism (and its antecedents) was always the dominant and authentic expression of Judaism. In his comment, Shaye J.D. Cohen presents an alternative understanding. He continues, ‘For the believer rabbinic Judaism is normative Judaism, and the rabbis were always at the center of Jewish history. For the historian, however, the rabbis and the rabbinic period become meaningful entities only after 70 C.E.’⁴⁵

It is difficult to learn much about the many sects of the Jews in the first century. After the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E., the only sect that survived was the Pharisees. The Sadducees disappeared, along with the Essenes. We can learn about the Essenes today from the Dead Sea Scrolls, but there are no primary sources of information about the Sadducees except from their bitter enemies, the Pharisees (and the Bible, of course).

Each of these sects had major religious disagreements with the other groups. One of the areas of contention was the calendar. For the most part it appears as though there was a standard calendar that was controlled by the Sanhedrin, but there was disagreement among the groups on how the calendar would be used. It is well documented that the Pharisees and Sadducees did not believe in the same date for Pentecost. Is it possible that they did not accept the same date for the Passover? The Essenes used an entirely different calendar for their festival observance. A solar calendar that appears to belong to the Essenes of the first century has been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Sadducees and Pharisees were bitter enemies. The Pharisees were the popular party and controlled most of the synagogues, but the Sadducees were the priestly party and controlled most of the activities at the temple. The Sadducees rejected the authority of the Pharisees as to the oral law and its interpretation. They followed a strict adherence to the written law and generally accepted no books as being necessary except those in the Pentateuch. They rejected the idea of a bodily resurrection since it couldn’t be found in these five books. They did not believe in spirit beings such as angels and demons. They rejected the Pharisees’ interpretation of the “day after the Sabbath” when calculating the day of Pentecost. In spite of these differences and being outnumbered by the Pharisees, the Sadducees held tenuous control over temple worship during most of the first century.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Weiss, Randall A., *Jewish Sects of the New Testament Era* (Cedar Hill, TX: Cross Talk) 1994.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶Weiss, Randall A., *Jewish Sects of the New Testament Era* (Cedar Hill, TX: Cross Talk) 1994.

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There is evidence among the scholars that the Sadducees disagreed with the Pharisees on the time for sacrificing the lambs.

The Pharisees held that the lambs were slain “during the last three hours before sunset” on the afternoon of the fourteenth.” The Sadducees on the other hand held that the lambs were slain “between sunset and nightfall.”⁴⁷

The Pharisees and Sadducees had a dispute as to the time when the slaughtering should take place; the former held it should be in the last 3 hours before sunset, the latter, between sunset and nightfall.⁴⁸

The time of the Passover sacrifice is defined in the Law as “between the two evenings” (Exodus 12:6; Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:3, 5, 11). This was interpreted by the Pharisees and Talmudists to mean from the hour of the sun’s decline until its setting; and this was the later temple practice (cf. *Pesach*. V. 1; Jubilees, 49; Jos., *BJ* vi. ix.3). The Samaritans, Karaites, and Sadducees, on the other hand held that the period between sunset and dark was intended.⁴⁹

Some have proposed that the Pharisees and Sadducees observed different dates for the Passover. However, one must not overlook the glaring difficulties that such an interpretation will produce. Is it possible to have the slaying of lambs at the temple on two separate days? Norval Geldenhuys disputes this possibility in his counterarguments to Strack-Billerbeck.

Their theory remains mere guess-work. It has by no means been proved that there ever was a genuine instance before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple when there was not merely a difference of opinion, but also a difference of action concerning the day of the celebration of the Passover. It may be true that there was a discussion as to the fixing of the day, but we have no indication that, in connection with such an important matter as the Passover (the feast par excellence among the Jews), and a feast held at Jerusalem (the centre of all Jewry at that time), there ever was an occasion before A.D. 70 when one section of the people celebrated it on a different day.⁵⁰

One can conclude from these statements from eminent scholars that there is no clear agreement. Most conclude that there was a dispute, but most will not accept two different days for the observance of Passover during the Second Temple. Is it possible that one group followed its conscience and observed a domestic Passover the day prior to the general observance in Jerusalem? Where is the biblical prohibition against something like this taking place, as long as it was done in the confines of Jerusalem? This would easily reconcile the accounts in the Synoptic Gospels and the one in John. Scholars themselves admit that their explanations are difficult and

⁴⁷*Mishnah Tractate Pesahim 61:a*; Rashi

⁴⁸*The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Volume 8, 1942. Page 406, Article “Paschal Lamb”

⁴⁹Hastings, James, *A Dictionary of the Bible, Dealing With Its Language, Literature, and Contents* (New York, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons) 1899-1902. Volume 3, page 691.

⁵⁰Geldenhuys, Norval, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1988. Pages 655-656.

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some conclude it is impossible to reconcile the two. Does the Bible contradict itself? If there is no contradiction between John and the other three gospels, wouldn't it make sense that two different Passovers are being referenced? Or, at the very least, a Passover observance by Christ and His disciples in the Synoptic Gospels and a Feast of Unleavened Bread sacrifice in John.

It is important to note that these sources acknowledge that at the time of Christ there was a difference of opinion as to the timing of the slaying of the lambs. Did the Sadducees slay the lamb at the beginning of the 14th (at twilight) and the Pharisees the afternoon of the 14th? Some scholars claim the difference in time was related to WHEN the lambs were slain on the afternoon of the 14th—between 3 and 5 p.m. or between sunset and nightfall. The understanding is that both these time periods were at the close of the 14th. This understanding makes no sense if one accepts that a legal day begins at sunset. If this is the case, “between sunset and nightfall” can ONLY apply to the beginning of the day and still be “on the fourteenth.” It can be shown that the common Jewish practice has been to use sundown as the beginning and ending of a day. This would be similar to our modern use of midnight. It is the demarcation line between two days and can legitimately be listed as the beginning of one day and the end of another day.

Josephus shows only one Passover sacrifice and states that the lambs were sacrificed between the 9th and 11th hours (3 p.m. and 5 p.m.) on the afternoon of the 14th. He wrote this while describing the Passover of 65 C.E., 34 years after Christ's crucifixion. Edersheim disagrees slightly with Josephus and claims the slaughtering began around 2:30 p.m., after the daily sacrifice was offered. But both of these agree that the slaughtering of lambs at the temple took place on the afternoon of the 14th. Even if one rejects Josephus' extraordinary claim of the numbers (255,000 lambs) killed in one afternoon, it would still seem impossible for enough lambs to be slaughtered in the temple area to satisfy the needs of all those who had arrived in Jerusalem to keep the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread within this two-hour window. Using Josephus' numbers there would be 255,000 lambs, plus 255,000 people accompanying the lambs, plus the number of Levites and priests required for the sacrifice. Was this remotely possible in such a confined area as the temple? Does this mean that a domestic Passover observed the previous evening by many Jews (possibly including Christ and His disciples) was acceptable during this time period?

It is interesting that even if one takes the approach that a common day begins and ends at nightfall, in the case of the Passover we are dealing with a Festival and a Holy Day—the First Day of Unleavened Bread, the 15th. To slay the lamb after sunset at the end of the 14th but prior to darkness would place the slaying of the Passover lamb on the 15th (based on the use of sunset for the beginning of a Sabbath or Holy Day) and not the 14th. This would be inconsistent with any Jewish practice that we know of. The Jewish claim is that the lamb must be slain on the 14th, but was eaten on the 15th. No one in the Jewish community accepts a slaying of the lamb on the 15th. This creates a huge problem with consistency. One really cannot have it both ways. You cannot declare that Sabbaths and Holy Days begin at sunset, but that the 15th (First Day of Unleavened Bread) does not begin until darkness. Notice again the statement from B'nai B'rith.

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The Jewish day begins and ends at sundown. Thus, all holidays begin at sundown of the day preceding the date shown and end at sundown of the (last) day shown.⁵¹

There is some information that indicates the Samaritans observed a Passover on the evening at the beginning of the 14th and that they killed the lambs “between the two evenings” or at twilight. It is difficult to learn much about the Samaritans and there is some dispute as to whether the group who call themselves Samaritans today really date back to the first century. Schauss has something to say about these people.

Modern historical research has proved that the Samaritans are not descendants of the heathen colonists settled in the northern kingdom of Israel by the conquerors of Samaria as was once assumed. . . . Actually, the Samaritans of today are a small and poor remnant of an old and great Jewish sect that appeared in Palestine about the beginning of the Greek period. They form the oldest Jewish sect in existence. . . . Two hundred Samaritans observe Pesach to this day on Mount Gerizim, in a manner that other Jews ceased practicing thousands of years ago. The custom of offering sacrifices has died out with the Samaritans, except on the fourteenth day of Nisan, when they offer the ceremonial Pesach sacrifice. A study of their ceremonies and observances during the festival is of special interest to us, because they practically duplicate the rites of the Jews of the very old days. What certain knowledge we have of Pesach and its rites dates only from the last century of the second Temple; of what happened before there are no exact records.⁵²

The Samaritans sacrifice the lamb on the fourteenth. Thus the passage “between the two evenings” the Samaritans translate to mean between sunset and dark, the twilight hour in these lands being very short. “Thou shalt sacrifice the Passover in the evening, at the going in of the sun, at the very time thou camest forth out of Egypt.”⁵³

It is interesting to note that Schauss claims the Samaritans were quite numerous in the area between Galilee and Judea. Christ was from Nazareth of Galilee. Is it possible that the Samaritans and the Sadducees both observed the Passover during the evening at the beginning of the 14th? The evidence is sketchy, but it poses an interesting possibility. At the very least it suggests diversity in the beliefs of “Judaism” during the first century. Was there really a normative Judaism during this period of time? And if there were, would it be the Pharisees’ version? This is clearly the one that has survived.

In his book *Jewish Sects of the New Testament Era*, Randall Weiss describes the wide range of beliefs that existed during the Second Temple period:

The heyday of Jewish sectarianism was from the middle of the second century BCE to the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Judaism, during this age of the Second Temple, was distinctive in that it had many sects claiming to be the rightful practitioners of the Jewish faith

⁵¹*The Jewish Holidays* by B’nai B’rith @ Internet site <http://bnaibrith.org/caln.html>.

⁵²Schauss, Hayyim, *The Jewish Festivals, A Guide to Their History and Observance* (New York, New York: Schocken Books, Inc.) 1938. Pages 61-62.

⁵³“The Last Blood Sacrifice” Article from *The National Geographic*, January, 1920. Author John D. Whiting.

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passed down through their forefathers from ancient Israel. *This was the age of sects and of sectarian literature.*⁵⁴

The Pharisees became the predominant party after the destruction of the temple. All other sects seem to vanish and the development of Judaism over the next 1,900 years is the Pharisaic model.

With the downfall of the Jewish state, the Sadducees vanished from history. Political leadership was their main function, and when national independence came to an end, so did they. Whereas the Pharisees were not only unaffected by the collapse of political affairs but profited from the new situation to establish themselves as exclusive leaders of the Jewish people, the ground on which the Sadducees were able to exist disappeared from under them.⁵⁵

There are numerous books available today that support the view of multiple ideas and practices extant among the Jews of the first century. One such book is: *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*. An impressive array of scholars contributed to this book, including: J.H. Charlesworth of Princeton Theological Seminary; John J. Collins, professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame; Jonathan Goldstein, professor of ancient history and classics at the University of Iowa; Jacob Neusner, university professor and distinguished scholar of Judaic studies at Brown University; and Shemaryahu Talmon, professor of Bible studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In the preface to the book we read the following:

If we insist that we speak not of Judaism but of Judaisms, does that mean we have also to speak not of Christianity but of Christianities? Indeed it does—and that proves our point. People familiar with the rich diversity of Christianity today and throughout the history of the Christian faith will find routine the allegation that, just as history has yielded its diverse Christianities—in some ways autonomous, in some connected, in some continuous—so history testifies to more than one Judaism. Imagine the Christianity we should define and describe, were we to treat all evidence as uniform in the manner in which we treat the evidence about “Judaism.”⁵⁶

Part of the argument supporting the current Jewish observance of Passover on the evening of the 15th comes from the assumption that it is the same as that of the first century. Yet, there are others who go so far as to proclaim that there wasn't a “normative” Judaism at that time. To accept the modern Jewish interpretation and practice as fact without applying the analytical method of study is assailed by some modern scholars as being flawed.

The analytical method has defined all learning from the beginning, in Greek science and philosophy, to our own day: observation, reflection. Curiosity reaches expression then in the questions, why? what if? and why not? and, above all, so what? But that mode of thought, based on observation and testing through experiment, scarcely characterizes the deductive system

⁵⁴Randall A. Weiss, *Jewish Sects of the New Testament Era* (Cedar Hill, TX: Cross Talk) 1994. (Emphasis added.)

⁵⁵Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (Volume 1, T & T Clark, Ltd.: Edinburgh) 1973, page 414.

⁵⁶Neusner, Jacob; Green, William Scott; and Frerichs, Ernest S., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press) 1987. Page xi of preface.

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commonplace in the received and established methods of Judaic learning, a system that shamelessly invokes *a priori* facts of history, and that knows things before proof or without proof. So the present approach—so self-evidently right to us—contradicts the established conviction, which is that all pieces of evidence deriving from Jews, whoever they were, wherever and whenever they lived without regard to context and circumstance, testify to one and the same Judaism. That proposition remains to be demonstrated.⁵⁷

In another scholarly work written by Professor Robert A. Kraft from the University of Pennsylvania, we find similar sentiments expressed. Professor Kraft delivered a paper to the Brown University Graduate Colloquium on Religious Studies in February 1967 that was titled: *The Multiform Jewish Heritage of Early Christianity*. This paper was published in 1975 by Jacob Neusner and updated by Professor Kraft in 1992.

The temptation to use such terms as “Judaism” and “Christianity” primarily in connection with what has survived in one’s own tradition as “Judaism” or “Christianity” is understandable. It is also extremely misleading. That which resulted when a certain type of Christianity achieved official status in the Roman Empire of the fourth century, and standardized for itself certain doctrinal and liturgical norms, should not be used to judge the earlier centuries, according to what I would like to believe is sound historical methodology. Similarly, the fact that [with] the Jewish revolts against Rome in 66-73 and again in 132-35, Judaism comes to mean primarily that torah (law)-oriented type of Rabbi-led Pharisaism which compiled and transmitted the Talmud and related Semitic literature (henceforth called “rabbinic” Judaism), should not blind us to the complexities of the earlier situation. For Christianity, the reign of Constantine became a major turning-point; for Judaism, the catastrophes of 66-73 and 132-135 were equally pivotal. We must be careful in any attempt to move behind these major developments that we do not simply read later Christian and Jewish history back into the earlier periods.⁵⁸

It is truly amazing how little we would know about pre- and non-rabbinic Judaism if we were solely dependent on the literature and traditions preserved by Judaism itself. . . . But on the whole, rabbinic literature is concerned with its own development and its own internal problems. It has little to tell us about what it left behind with the ruins of Jerusalem and of its temple, such as the Sadducees or the Essenes, or of non-Semitic-speaking Judaism in its various aspects. Rabbinic Judaism built its hedges rather carefully and effectively. They are not completely opaque, but one must expend considerable effort and risk eye-strain in an attempt to penetrate through them.⁵⁹

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has assisted greatly in pin-pointing some of the areas of which there had long been some sort of general awareness based on allusions to Essenes and to Essene-like groups by ancient authors. For example, we find: problems as to the Jerusalem cult itself—who should be recognized as the legitimate priesthood, etc.? (Note the presence of related

⁵⁷Neusner, Jacob; Green, William Scott; and Frerichs, Ernest S., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press) 1987. Page xiii.

⁵⁸Kraft, Robert A., University of Pennsylvania, revised version, updated September 21, 1992; copyright R.A. Kraft, (originally appeared in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. Jacob Neusner, vol. 3, Leide: Brill, 1975) Pages 174-199.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

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temples for a time at Gerizim [Samaritan] and Leontopolis in Egypt [Jewish] as well as the role of the Jewish synagogues in the Hellenistic world.)—problems as to what calendar to follow in observing Jewish holy days—should one prefer the solar calendar of the Qumranites and others, or the lunar calculations of the Pharisees and Jerusalem leaders?⁶⁰

These quotes provide evidence of diversity within Judaism as it developed during the Second Temple period. The presence of numerous sects attests to the same diversity. The only survivors of this time were the Pharisees. We have no documents that claim to have been written by a “Sadducee” or even an “Essene,” although it is widely accepted that the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls were Essenes. We know from the Bible and other historical sources that there were serious differences of interpretation and practice among the various sects. In John Christ condemned the Jews for not believing the writings of Moses (John 5:46-47: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”).

Did these differences affect the observance of Passover during the time of Christ? If the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed on the date for Pentecost and the wave sheaf offering, were they united on the timing of Passover? With the scarcity of information from this time period, we must rely upon the Scriptures to resolve the problem.

What Did Christ Do?

This is the critical question that needs to be addressed. We can rest assured that when Christ set the example for us to follow, He did it during the evening at the beginning of the 14th. This is the clear example that we follow today. Notice that Scripture states this was the Passover.

Matthew 26:17-19 “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?’ 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.’”’ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.”

Mark 14:12-14, 16 “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?’ 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. 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?’” . . . 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.”

Luke 22:8, 11, 13 “And He sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.’ . . . ‘Then you shall say to the master of the house, “The Teacher says to you,

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

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‘Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’ . . . So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.”

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.’”

These accounts are quite clear that Jesus and His disciples observed His final Passover the evening before He died. In Corinthians Paul makes the claim that Christ ate the bread and drank the wine on the “same night in which He was betrayed.” If Christ was crucified on Passover day, then this event occurred during the evening at the beginning of the 14th.

Without a lamb how could this event be called “Passover”? Yet Christ clearly said “I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples” (Matthew 26:18). Did Christ lie, or did He actually eat the Passover? It would seem that He ate the Passover. There are some difficult sections in John, which indicate that the Jews or a portion of the Jews were not eating the Passover until the next night. Matthew Henry in his commentary and David Stern in his *Jewish New Testament* explain this as special offerings dealing with the First Day of Unleavened Bread and not the Passover. (See paper “New Testament Passover, *A Christian Responsibility*” for further comment on these verses.)

We are really faced with some difficult choices given the testimony of the gospel writers. Did Christ ever break God’s commandments? The answer is, of course not! Did Christ ever do anything that was contrary to the will of God? Again, the answer is no. By concluding, based on the Scriptures, that Christ observed something called the Passover the night before He died (on the evening at the beginning of the 14th), we must believe that this was within the law and the will of God. We now have some interesting choices.

1. Christ was observing the Passover as He had always observed it, at least with His disciples, and at the time He had always observed it.
2. Christ did not observe the Passover since He was dead before it occurred, and this was some sort of pre-Passover meal eaten the night before. (This would seem to contradict the clear scriptures that called this event “the Passover.”)
3. Christ made an exception and kept the Passover a day early to set an example for our observance of the New Testament Passover.
4. During the time of the Second Temple it was equally acceptable to eat the Passover at either the beginning of the 14th or the beginning of the 15th.
5. Christ made no change in the observance of Passover. The Pharisees had it correct, and we should be following the Jewish practice today and keep it on the 15th.

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Of these possibilities, some feel strongly that Christ kept the Passover (or a type of the Passover) earlier than the legal date to set us an example to follow today with the New Testament Passover. But where is this stated in the Scripture, and why weren't the disciples and the owner of the guestroom bothered by this change in tradition? Based on the biblical evidence it would seem that the two strongest possibilities are 1 and 4. Christ kept the Passover at the appropriate time, but both times (14th and 15th) were acceptable. Number 1 really seems to make the most sense. But could Christ observe a different time than the rest of the Jews and not be noticed?

We have a good example of how this could have happened. In a previous paper on the subject of Pentecost, it was shown that the Sadducees believed in a different date for Pentecost than the Pharisees. Who controlled the temple worship? The records show that the Sadducees controlled the temple, but the Pharisees controlled the synagogues. So which Pentecost did the majority observe? We simply don't know and the Bible doesn't make an issue of it. Did Christ keep the Sadducean Pentecost or the Pharisaical one? We believe He observed the correct one, and that was the Sadducean one. Is it possible that there was a similar problem with the Passover in the first century? Since a domestic Passover seems possible according to Scripture, it would have been even easier for Christ and the disciples to keep a separate Passover without attracting attention. It should also be noted that if everyone went to the temple, a logistical problem for the priests and Levites would have been created.

The argument is made that Christ kept the Passover of the Jews in the first century. It is true that there is no record of Christ objecting to the Passover as observed by the Jews and there are examples of Him going to Jerusalem with His family to keep the Passover. But this same argument could be made about Pentecost. Nowhere do we find Christ objecting or even involving Himself in the Pentecost debate. This silence may mean that the Sadducean Pentecost was kept at the temple, but what did the Pharisees do? The argument from silence simply doesn't satisfactorily resolve the problem.

A different explanation is that the Jews in the first century followed two calendars in observing the Passover. According to this view Jesus and His disciples observed one date, eating the Passover meal before His crucifixion, whereas most of the nation, including the Pharisees, followed the other calendar in which the Passover lambs were slain on the very day of Jesus' death.⁶¹

The Anchor Bible Dictionary is another source that touches on this issue. Was this a Passover that Christ observed? Their conclusion is that it most likely was not, but they admit that there is no way to absolutely prove this position.

Other solutions have been proposed to explain why the Synoptics and John do not agree that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. There is, of course, the possibility that Jesus anticipated the Passover. Moreover, different calculations for the time of the Passover could have arisen,

⁶¹Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Whato, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

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because Galileans, for various reasons, could have had trouble determining the exact time of the full moon. Finally, the Jews of Jerusalem may have postponed the Passover so as not to have two consecutive days of rest (Nolle 1948: 44–45).

Billerbeck proposes that two calendars were a day out of step with each other in the year of the Last Supper. These two calendars are alleged to have come into existence because of a dispute between the Sadducees and Pharisees, and were realized because extra days had to be inserted to keep the lunar calendar in harmony with the solar one, or because there had been a difficulty in determining the date of the new moon.

A. Jaubert (1957: 105–36) likewise argues that two calendars existed at the time. The official, priestly calendar was lunar, and that of Qumran, solar. John is correct by the official Jerusalem calendar, and the Synoptics are correct in terms of the calendar used at Qumran and, perhaps, in Galilee. According to the solar calendar, the Passover would have been on Wednesday (Johnston 1957: 109–13; Vogt 1955: 403–13). However, Jaubert’s theory has not commanded wide assent.

H. Hoehner assumes the existence of two different methods for calculating the hours of a day: sunset to sunset or sunrise to sunrise. The Galileans and the Pharisees would have used the latter method, and so celebrated their Passover one day earlier. But this theory would have Jesus celebrating the Passover on Nisan 14, which seems most unlikely. Billerbeck’s theory appears to be the most reasonable of these three calendrical theories (Marshall 1981: 71–75).⁶²

Their conclusion is found later in the same article:

We simply cannot determine whether it was a Passover meal or not; however, a reasonable assumption is that it was celebrated in a Passover atmosphere.⁶³

If we did not have the verses in John which appear to confirm that the Jews (at least some of the Jews) were planning to keep the Passover the evening after Christ’s death, there would be little debate on the series of events. We would have a clear biblical example of Passover observance being at the beginning of the 14th. Matthew, Mark and Luke seem to tell a consistent story, but John adds a different twist.

John 18:28 and John 19:14

Scholars seem to be hopelessly divided on how to reconcile the accounts in the synoptic Gospels with John’s account. Some conclude that there is a contradiction between the two that cannot be reconciled.⁶⁴ The earliest efforts to solve the problem attempted to harmonize the accounts.

⁶²Freedman, David Noel, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday) 1997, 1992. Article: “The Last Supper.”

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴The following is a partial list of scholars who have concluded that there is no satisfactory way of harmonizing the Johannine chronology with that of the synoptics: G. Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua* (London SPCK, 1929); S. Zeitlin, “The Last Supper as an Ordinary Meal in the Fourth Gospel,” *JQR* 42 (1951/52) 251-60; id., “The Time of the Passover

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So, taking into consideration all the evidence bearing on the views held by the church fathers until 160-170, we come to the conclusion that the church of the first hundred and fifty years (when the contact with the apostles was still fresh and at first hand) saw no problem in the date of the Gospels as to the dating of the crucifixion. As far as we have been able to ascertain, Tatian, in compiling his *Diatessaron* or Harmony of the Four Gospels (c. A.D. 170), was the first who began to realize the problem. However, he solved it as follows. He put back John xiii. 1-20 to a day before the Passover and thus made it a separate meal and adds Luke xxii. 7-16, John xiii. 21 ff. Most probably he rendered John xviii. 28 by "that they might not be defiled while celebrating the seven days' feast of the unleavened loaves."

Eusebius tried to solve the problem by representing that the Jews were so busy with their persecution of Jesus that they postponed the eating of the paschal lamb for a day, and thus John might have been correct in writing as he did in John xviii. 28.

Chrysostom again apparently held before his readers a number of possible solutions without taking sides, *inter alia*, that John by the Passover meant the whole of the seven days' feast, or that Jesus anticipated the paschal repast by a day.

Jerome strongly defended the synoptic version and apparently harmonized John's data with it. Under his influence, and especially through the clear statements of the Synoptists, the Synoptic version gained more and more ground and eventually became the generally accepted view of the Christian church, and continued to remain so throughout all the centuries until the nineteenth century.⁶⁵

Scholars who believe that there is no contradiction between John and the synoptics propose two primary theories in an effort to explain the *perceived* differences between the two. Both theories suggest that Christ did observe the Passover (the legal Passover) prior to His death. Those who propose that Christ did not keep the Passover the night before His death but some sort of pre-Passover meal are in the distinct minority. From the scholars making an effort to harmonize the accounts, we obtain two primary theories:

1. Christ kept the legal Passover in the evening at *the beginning of the 14th*. He was crucified during the daylight portion of the Passover (the 14th). John 18:28 and John 19:14 are not

Meal," *ibid.*, 45-50, which is a response to P.J. Heawood, "The Time of the Last Supper," *ibid.*, 37-44; G. Ogg, "The Chronology of the Last Supper," in *Theological Collections VI: Historicity and Chronology in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1965) 75-96; R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (2 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 1977) 2.323-28; I.H. Marshall, *Lord's Supper and Last Supper* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980) 57-75; R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (2 vols; AB 29-29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 2.5550-58; C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); R. Schnackenburg, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (3 vols.; London: Burn and Oates, 1982) 3.33-47; L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 774-85; E. Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 2.178.

⁶⁵Geldenhuis, Norval, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1988. Pages 652-653.

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discussing the Passover, but Passover offerings and special meals that took place each day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

2. Christ kept the legal Passover in the evening hours at *the beginning of the 15th*. He was crucified during the daylight portion of the 15th, the First Day of Unleavened Bread. In this theory, Passover and the First Day of Unleavened Bread are one and the same. The lambs are slaughtered on the afternoon of the 14th but eaten during the evening of the 15th. John 18:28 and John 19:14 are not discussing the Passover, but Passover offerings and special meals that took place each day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Both of these theories are thoroughly expounded in the *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* by Norval Geldenhuys, B.A., B.D., Th.M. Mr. Geldenhuys quotes numerous scholars who support these views. Personally, he believes that the difficulties among the accounts can be resolved if one believes that Christ was crucified on the First Day of Unleavened Bread (the 15th) and not on the 14th. He believes that the Passover is to be observed during the evening of the 15th, which would force the crucifixion to be during the daylight portion of the 15th. It is abundantly clear that Christ died less than 24 hours after eating the final Passover with His disciples. If this was the evening of the 14th, then Christ was crucified on the 14th. If one believes it was the evening of the 15th, then he must accept a crucifixion on the First Day of Unleavened Bread—a Holy Day and annual Sabbath. Here are some quotes from Mr. Geldenhuys. (Note the reference to “practically no difference of opinion” for a Friday crucifixion. This points out the difficulty with always accepting the popular view of scholars. While there may be “practically no difference of opinion among scholars,” we believe there is a difference of opinion with the Scriptures.):

There exists practically no difference of opinion on the fact which is unanimously taught by the Gospels that Jesus was crucified on a Friday. But when we ask what the date (according to Jewish chronology of that time) of that Friday was, no unanimity is to be found among Bible expositors. The reason for this is that there is an apparent contradiction between the evidence for the dating of the crucifixion in the first three Gospels and that in the fourth.

In 1892 D. Chwolson in his *Das Letzte Passmahl Christi und der Tag seines Todes* introduced a new view. In more recent times Strack-Billerbeck, the expert authorities on rabbinical writings from the earliest times, proposed a modification of Chwolson’s theory. They suggest that the solution of our problem must be sought in the controversy concerning the correct interpretation of Leviticus xxiii. 9-11 between the Pharisees and the sons of Boethus (a Sadducee family that filled the office of the high priest between 24 B.C. and A.D. 65). The latter are said to have maintained that the offering of the firstlings had always to be brought to the Lord on the day after the Sabbath which falls in the feast of unleavened loaves. The Pharisees, on the other hand, taught that the offering, apart from the day on which the Sabbath falls, had always to be brought on the second day of the feast, since the first day of the feast was regarded as a Sabbath in the religious sense. Furthermore according to Strack-Billerbeck, there is evidence that indicates that there was sometimes a controversy over the official fixing of the beginning of the month Nisan (which ushered in the Jewish ecclesiastical year). . . . Quite a number of conservative and other

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Bible expositors of today follow this interpretation introduced by Chwolson and remodeled and developed by Strack-Billerbeck.⁶⁶

This is the basis for the two theories that are put forward by scholars. Either Christ and others of His day observed the Passover on the night at the beginning of the 14th or they observed the Passover on the night at the beginning of the 15th. Most liberal scholars lean toward the evening at the beginning of the 15th with Christ being crucified during the daylight portion of the 15th. But this theory has serious problems.

In Deuteronomy 21:22-23 we read: “If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you *as* an inheritance; for he who is hanged *is* accursed of God.” While there is no mention of the Sabbath or a Holy Day in this verse, the Jews state clearly that there were to be no bodies on the stakes during the Sabbath days. The 15th of Abib is a Sabbath day (Leviticus 23:4-7), but the 14th is not! John 19:31 makes this quite clear: “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.” This would seem to preclude the crucifixion from occurring on the 15th, therefore, it would mean that Christ observed His final Passover on the night at the beginning of the 14th. Was this the legal Passover? Would Christ have done anything that was illegal?

Mr. Geldenhuys is very clear in his belief that there was a unified Passover observance during the first century and that it was on the evening at the beginning of the 15th. But this seems to be at odds with both John and the synoptic Gospels. Passover day is shown to be the 14th in the Old Testament. Christ died on the day of the Passover. There is no biblical or scriptural requirement that He die simultaneously with the lambs. But He did die on the day of Passover—the 14th.

Geldenhuys continues with his explanation of John and the synoptics.

John xviii.28. This text is of cardinal importance in our investigation. Numerous critics, and especially Strack-Billerbeck, declare that the expression *φάγωσιν τὸ πάσχα* [eat the Passover] can mean nothing else than that John here states that the Jews still had to eat the paschal repast and that therefore, according to John, the Lord was already condemned to be crucified the morning before the paschal repast. In spite of all the arguments adduced in this connection, we nevertheless do not feel convinced that by the expression John definitely meant the eating of the paschal repast as such. On the contrary we are convinced that a mistake is made in expecting from John a too precisely Jewish mode of expression. On the contrary, in spite of everything alleged by Strack-Billerbeck and others in opposition to this, we are convinced with Zahn, Edersheim, Hengstenberg, David Smith, Andrews, Ubbink, and others that the expression *φάγωσιν τὸ πάσχα* [eat the Passover] in John xviii. 28 does not mean the eating of the paschal

⁶⁶Geldenhuys, Norval, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1988.

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repast as such but refers to the seven days' feast of the unleavened loaves (and more especially to the sacrificial meals eaten during the feast).

John xix.14. This verse also is generally adduced as a so-called proof that John teaches that Jesus was crucified already before the Passover. This verse is often interpreted as though it said that the day for the crucifixion was the preparation *for* the Passover; it is even translated so in the American Revised Standard Version. But A.V. and R.V. rightly translate παρασκευὴ τοῦ πάσχα by "the preparation *of* the passover." This expression in John xix.14 was most probably intended by John as preparatory to his statement in xix.31, that the Sabbath after the Lord's crucifixion was a "high" day.⁶⁷

In reality the four gospels complement one another and do not contradict. Matthew Henry and David Stern are two other scholars who agree that John 18 and 19 are not talking about the Passover, but special meals and offerings during the days of Unleavened Bread. Matthew Henry was the author of a respected commentary and David Stern has written the *Jewish New Testament*. While both seem to accept that Christ was crucified on the 15th instead of the 14th, there are some key points to keep in mind:

1. The entire festival of Unleavened Bread is occasionally called Passover.
2. Special offerings and meals occurred each day during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These are also called Passover offerings.
3. Joseph of Arimethea asked for Christ's body and placed it in a tomb prior to sunset on the day Christ was crucified. Why is there no mention of Joseph being unable to participate in Passover that evening? Did he possibly observe Passover the night before as did Christ and His disciples?
4. If the Jews had entered the court of Pilate they would have been unclean until evening. This means they would not have been permitted to kill the lambs in the afternoon. Did everyone sacrifice a lamb on the afternoon of the 14th? Or did some sacrifice their own animals the night before (beginning of the 14th)?

So far we have examined Judaism, the practices of the Second Temple period, and Christ's conduct. What do we know of the early Church and their Passover observance?

The Quartodeciman Controversy

There are numerous historical references to the early Church observing a Passover on the 14th day instead of worshiping on the Sunday commemorating the resurrection. The controversy over these two dates is called the Quartodeciman Controversy in history. It culminated with the Catholic Church convening the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E. With Constantine's conversion to

⁶⁷Geldenhuis, Norval, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1988.

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“Christianity,” Sunday is now declared the correct day for worship and the timing of Easter is fixed. No longer can it occur on the same day as the Passover.

Quartodeciman was the term applied to those who kept the 14th. The early Church observed an event in the evening of the 14th to commemorate the death of Christ. This was the 14th day of the first month on the Hebrew calendar. When using the Hebrew calendar, the evening of the 14th can only be the *evening at the beginning of the day*. Where did this custom come from? The leaders of the Church in Asia Minor claimed a tradition dating back to the time of the apostles. Although the practice among the Jews after the destruction of the temple was to observe the Passover on the evening of the 15th (some would say that it had always been on the evening of the 15th), we are told that the Christians in Asia Minor kept the Passover on the 14th. There is no longer an animal to sacrifice for the Jews and there never was for the Christians.

For Jeremias (1977: 207–18), the Luke 22:15–18 passage informs us of Jesus’ avowal of abstinence on behalf of Israel. Jeremias sees the avowal confirmed by the practice of the Quartodecimans who, inspired by this example, fasted for the Jews during the night of the Passover and only ate their agape and Eucharist at 3 a.m.—the next morning. The Quartodecimans read and explained Exodus 12 and awaited Jesus’ second coming at their Passover. Jeremias’ student Lohse (1953: 62–89, 136–37) supports this position.⁶⁸

Finally, a letter of Polycrates of Ephesus (ca. A.D. 190) to Victor, bishop of Rome (A.D. 189–98), on the paschal controversy names Polycarp, among others, as preserving Quartodeciman practice from the time of the apostle John (Eus. *Hist. Eccl.* 5.24.2–7). Irenaeus also wrote to the Roman bishop on this matter, reminding him that when Polycarp visited Anicetus in Rome, there was mutual respect in spite of disagreement on the date of the celebration of Easter (Eus. *Hist. Eccl.* 5.24.14–17).⁶⁹

The Quartodecimans are so called because they observe this festival [of Passover] like the Jews, on the 14th day of the moon, and hence their name.⁷⁰

The history is sketchy and the scholars few who can even provide a glimpse into the Church during these early years. It has been stated by some that a veil came over Church history shortly after the end of the New Testament and lasted for almost a century (Jesse Hurlburt makes such a claim in his history of the Church). It is interesting that some sources make the claim that the Pharisees called Christians (especially those living in the east) “Sadducees.” This information can be found in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*⁷¹ and the book by the French author Jean LeMoynes titled *Les Sadduceens*.⁷² Why would the Pharisees label the Christians of Asia Minor as being

⁶⁸Freedman, David Noel, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday) 1997, 1992. Article: “The Last Supper.”

⁶⁹*Ibid.* Article: “Epistle of Polycarp.”

⁷⁰Sozomenus, Salaminius Hermia, *Historia Ecclesiastica (The Ecclesiastical History)*. Mid-fifth century C.E., page 67.

⁷¹Singer, Isadore, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. 12 volumes. (New York, New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc.) 1964. Volume 10, page 633.

⁷²LeMoynes, Jean, *Les Sadduceens* (Paris: Libraire Lecoffre) 1972. Pages 97-99.

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“Sadducees”? Could it be that they also rejected the oral laws ascribed to by the Pharisees and rabbis, but celebrated the observance of the Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost on the same days as had the conservative Sadducees?

During the second century C.E. the leader of the Church in Asia was an individual named Polycrates. He was the bishop of Ephesus and a Quartodeciman. In a letter to Victor, bishop of Rome he establishes clearly the need to observe the Passover on the 14th. A record of this letter can be found in the writings of the Church historian Eusebius.

All these kept the 14th day of the Passover according to the good news [New Testament], never swerving, but followed according to the rule of the trust. And I also, Polycrates, the least of you all, live according to the tradition of my kinsmen, and some of them have I followed. For seven of my family were bishops and I am the eighth. And my kinsmen always kept the day when the people put away the leaven.⁷³

Historians link this observance to that of Easter, but in reality there is no evidence that these Christians ever observed anything like Easter. They kept the New Testament Passover in commemoration of Christ’s death. It is important to address two key points in this debate that raged for almost 300 years:

1. These Christians kept the Passover in the evening of the 14th day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar. This could only be the evening at the *beginning* of the 14th. They were following the example of Christ and the apostles. This event was referred to as the Passover or New Testament Passover and as such was distinct from the Jewish Passover that was still being observed by the Jews, even though the temple had been destroyed in 70 C.E. The Jewish observance no longer includes the sacrificing of a lamb and the meal is eaten on the 15th day of the first month in the evening. This is a day later than the Christians were observing the Passover. This is the same pattern that we see in Scripture—Christ and the apostles observed the Passover during the night at the beginning of the 14th.
2. It is claimed in some writings that the Christians in Asia Minor were observing the Passover at the same time as the Jews—the 14th day of the first month. What does this mean? We know that the traditional view of the Jews (as shown in the Talmud) is that the Passover meal was eaten in the evening of the 15th. Which Jews were the Christians in harmony with during this time period? Were there Jews in Asia Minor who observed the Passover meal on the evening at the beginning of the 14th? Or did the 14th have reference to the Jewish belief that the lambs were to be slain on this day, even though the meal was not eaten until the 15th? We simply don’t know the answer to these questions. But we do know that these Christians in Asia Minor were not called “Quartodecimans” for observing the Passover on the 15th. They would have been called “Quintodecimans” if this were the case. And since there is no longer a lamb to slay, the only possibility for the 14th is the evening at the beginning.

⁷³Eusebius Pamphii of Caesarea (265-340 C.E.), *Historia Ecclesiastica (The Ecclesiastical History)*, 5:24:6f.

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Important information regarding the early Church is recorded in a treatise on the Passover by Apollinarius, bishop of Hierapolis in the second century C.E.⁷⁴ Eusebius tells us that Apollinarius wrote two books against the Jews.⁷⁵ In Asia Minor we have important evidence that Polycarp, Polycrates, Papias and Melito (all bishops) were solid Quartodecimans, and according to Apollinarius, who was one of them, kept the Passover on the same night Christ did, at the beginning of the 14th of Nisan. This is important when one attempts to establish what the Church should be doing today.

The available historical information simply confirms what we read in Scripture. Christ observed His final Passover on this earth with the apostles during the evening portion of the 14th. At this Passover He instituted the symbols of the new covenant and He washed His disciples' feet. This is the example followed by the New Testament Church and the same example that we follow today. We can confidently observe the New Testament Passover on the night portion of the 14th knowing that we have the support of Scripture and history.

Conclusion

The preponderance of biblical evidence supports the evening at the beginning of the 14th as the historical date for the Passover of Exodus 12. The available historical data is sketchy at best and can be interpreted in various ways. One cannot dismiss the weight of history on the side of the Jewish community for their current practice, but does this make it correct? At the time of the Exodus, the Israelites spent the night of the 14th in their homes somewhere in the land of Goshen. The lamb was not to be taken outside the house (Exodus 12:46) and the leftovers were to be burnt in the morning.

The Israelites spent the daylight portion of the 14th gathering in their "armies" and spoiling the Egyptians (an exercise that had begun earlier, but was probably not completed until just prior to departure). There were 600,000 men, unknown numbers of women and children, a mixed multitude and much cattle that had to be organized in Rameses, the point of departure from Egypt. This was no small feat. It would be like evacuating a city the size of Chicago. Even though each family was prepared for a journey, the need to bring everyone together from possibly a 750-square-mile area would require several hours. This would seem impossible to accomplish in the hours prior to daybreak when nothing could be done until at least after midnight.

From Rameses they departed as the sun was setting and the night of the 15th (the day after the Passover, Numbers 33:3) was beginning, having been too busy to prepare the dough and having time for it to rise. They baked unleavened cakes (Exodus 12:39) for the journey and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They viewed the Egyptians burying the dead from the previous night

⁷⁴*Chronicon Paschale*, pages 82, 92.

⁷⁵Eusebius Pamphii of Caesaria (265-340 C.E.), *Historia Ecclesiastica (The Ecclesiastical History)* 4:27.

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as they marched out of the land. With a full moon guiding them they marched to their first campsite, Succoth.

This brief summary of events is far from complete. There are still questions that need to be addressed. Not all of them can be answered. A controversy such as this doesn't endure for hundreds of years without substance on both sides of the discussion. Below is a review of the most pertinent questions and arguments.

1. **What is the meaning of the term *bein ha-'arbayim* as found in Exodus 12:6?** This is a disputed term. In most translations it is translated as "twilight" or "dusk." It is never translated as "afternoon" or "toward evening." Literally it means "between the two evenings." We accept that it means the time period between sunset and complete darkness. There are scholars who support this view. The Talmud adopts the meaning given to this phrase by the rabbis—the time period between noon and sunset (or darkness). This is said to be the common practice during the Second Temple period. This provides for an afternoon sacrifice of the Passover on the 14th and eating the meal on the night of the 15th. Yet the Bible says that the Passover is on the 14th and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is on the 15th.
2. **The term "at evening" is used twice in Exodus 12:18. What is the meaning of this phrase?** The Hebrew term here is quite different from the one found in Exodus 12:6. Why was Moses inspired to use a different term? The obvious reason is that he had a different meaning in mind. The phrase "at even" in the AV comes from the Hebrew *ba-erev*. It generally means "sunset," although it can refer to the time of darkness—the evening (*erev*). By comparing Exodus 12:18 with Leviticus 23:32 we come to the conclusion that satisfies all the scriptures. There are only seven days of Unleavened Bread and the first day is the 15th (Leviticus 23:6). The term "at even" when interpreted to be sunset can be either sunset at the beginning of a day or sunset at the end of the day. We have a similar situation with our term "midnight." Each year on December 31 at the stroke of midnight, a new year begins AND the old year ends. Exodus 12:18 is telling us that when the sun sets at the end of the 14th, the first day of Unleavened Bread begins. The last of the seven days will end when the sun sets on the 21st day of the month. This gives us seven days of Unleavened Bread (15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21), just as we have one day of Atonement (9th day at even [sunset] until the 10th day at even [sunset]).
3. **Can the Hebrew term for morning refer to the few hours after midnight, thereby allowing the Israelites to leave their homes before daybreak?** There is no example of the Hebrew term *boqer* (morning) ever meaning anything but "daybreak," "dawn" or "towards dawn." In the case of Ruth and Boaz, it was clearly toward dawn and not the middle of the night. It is quite dark even when the sun begins to rise in the morning. The term *boqer* is used for the light portion of the day in Genesis 1 and is never used in the place of night. In Exodus 12, the firstborn were killed at midnight (middle of the night and not the dividing line between night and morning). The Israelites were told not to leave their homes until morning, not after midnight, or after the firstborn have died. God

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was very clear in the command that they were not to go out until morning—daybreak. In Exodus 12:30, we are told that Pharaoh arose “in the night” but this was after the death of his son, which was after midnight. In Exodus 12:31 we are told that he called for Moses and Aaron “by night.” This is after midnight and still called night, not morning. If the term “morning watch” was intended here, then it would have been used. Later on the term is used (Exodus 14:24; 1 Samuel 11:11).

4. **Didn't Moses and Aaron respond to Pharaoh's summons and leave their homes before morning?** All we know in Scripture is that Pharaoh *sent* for Moses and Aaron by night. We have no statement that they left their homes. In fact, Moses prophesied to Pharaoh only hours before that he would never again see his face (Exodus 10:29). Moses also prophesied that Pharaoh's servants would come to him and bow down to him and tell him to get out of Egypt and then he would leave (Exodus 11:7-8). Both these prophecies were fulfilled (Exodus 12:31): Moses did not go to Pharaoh, but his servants brought the message asking them to leave. There is no record of Moses and Aaron leaving their homes prior to morning.
5. **The Israelites were thrust out of Egypt. They were told to eat the Passover in haste, ready to depart. Doesn't this prove that they left the very night of the Passover instead of waiting until the next evening?** The Hebrew term for *haste* in Exodus 12:11 can be translated “trepidation” (see Strong's). It can mean “fear,” “hurriedly” or even “to be diligent” or “zealous.” God instructed Israel to be diligent and zealous, to be prepared to leave. He did not say they would leave that night. Even with extensive preparation it would be physically impossible to gather a group of people the size of the city of Chicago in one place and then organize them into “armies” (Exodus 12:17, 51) and then march out of the land. The perhaps 2.5 million people would require an area of 750 square miles to camp (or live). That is two-thirds the size of the state of Rhode Island. This would seem physically impossible to gather this size group in the three or four hours after midnight to depart from Egypt. Scripture tells us that they departed by night (Numbers 33). If it wasn't the night of the Passover then it had to be the next night (the 15th). If they could not leave their homes till morning and they left Egypt by night, there is only one logical answer. They remained in their homes the night of the 14th and left the area on the night of the 15th.
6. **What about the morning and evening sacrifices? The term for the evening sacrifice in one place is *bein ha- 'arbayim*. Doesn't this prove that the term evening can mean afternoon?** There are two locations in Scripture (total of four verses) where the term *bein ha- 'arbayim* is used to describe the timing of the evening sacrifice—Exodus 29:39, 41; Numbers 28:4, 8. In Exodus 29 the NKJV translates the phrase as “twilight.” In Numbers 28 it is translated as “evening.” When were the daily offerings given? In all but one location in Scripture the term is “morning and evening.” In Daniel 8:14, there is a combination of two Hebrew terms used (*erev* and *boqer*). We find a similar expression in Psalm 55:17. The literal translation in Daniel is “evenings and mornings.” This is confirmed by Daniel 8:26. Which offering is considered the first one of the day—the morning or the evening? According to Edersheim, during the Second Temple period the

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evening sacrifice was offered in the afternoon. Does this define the term “between the two evenings” as being in the afternoon? When all the scriptures using this term (*bein ha-‘arbayim*) are studied (Exodus 12:6; Exodus 16:12; Exodus 29:39, 41; Exodus 30:8; Leviticus 23:5; Numbers 9:3, 5, 11; Numbers 28:4, 8) along with the various translations, the conclusion is not the afternoon. The lamps in the tabernacle were lit at this time. If one accepts that a common day ended with darkness, then we have an answer to the daily sacrifice that would allow the evening sacrifice to be given at sunset and still be a part of the common day. This would not apply to the Passover or Holy Days, which must begin at sunset. Edersheim explains that the term “between the two evenings” meant between sunset and darkness anciently. He describes the evening sacrifice as corresponding to this time period *until* the Second Temple. At this time it was changed to the afternoon. This is according to Edersheim.

7. **When does a day actually begin?** While there is some disputing among scholars on this point, most will confirm that sunset begins a day. The Hebrew term *ba- erev* or *ba- ereb* is translated “evening” or “at even” in most places in Scripture. It can be shown from Scripture that it most likely means “sunset” (Joshua 10:26-27; Deuteronomy 23:10-11). An individual was unclean until evening, that is, until sunset. This marked the beginning of a new day. It is also fairly common to be told that “darkness” and not sunset ends a day and begins a new one. This is found in several Jewish sources. While this may be an issue for some, it is clearly stated that in the case of the Sabbath (or an annual Sabbath) the day begins at sunset (or even slightly before). Rabbi Donin in his book *To Be a Jew* states that the time from sunset to darkness is ambiguous as to which day it belongs. Because of this ambiguity the Jews consider it to be a part of the day beginning when a Sabbath occurs and also the ending of the day. In looking at the issue of Passover, if the desire is to have a 14th Passover meal one must include the “between the two evenings” with the beginning of the day, because the 15th is a Holy Day. In other words, if we accept that the Hebrew term *bein ha- ‘arbayim* is the time between sunset and darkness, we cannot include it with the end of the 14th. The 15th is a Holy Day, therefore would have to begin at sunset and not darkness. While the beginning and ending of a day is somewhat in dispute, there are many reliable sources that refer to sunset as the time one day ends and another begins.
8. **When did the Israelites spoil the Egyptians?** The spoiling of the Egyptians actually begins before the day of departure. This is shown in Exodus 11:2. A correct translation of Exodus 12:35 includes the phrase “had borrowed.” This doesn’t preclude the fact that more spoiling and borrowing went on during the daylight portion of the 14th as they were leaving. This would fit the story flow. But it is not essential that the children of Israel spend the daylight portion of the 14th borrowing from the Egyptians. There were plenty of other things that had to be completed prior to their departure, not the least of which was the gathering and organizing into “armies.”
9. **Didn’t Christ die at the precise time the lambs were being killed at the temple and isn’t this the appropriate timing for the Passover?** There isn’t a single scripture in the Bible that states Christ died at the time the lambs were killed and that this was by divine orchestration. Some have made the statement that the Jews were slaughtering the lambs

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on the afternoon and that this was when Christ died. Some go so far as to claim that Christ had to die at this time or He would not be our Savior. While it is a good thought to believe that the fulfillment of the festivals is to the exact moment, there simply isn't any biblical support for such an idea. If this were true, then Christ MUST return on the Feast of Trumpets. It would be exciting if this could be proven, but where does it state such in Scripture? Christ is our wave sheaf offering, but He did not ascend to the Father until Sunday morning according to the Scriptures. Edersheim explains that the wave sheaf was offered in the evening after the Sabbath. Will Satan be put away on the Day of Atonement? Christ died on the day of Passover. There is nothing in Scripture that would require Him to die at the moment the lambs were being slain. Our sources for the timing of the slaughter of the lambs are primarily: Josephus, the Talmud and Edersheim. But think about what was happening the day Christ died. There was complete darkness from noon until 3 p.m. There was an earthquake at the temple at 3 o'clock that was so severe it ripped the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Who in his right mind would be at the temple during such events! It is also interesting that Joseph of Arimethea took Christ's body and buried it before sunset. Why wasn't he concerned about the Passover that evening? Why wasn't he at the temple? When did he slaughter his lamb? By having contact with a dead body, he would have been unclean and ineligible to observe the Passover that evening. Is it not possible that he observed the Passover the previous evening? John states clearly that the Jews who brought Jesus to Pilate would not enter his home for fear of being unclean for the Passover. Contact with a gentile only made one unclean until the evening. This should not have interfered with their eating the Passover that evening, but for some reason it is stated as though it did. Why is there no statement similar to this made about Joseph? In Numbers we are told that contact with a dead body makes one ineligible for the Passover until the second month.

10. **What does the term *Passover* mean?** The word *Passover* is clearly associated with "passing over" the homes of the Israelites. If the Passover has to do with the timing of God passing over the homes of the Israelites while slaying the firstborn of the Egyptians and if the Passover is on the 14th day, then this activity had to be after the beginning of the 14th and not on the 15th.

These are a few of the questions that seem to be problematic when one is attempting to determine the timing of the Exodus 12 Passover. By using the Scriptures as our primary source and history for corroboration, it is our conclusion that the preponderance of evidence points to the evening at the beginning of the 14th for the Passover of the Exodus. This is a question of history and the language of the Bible. Our doctrinal statement on the Passover is very clear. We follow the example of Jesus Christ and observe the Passover as He did and on the evening that He did. As in all things, we strive to imitate our Savior (1 Corinthians 11:1).