

When Is the Biblical Passover?

Why is there so much confusion about the proper time to observe the Passover? Learn what the Bible and history reveal about this important question!

by Rod Reynolds

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Introduction

In early 1995, as I began ministering to a newly reorganized congregation of the Church of God, I was barraged with questions about the Passover. Most of the questions had specifically to do with the correct time for observing the Biblical Passover. This was one of a variety of doctrinal issues over which many members had concerns. Primarily this was a consequence of massive apostasy from Biblical truth by the leaders of a former Church affiliation.

I gave two or three sermons and Bible studies in response to the questions I received about the Passover. I told the brethren that, due to the somewhat technical nature of some of the details of this question, I would make an effort to make the information I presented available in writing, so that it might be more fully scrutinized and assimilated.

In following up on this commitment, I determined to make a definitive presentation regarding when the Biblical Passover is to be observed. The correct time for the Passover is perhaps only a moderately difficult subject from a strictly Scriptural standpoint. But it has been rendered enormously more challenging and complex by popular but ill founded traditions, compounded by confusing, erroneous assertions from many quarters. My goal in writing this treatise has been to clear up as much confusion as possible and lay to rest the most prominent questions relating to the proper time for observing the Passover.

I have tried to be very careful to avoid factual and logical errors and document the evidence and sources thoroughly. I would counsel the reader to avoid jumping to conclusions about any perceived errors without giving careful study and thought to all the evidence relating to the question. Foolish and unsound notions relating to this subject abound, and new ones seem to appear with astonishing frequency. Though I've made a diligent effort to avoid them, if I become aware of errors existing in this work, I will revise the material accordingly, to the extent that I am able.

This treatise in it's present form does not deal at length with other issues regarding the Passover. One such issue is, did Jesus eat the Passover, including the Paschal lamb, on the night preceding his death?

Briefly, please consider the following: (1) Scripture says he ate the Passover (Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12, 14, 16; Luke 22:8, 11, 13, 15). (2) God commanded the Passover to be kept by those Levitically clean and in proximity to the place of sacrifice, on penalty of extirpation (Numbers 9:13). Under the Old Covenant, which was in force until Jesus died, the obligation included offering and partaking of the sacrifice (Exodus 12:46-47; Numbers 9:6-7, 13; Deuteronomy 16:5-7). Had Jesus, being Levitically clean and near Jerusalem, not done this, he would have been sinning. And he did not sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrew 4:15; 1 Peter

2:2; 1 John 3:5). (3) Though he was residing outside Jerusalem, he went into the city to eat the Passover (Luke 21:37; 22:7-10; Mark 14:12-17). Had the meal not included the sacrifice, there would have been no need to go into the city. But the sacrifice could be lawfully eaten nowhere else (Deuteronomy 16:5-7; Benjamin Mazar, *The Mountain of the Lord*, p. 109; *M. Megillah* 1:11; *M. Zebahim* 5:8.A; 14:8). Additional evidence is presented by Alfred Edersheim in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* 5.10.

Another significant issue has to do with where the Passover was sacrificed. The Biblical and extra-Biblical evidence overwhelmingly favors the view that from the time of the dedication of the Temple, it was the only legitimate place to sacrifice the Passover. Following the return from the exile, the evidence indicates that the vast majority of Jews accepted and observed this paradigm. Some have a different opinion on this issue, but I have yet to see any credible evidence supporting the contrary view.

In this treatise I necessarily discuss mistaken Jewish traditions and the actions of Jewish leaders who were directly involved in the persecution and murder of Jesus Christ. In no way should this be regarded as justification for anti-Jewish hate, however. The anti-Semitic hate spewed forth by post-apostolic writers of the professing Christian Church is shameful and worthy of the most hearty condemnation.

Although many early writers of the professing Church, and numerous others since, blamed the Jewish race for the death of Jesus, the Jews were not exclusively responsible. At the time of Christ Judea was under direct Roman administration. The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, delivered Jesus to be executed though he knew he was innocent, and had the power to release him (John 19:4, 10, 16). Roman soldiers beat, mocked, crucified and finally killed Jesus by thrusting a spear into his side.

If the Jews can be blamed for the death of Jesus, so can the Gentiles. In a sense, we are all responsible for the death of Jesus, because he died to pay the penalty for our sins — the sins of the whole world (1 Peter 2:24; Romans 4:25; 1 John 2:1-2).

God loves the Jewish people as he does all people. All nations have sinned, and all are deceived (Romans 3:23; Revelation 12:9). But salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22). Jesus and all the earliest apostles were Jews. One must become, spiritually, a Jew to be accepted of God (Romans 2:28-29; Revelation 3:9). In the future Kingdom of God, he will use Jews powerfully to lead others to salvation (Zechariah 8:23). There is no excuse for hatred toward Jews or any other ethnic group. In God's sight, such mindless hatred is tantamount to murder, and is condemned (Matthew 5:21-22, 43-45; 1 John 3:15).

Chapter 1

Between the Evenings

When is the proper time for the Biblical Passover? This has been a subject of controversy dating to before the time of Christ. Among various groups and scattered brethren of the Church of God today it remains a topic of discussion and a source of confusion. Can the proper date for the Passover be ascertained beyond reasonable doubt? Is there any need for confusion on this subject? The evidence presented below will show that God's instructions for the time to observe the Passover are clear and simple. We'll see that the source of confusion has been false traditions of men distorting the truth. And that the New Testament Church and its immediate successors clearly understood and followed Biblical instructions and Christ's example regarding when to observe the Passover.

Ignoring for a moment the Easter Sunday tradition, there are two predominant views regarding the correct time for observing the Passover which have been debated for centuries. One is based on Pharisaic tradition, carried down to modern times among the Jews, that the Passover was to be sacrificed on the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan (also called Abib, the first month of the Hebrew sacred calendar). Due to the time required to cook the sacrificial lamb (and by rabbinic decree — *M. Pesahim* 10:1; *M. Zebahim* 5:8), the Passover meal itself would be eaten on the fifteenth, in the evening after sundown. The other view is that the Passover was to be sacrificed at dusk or twilight on the evening of the fourteenth, cooked and eaten during the nighttime portion of the fourteenth.

The correct time for the Passover is not its most important aspect — the spiritual understanding and application of its meaning are far more important. Yet, that's not to say that the time lacks importance — not only for the sake of unity but as part of the basis for correct spiritual understanding (Psalm 111:10). The Church ought to follow the applicable Biblical instructions for observing this and other sacred festivals commanded by God. It's not difficult to isolate a Scripture or two and read into it a particular point of view, or find a scholarly quotation to support either position. However, there is only one view that fits harmoniously with all the Scriptures as well as with the preponderance of historical evidence.

While there are shadowy references to the typology of the Passover in events long before the Exodus (e.g., Genesis 18:1-8; 22:1-14), the Passover was plainly revealed to Israel and its observance commanded as God set his hand to deliver them from their slavery in Egypt. They were commanded to take a yearling male lamb or goat and "...keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight" (Exodus 12:6, NKJV).

A pivotal issue in the dispute over when to observe the Passover is what is meant by the Hebrew term translated "twilight." A dictionary definition of "twilight" is: "The light diffused over the sky when the sun is below the horizon, especially in the evening; also, the period during which this light is prevalent" (*Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*). In the King James version this same term in Exodus 12:6 is translated "evening."

In some Bible editions the margin indicates that the Hebrew meaning of the term in question is "between the two evenings." Young's Literal Translation renders the term "between the evenings." Darby's version reads, "between the two evenings." The Hebrew is *beyn ha'arbayim*. *Beyn* is Hebrew for between (also interval, and within). And *ha'arbayim* is the dual of *'ereb*, evening. Hence, "between the two evenings" is a reasonable and accurate translation of *beyn ha'arbayim*.

What does "between the two evenings" mean in practical terms? At the time of Christ the Pharisees' influence competed with that of the Sadducees with regard to the ceremonial forms of Temple centered religious worship. The Pharisees interpreted "between the two evenings" to mean the interval between the early hours of the sun's declination — early to mid afternoon — to sunset. Thus they justified the slaying of the Passover lambs on the afternoon of the fourteenth, as the day was approaching its end. However, the Sadducees, the Samaritans, and later the Karaites (a Jewish sect that arose in the eighth century A.D.) defined the term as the time interval *between sunset and total darkness*.

The prevailing view among Biblical scholars is that the original, specific meaning of the term *beyn ha'arbayim* is the latter. Keil & Delitzsch remark as follows: "*Aben Ezra* agrees with the Caraites and Samaritans in taking the first evening to be the time when the sun sinks below the horizon, and the second the time of total darkness.... Modern expositors have very properly decided in favour of the view held by *Aben Ezra* and the custom adopted by the Caraites and Samaritans..." (*Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 1971, vol. II, p. 12). The *Interpreters Bible* agrees, "Samaritans, Karaites, and Sadducees specify the time as after sunset and before darkness. The latter probably designates the more archaic practice" (vol. 1, p. 919). And *Vine's*, "The phrase 'between the evenings' means the period between sunset and darkness, 'twilight'..." (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Old Testament section, p.71). Recounting the first Passover, Professor Eugene Merrill (specialist in Hebrew language and culture) comments, "This [Passover] lamb...was to be slaughtered 'between the evenings' or between the going down of the sun and absolute darkness." He goes on to write, "That fateful night of the fourteenth of Abib... God's judgment passed over the land of Egypt, only those homes sheltered by the sprinkled blood escaped..." (*An Historical Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 113).

Chapter 2

Morning and Evening Sacrifice

Alfred Edersheim, who wrote extensively on Jewish history and customs, agrees that the original meaning and Biblical definition of "between the two evenings" is sunset to dark. Though he defends the Pharisaic tradition of slaying the Passover lambs in mid-afternoon, he admits:

The evening sacrifice was fixed by the Law (Num. 28:4, 8) as 'between the evenings,' that is, between the darkness of the gloaming [the dusk of early evening, twilight] and that of the night.

Such admonitions as 'to show forth thy faithfulness every night upon an instrument of ten strings and on the psaltery' (Ps. 92:2, 3), and the call to those who 'by night stand in the house of the Lord,' to 'lift up their hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord' (Ps. 134), seem indeed to imply an evening service--an impression confirmed by the appointment of Levite singers for night service in 1 Chron. 9:33; 23:30. But at the time of our Lord the evening sacrifice certainly commenced much earlier. [*The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, p. 108].

Indeed, the "evening sacrifice" was transferred by Pharisaic practice from evening to mid to early afternoon (sometimes as early as 12:30 p.m.), just as the Passover sacrifice was transferred from twilight on the fourteenth to mid-afternoon of the same day, due to a misapplication of the term "between the two evenings."

Since the time of the evening sacrifice relates directly to the time of the sacrifice of the Passover, let's examine the subject more closely. Some have made an issue of the fact that the morning sacrifice is mentioned before the evening sacrifice in Exodus 29:38-42; Numbers 28:4; 1 Chronicles 16:40 and elsewhere. It's argued that since the morning sacrifice is mentioned *first*, in any given twenty-four hour day the morning sacrifice would *precede* the evening sacrifice. Therefore the evening sacrifice would have to occur before sunset, or in the afternoon as the Pharisees maintained. This argument lacks validity for several reasons.

It's based on an assumption that because the morning sacrifice is mentioned first in some passages, it must occur first in a formal twenty-four hour day. This assumption does not take into account the manner in which the day-night, or morning-evening, cycle is commonly expressed in Biblical language. There is no question that when the term "day and night" (Hebrew *yowm* and *layil*) appears it is referring to the daylight portion of the day as "day," and the nighttime portion as "night" (Genesis 1:5). It's also clear that in a formal sense the Biblical twenty-four hour day begins and ends at sunset. Technically then, *night* precedes *day* in a twenty-four hour day as reckoned by the Hebrews. The Biblical writers well understood this. Yet in more than three dozen instances we find either the expression "day and night" — or day mentioned before night — in the Old Testament. Using the same logic as applied by some to the expression "morning and evening sacrifice," we would have to conclude based on

the expression “day and night” that day precedes night in a formal twenty-four hour day. Yet that is not true.

Occasionally the expression “night and day” is used. The two accounts of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple are very similar, capturing the essence of Solomon's prayer while differing in minor details. In one rendition Solomon prays, “that your eyes may be open toward this temple *night and day*” (1 Kings 8:29). In the other he prays, “that your eyes may be open toward this temple *day and night*” (2 Chronicles 6:20). Thus the Biblical writers regarded the expressions as equivalent in meaning. Such manner of expression usually has nothing to do with the order of day and night in a formal sense. And the same could be said of the expression “morning and evening.” In fact, while “morning and evening” is associated with the daily sacrifices in some passages of Scripture, the opposite is also true! In Daniel 8:26 the daily sacrifices are referred to as “evenings and mornings” (compare verses 11-13).

Moreover, as alluded to by Alfred Edersheim in the previous quotation, there's clear evidence that prior to the emergence of the Pharisees and the changes they began to advance in the second century B.C., the Temple service which accompanied the evening sacrifice occurred at night, not in mid-afternoon! The killing of the evening sacrifice and sprinkling of its blood occurred simultaneously with the lighting of the lamps and the burning of incense. All were to take place “between the two evenings” (Exodus 29:39, 41; 30:8; 2 Chronicles 13:11).

Having been lit, the lamps were to be kept burning all night, from evening to morning, at which time they were extinguished (Exodus 27:20-21; 30:8; Leviticus 24:3; 1 Samuel 3:3). After the salting of the sacrifice, prayers were offered, the pieces of the sacrifice were placed on the altar, and incense was burnt on the altar of incense (Exodus 30:1-8), accompanied by additional prayers (Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:10; Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4). Then the meal offerings and drink offering were presented at the altar (Exodus 29:40-41; Leviticus 6:20; Numbers 28:5-8). Then the silver trumpets were blown to be joined by other instruments of music and the voices of the Levites in song “praising and thanking the LORD” (2 Chronicles 5:12-13; also Numbers 10:10; 2 Chronicles 7:6; 29:20-30; Psalm 150, cf. *The Temple*, pp. 113-132).

So we see that the priests, Levites and people standing in the Temple courts blessing the Eternal and singing praises to him was directly associated with the offering of sacrifices, including the evening sacrifice. Certain Levites were chosen as singers for the services, and “they were employed in that work day and night [*layil*]” (1 Chronicles 9:33). The fact that singers were appointed for night duty tells us the service associated with the evening sacrifice occurred at night, not at 3:30 or earlier in the afternoon as under the regime of the Pharisees. Of the Levite singers it is said they were “to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at evening” (1 Chronicles 23:30). That the evening service attended by these Levites occurred at night is evident from the following: “Behold, bless the Lord, All [you] servants of the Lord, Who by night stand in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands [in] the sanctuary, And bless the Lord” (Psalm 134:1-2, cf. Psalm 92:1-3).

Josephus also testifies of the change that occurred, saying that at the time of Moses and

Aaron the incense — hence the evening sacrifice — was offered at sunset, but at the time of Pompey's siege of Jerusalem (64 B.C.) the evening sacrifice was commonly offered in the afternoon at “about the ninth hour” — 3:00 p.m. (*Antiquities* 3.8.3; 14.4.3).

Chapter 3

Biblical Command Reflected in Samaritan and Sadducean Tradition

When the Samaritan temple at mount Gerizim was built it was presided over by the son of a Jewish high-priest who was cast out of office for marrying a Samaritan woman. Scholars differ over the date, some thinking it occurred at the time of Nehemiah in the late fifth century B.C., others accepting the accuracy of Josephus' account who places it at the time of Alexander the Great (332 B.C.; *Antiquities* 11.8.4; cf. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, Joachim Jeremias, p. 352 n.). "What is certain is, that the rival worship was now established at Samaria, and attracted a great number of priests and other Jews from the distracted capital of Judea" (*Angus-Green Bible Handbook*, p. 598). Although Samaritan religious tradition and practice embraces a multitude of false doctrines, in certain respects the Samaritan tradition reflects Jewish practices regarding temple worship older than that of the Pharisaic tradition developed during and after the Hasmonean period of the second and first centuries B.C. This is certainly true with regard to the time of day for the killing of the Passover lamb, wherein the Samaritans and Sadducees agreed.

The Sadducees' tradition was more conservative than that of the Pharisees, "They held strictly to the literal interpretation of the Torah, in particular to the precepts on the cultus and the priesthood" (Jeremias, p. 231). In these matters, "...generally, the Sadducean rule undoubtedly conformed to ancient practice" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. XI, "Sadducees," p. 45). Due to their understanding of the meaning of "between the two evenings" the Sadducees designated the beginning of the fourteenth, not the following afternoon, as the correct time to kill the Passover lamb. Therefore, "The Sadducees and Pharisees differed as to the proper day [to eat the Passover]" (*Smith's Bible Dictionary*, "Passover," p. 235). Both agreed the Passover was to be sacrificed on the fourteenth, though at different times, but the Pharisees' tradition placed its eating on the fifteenth.

The Sadducees ceased to exist as a distinct party about 70 A.D. But the Sadducean belief concerning the proper time of day to kill the Passover is reflected in the practice of the Samaritans. The Samaritan temple was destroyed about 128 B.C. by the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus (c. 135-106). Nevertheless, the Samaritan Passover tradition is believed to have continued unbroken from the time of the building of their temple, and is said to be "probably the oldest religious rite that has been continuously kept up" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition, "Passover").

The Samaritans sacrifice the Passover lambs, "At twilight on the 14th day of the first month... [i.e., immediately after sunset, as the day begins]" (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14, "Samaritans," p. 742). "The Samaritans still meticulously observe their ancient N Israelite Passover ritual annually on Mt Gerizim, in close conformity to the Pentateuch, keeping Passover and Unleavened Bread entirely separate entities" (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, "Passover," p. 1157). The Samaritan Passover is both killed and eaten on the fourteenth. "The phrase 'between the two evenings'... has been accorded two variant interpretations, according to variant community practice--either between 3 p.m. and sunset, as the Pharisees maintained and practiced...; or as the Samaritans and others argued, between sunset and dark"

(*ibid.*, p. 1157).

Stating that the Samaritan practice antedates the Pharisaic, the *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* declares, "The counsel to kill the lambs 'in the evening' is more literally followed in the Samaritan rite, the Hebrew is properly interpreted as dusk and cannot be fully reconciled with the later practice of making the sacrifice in the late afternoon; it is also true that as with the Samaritans, the communal meal was about midnight, rather than in the evening, as was later true in Jerusalem" (p. 666). The *New International Encyclopedia* concurs, "Passover, according to critical views, was originally observed by the sacrifice of a lamb on the night of the 14th of Nisan (March-April)..." (Grolier, 1974, "Passover," vol. 14, p. 112). In discussing the Samaritan Passover the *Encyclopedia Britannica* affirms, "In two important points they differ from *later* [my emphasis] Jewish interpretation. The term between the evenings' (Lev. xxiii. 5) they take as the time between sunset and dark, and the morrow of the sabbath' (v. 11) they take literally as the first Sunday in the Passover week; wherein they agree with the Sadducees, Boethusians, Karaites and other Jewish sectaries" (11th edition, "Passover").

Chapter 4

Biblical Definitions

Evening ('*ereb*) is directly associated with the setting of the sun in several Scriptures, including Leviticus 22:6-7 ("...unclean until evening.... And when the sun goes down he shall be clean..."); Deuteronomy 16:6; Joshua 8:29 ("...on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down..."); 10:26-27 (...on the trees until evening. So it was at the time of the going down of the sun..."); 1 Kings 22:35-36 and 2 Chronicles 18:34 ("...until evening; and about the time of sunset...").

In Judges 14 we find that the day ends at sunset. It's recounted that Samson arranged a feast of seven days on the occasion of his wedding, as the custom was. Samson posed a riddle to some Philistine guests which they were to solve "within the seven days of the feast" (verse 12). Through Samson's wife they learned the meaning of the riddle and spoke it to Samson "on the seventh day before the sun went down" (verse 18), obviously referring to the deadline when the seventh day of the feast would end.

In Leviticus 23:27 we are told that the tenth day of the seventh month is the day of Atonement. In verse 32 we are told, "...you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath." Note that the demarcation between the ninth and the tenth is evening. The feast day is the tenth, which begins at evening as the ninth day ends, and the fast was to last until the following evening, when the tenth day ends.

In Genesis 1:5 evening is associated with darkness, night; morning with the light portion of the day. The first day began at evening and ended the following evening when the second day began (verse 8). Hence, '*ereb*, evening, sunset, is the time when one day ends and the next begins. Time flows in a steady, linear fashion. At the exact time when one day ends the next begins. The clear evidence of Scripture is that moment is sunset, and is also referred to as "evening."

"Formally, the Sabbath commenced at sunset on Friday, the day being reckoned by the Hebrews from sunset to sunset" (*The Temple*, p. 138). And also, "The special preparations for the Passover commenced on the evening of the 13th of Nisan, with which, according to Jewish reckoning, the 14th began, the day being always computed from evening to evening" (*ibid.*, pp. 171-172). The later rabbinical tradition of beginning the day when the first stars are visible is without Biblical support.

The Bible gives us a clear example showing that "between the two evenings" (*beyn ha'arbayim*) follows evening ('*ereb*). God told the Israelites that he would send "bread" ("manna") and quail for them to eat. Referring to the quail God said, "At twilight [*beyn ha'arbayim*, between the two evenings, or twilight] you shall eat meat.... So it was that quails came up at evening [*ereb*] and covered the camp..." (Exodus 16:12-13). Note the time order. They would be eating meat at twilight, or between the two evenings. Obviously, they could not eat the meat until after it had arrived. The quail arrived at evening. Hence "evening"

(*'ereb*) preceded "twilight" or "between the two evenings." This example reveals the correct Biblical definition of the term "between the two evenings." It is the time from sunset to dark, and by definition *always falls at the beginning of a Biblical day*.

In Deuteronomy 16 Moses rehearsed instructions regarding the three festival seasons at which the males of Israel were to appear before the Eternal "in the place which he chooses" (verse 16, cf. Exodus 23:14-19; 34:18, 22-25; Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 17-18). The first of the three seasons is referred to generically as "Passover," though it included the Feast of Unleavened Bread which immediately follows the Feast of Passover proper.

Moses told the Israelites, "Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the Lord your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the Lord chooses to put His name" (Deuteronomy 16:2). The sacrifices referred to in verses 2-3 include not only the Paschal lamb, but other sacrifices, especially peace offerings, offered during the entire festival season. The Passover sacrifice proper could only be of the flock, a yearling sheep or goat (Exodus 12:5). But peace offerings, of which portions could be eaten by the offerers in their festal meals (cf. Deuteronomy 16:3; Leviticus 7:11-21), could be of the flock or the herd (Leviticus 3:1-17; 22:21-23; Numbers 15:3). All of the Paschal offerings, including the Passover lamb itself, were to be offered where the Eternal had put his name. After the dedication of the Temple the penalty of extirpation applied to anyone who slaughtered and offered up an animal sacrifice outside the Temple court (Leviticus 17:9; Deuteronomy 12:5-18; *M. Megillah* 1:11; *M. Zebahim* 14:4-9; *M. Keritot* 1:1.J). ¹

¹ During the period of the kings both the Israelite tribes and many Jews disobeyed and continued to sacrifice at altars associated with "high places" scattered about. The Israelites' use of high places for sacrifice was displeasing to God, even when it did not involve idolatry (1 Kings 3:2-3). But the use of these altars was commonly associated with the worship of idol gods to which the Israelites often attached the name of Yahweh (cf. Exodus 32:4-5). The prophets denounced the use of high places for sacrifice, along with the idolatry usually associated with such sacrifices (1 Kings 13:1-5; Ezekiel 20:28-30; Hosea 4:13-15; Amos 4:4-5). Some of the more righteous kings of Judah were praised for their efforts to remove the high places and their altars (2 Kings 18:1-7; 23:8, 13, 15, 19-20; 2 Chronicles 17:6; 34:3-7). Others are faulted for not removing the high places (2 Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35).

Jehoshaphat is praised because "he removed the high places and wooden images from Judah" (2 Chronicles 17:6). But he is also faulted because "the high places were not taken away, for the people offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places" (1 Kings 22:43). The seeming anomaly is properly explained by John Gill in his commentary on the latter verse: "he took away the high places and groves for idolatrous worship, 2Ch 17:6, but not the high places in which sacrifices were offered to the Lord, which ought to have been, especially since the temple was built..." The Geneva Bible footnote also explains, "he was led with an error, thinking that they might still sacrifice to the Lord in those places, as they did before the temple was built."

The prophets spoke of a time of restoration; yet to be completely fulfilled, when sacrifices would be required and accepted of a righteous Israel, and Gentiles also, on the altar in his "holy

In the latter part of Deuteronomy 16:4 through verse 7 Moses gives certain instructions for the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb itself, which was offered on the first day of the Passover season (compare Mark 14:12). While many commentators recognize that verses 4-7 discuss the Passover sacrifice proper, it's alleged in *The Christian Passover* that these verses refer to peace offerings offered on the fifteenth (Fred Coulter, pp. 150-155). Because some readers may have been influenced by this erroneous assertion, it seems prudent to establish that these verses do indeed refer to the Paschal lamb.

"...nor shall any of the meat which you sacrifice the first day at twilight remain overnight until morning" (verse 4). This was a command specifically pertaining to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb (compare Exodus 12:10; 34:25). Like all other sacrifices (Leviticus 17:1-9; Deuteronomy 12:1-28),² the Passover was only to be offered "...at the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide..." (verse 6), there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time [season] you came out of Egypt" (verse 6). We know for certain that this is referring to the Passover sacrifice proper, because: (1) It

mountain," i.e., his Temple in Jerusalem (Isaiah 56:6; Ezekiel 20:40). The Jews, having been punished with a national captivity, did partly learn the lesson. "During the Second Temple period sacrifices were offered only in the Temple in Jerusalem, with the sole exception of the Temple of Onias in Egypt" (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, "Sacrifice," vol. 14, p. 607). As a general rule this is true, excepting of course, the Samaritans, who were scorned as a mixed race of apostates, and the Essenes, who putatively did not offer animal sacrifices. One other exception to this general rule is said to be the Galilean Zealots, a kind of terrorist band ("sect," — *Antiquities* 20.1.6; *Wars* 2.8.1) that arose at the time of the Procuratorship of Coponius (6-10 A.D.), said to have performed their sacrifices apart, having deemed it unlawful to pray for foreign princes, as was common in the Temple ritual (*Angus-Green Bible Handbook*, p. 624). To my knowledge, history records no other exceptions.

² There were exceptions to the general rule that all sacrifices were to be slain at the door of the Tabernacle as stipulated in Leviticus 17:1-9 and as implied in Deuteronomy 12:5-28. Particularly during the period of the Judges and early monarchy God tolerated the use of multiple altars at which sacrifices were made (Judges 6:24; 13:19-20; 21:4; cf. 1 Samuel 6:14-15; 7:17; 9:13; 10:8; 16:1-5; 20:6; 1 Chronicles 15:1; 16:1-2, 39-40; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14, "Sacrifice," p. 606-607; *M. Zebahim* 14:4-9). Even then, however, the presence of a priest was necessary for legitimate sacrifices except in the most unusual cases (1 Samuel 9:13; 13:8-14). After the building of the Temple, however, God said, "I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there..." and "I... have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice" (2 Chronicles 6:6; 7:12), and Scripture recognizes no other place as legitimate for the offering of regular animal sacrifices. The extraordinary sacrifice by Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20-40) was a singular event involving special circumstances. The red heifer sacrifice (Numbers 19) was a special sacrifice performed "outside the camp," yet in proximity to the Tabernacle (or Temple) and directly connected with its ritual. This sacrifice was rare, occurring only five times during the entire history of the second Temple (*The Mountain of the Lord*, Benjamin Mazar, p. 151). I present additional information relating to this subject in *Where was the Passover Sacrificed?*

is required to be offered on a specific day and time. (2) The people were to roast and eat of it. (3) None of it could be eaten after the night of its sacrifice. Of the *commanded* sacrifices discussed in the Pentateuch for the Passover season (including the Feast of Unleavened Bread), *only* the Passover sacrifice itself could be eaten by the people. The other commanded offerings were burnt offerings and sin offerings, besides the regular daily burnt offerings (Numbers 28:19-24). The burnt offerings and some sin offerings were wholly burnt up, and of the other sin offerings only the priests were to eat (Leviticus 1:9, 13; 6:24-30).

It was expected that rejoicing at the festivals would include peace offerings (Numbers 10:10). Yet, for private individuals, “They were not commanded to be offered at any set time” (*Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, “Sacrifice,” p. 740).³ Much later Pharisaic practice required a peace offering — called “*Chagigah*” (“festivity” or festal offering) — on Nisan 15 (*The Temple*, pp. 170-171).⁴ This was not an absolute requirement, however, as the *Chagigah* could be offered on any day of the festival if not done on the fifteenth (*M. Hagigah* 1:6). The law says private peace offerings were to be offered “of your own free will” (Leviticus 19:5; 22:19, 21). In general they “were presented spontaneously as the feelings of the worshiper prompted” (*Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, “Sacrifice,” p. 740; cf. Keil & Delitzsch on Leviticus 7:28-36, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, The Pentateuch*, vol. II, p. 331; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14, “Sacrifice,” p. 603; *The Old Testament Speaks*, Samuel J. Schultz, 4th ed., p. 66). Peace offerings, except for thanksgiving offerings (which was one of three varieties of peace offerings), could be eaten the second day (Leviticus 7:15-18). The *Chagigah*, or obligatory peace offering, of Pharisaic tradition could be any type of peace offering, and hence could be kept over and eaten the second day (*M. Hagigah* 1:4; *M. Zebahim* 5:7-8; *The Temple*, p. 199; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol.14, “Sacrifice,” p. 605). The obligatory peace offering of Nisan 15 was the “second” *Chagigah*, the first was a voluntary

³ The peace offering commanded on Pentecost (Leviticus 23:19) was a public offering. A Nazirite was required to offer a peace offering at the conclusion of his days of separation (Numbers 6:14, 17-18). “Fellowship [peace] offerings. This category consists of those offerings that expressed a voluntary desire on the part of the offerer. They were not required (except in the case of the Nazirite -- Num. 6:17 -- and Shavuot -- Lev. 23:19-20) by explicit regulations, but were permitted on condition that the offerer had met with the requirements of expiation and consecration” (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, “Sacrifice,” vol. 14, p. 603).

⁴ This was the Pharisees' way of applying Exodus 23:14-15 and Deuteronomy 16:16. Rather than letting the celebrants decide how to give in accordance with their blessings, the lawyers established for the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (and the other festival seasons) a minimum of a burnt offering and a peace offering. However, the festal offering (peace offering) could be purchased with second tithe, according to Hillel, but Shammai required it to be purchased from unconsecrated money (*M. Hagigah* 1:3). As noted elsewhere, the scholars admitted they had “little Scripture” to back up their rules regarding festal offerings (*M. Hagigah* 1:8). In Ezekiel 45:13-16 the offerings during the Millennial setting are set at one-sixth of an ephah from an homer of grain, one-tenth of a bath from a kor of oil, and one lamb out of a flock of two hundred (.5 to 1.7 percent). By this formula it appears those less well off would be exempted from offering an animal as a burnt offering or peace offering.

peace offering made on the fourteenth, alongside the Passover. The first *Chagigah* also could be kept over to the second day (*M. Pesahim* 6:4).

Moreover, peace offerings, except for those sacrificed alongside the Passover lambs as supplements to the Passover meal, were not sacrificed at night, nor at sunset, but during the daytime after the morning service (Benjamin Mazar, *The Mountain of the Lord*, p. 108). “All other individual and public sacrifices were brought in between them [i.e., between the morning and evening sacrifices, during the daytime]” (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14, “Sacrifice,” p. 608). “...the great Temple-gates were opened at midnight [Nisan 15] to begin early preparations for the offering of the *Chagigah*, or festive sacrifice, which was not voluntary but of due [by Pharisaic rules], and the remainder of which was afterwards eaten as a festive meal...” (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 825, or 2.509; cf. *Antiquities* 18.2.1). On the fifteenth of Nisan, private offerings, including the *Chagigah*, were brought following the morning burnt offerings and the required public offerings (Numbers 28:23; *The Temple*, pp. 198-199). “According to the express rule (Chag. 1:3) the *Chagigah* was brought on the first festive Paschal Day [the fifteenth of Abib]. It was offered immediately after the morning-service, and eaten on that day -- probably some time before the evening...” (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 866 or 2.568). Although Scriptural requirements for peace offerings are fairly clear, interestingly, the rabbinical scholars admitted they had little Scriptural authority for their rules regarding *Chagigah*. “The laws of the Sabbath, festal offerings [*Chagigah*], and sacrilege — lo, they are like mountains hanging by a string, for they have little Scripture for many laws” (*M. Hagigah* 1:8).⁵ In any case, the traditions regarding the *Chagigah* reveal clearly that the obligatory *Chagigah* of Nisan 15 is not the subject of Deuteronomy 16:4-7.

Instructions concerning the Passover sacrifice proper continue in Deuteronomy 16:7, “And you shall roast and eat it in the place which the LORD your God chooses....” In *The Christian Passover* it’s alleged that “roast” is a mistranslation of *bashal* in Deuteronomy 16:7, and that the word means “boil” (pp. 150-151). While *bashal* may refer in certain contexts to the boiling of food, that is not its proper meaning. *Bashal* “does not mean to be boiled, but to become ripe or done” (Keil & Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, vol. II, p. 14). *Gesenius* gives the meaning: (1) to be cooked with fire, or (2) ripened with the heat of the sun. Or Piel (verb), to cook (*Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, p. 147). It is used several places in the Old Testament of cooking with water in pots, i.e., boiling. But it’s also used of other forms of cooking. In Numbers 11:8 it’s used of cooking Manna in pans. And in 2 Samuel 13:8 of baking cakes of dough. And in 2 Chronicles 35:13 it’s used of roasting the Passover with fire: “Also they roasted [*bashal*] the Passover offerings with fire according to the ordinance; but the other holy offerings [supplemental peace offerings] they boiled in pots, in caldrons, and in pans, and divided them quickly among all the lay people.” Hence there’s no reason to believe that “roast” is not a correct translation of *bashal* in Deuteronomy 16:7 in reference to cooking the Passover sacrifice.

⁵ Quotations from the Mishna are from *The Mishnah: A New Translation*, trans. Jacob Neusner, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1988.

It says of the Passover lambs killed at the time of Josiah that they were slaughtered on the fourteenth day of the first month (2 Chronicles 35:1). Supplemental peace offerings were given by the leaders to accompany the Passover sacrifices themselves (verses 7-9, probably some donated animals were used later in the festival season as well). The subject of discussion in 2 Chronicles 35:1-17 is the Passover service, and the killing of the Paschal lambs and accompanying peace offerings, not some other service during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. I mention this only because the latter untenable idea has been broached within the Church of God.

Eugene Merrill, in commenting on 2 Chronicles 35:11 writes, “When all was ready the officiants offered the Passover lambs.” He goes on to say, “Only the lambs and goats were suitable for Passover and daily burnt offerings (Exod. 13:3; 29:28-45) so the cattle were for fellowship or peace offerings (cf. Lev. 3:1-5)” (*1, 2 Chronicles, Bible Study Commentary*, p. 167). John Gill comments on the phrase, “And they killed the passover” (KJV) in verse 11 as follows, “The lambs for the passover,…” (*Exposition of the Entire Bible*). Thus is represented the typical view of commentators well versed in Biblical Hebrew, and associated laws and customs.

Context is very often the determining factor in the correct exegesis of Scripture (or any other document). “It has often been said that the best commentary on Scripture is Scripture itself. Nowhere is this more true than in Hebrew word studies. The best method for determining the meaning of any Hebrew word is to study the context in which it appears” (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p. xvi). In the immediate context of 2 Chronicles 35:1-19, verse 1 introduces the Passover as the main subject of the passage, “...they slaughtered the Passover lambs on the fourteenth day of the first month” (verse 1). Most of what follows is a detailed description of the subject introduced in verse 1. In verse sixteen we have a summation of what has gone before, “So all the service of the LORD was prepared the *same day*, to *keep the Passover*, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah.” In the next verse, Passover, kept the one day, is clearly distinguished from the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was kept not for one day, but for seven days. In the Masoretic text, the phrase “and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days” (verse 17), is set off from the rest of the verse by a disjunctive accent.

Moreover, “And they slaughtered the Passover [offerings].... Then they removed the burnt offerings, that they might give *according to the divisions of the families of the people, to offer unto the LORD, as [it is] written in the book of Moses*. And so [did they] with the oxen “ (2 Chronicles 35:12). This procedure describes the application of the unique instructions for the Passover: “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth [day] of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, *according to the house of [his] father*, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take [it] *according to the number of the persons*; according to each man’s need you shall *make your count* for the lamb” (Exodus 12:3-4). As applied during the time of Jesus, a Passover lamb could be eaten only by those registered and assigned for it (*M. Zebahim* 5:8). Peace offerings (which includes the *Chagigah*) could be eaten by anyone (*M. Zebahim* 5:7). Except that the supplementary peace offerings accompanying the Passover sacrifice were

offered in accordance with the need for extra meat to satisfy the needs of each specific group (*M. Pesahim* 6:3). In such cases, each one would eat a small portion of the Passover lamb. The extra meat was to round out the meal.

As with other sacrifices, the fat parts of the Passover lamb were removed and placed on the altar as a burnt offering. Describing the flaying of the Passover lamb by each offerer, the Mishna states: “He slit open the carcass and removed its sacrificial portions, put them on a tray and [a priest] burned them on the altar” (*M. Pesahim* 5:10).

“Also they roasted the Passover [offerings] with fire according to the ordinance; but the [other] holy [offerings] they boiled in pots, in caldrons, and in pans, and divided [them] quickly among all the [lay] people” (2 Chronicles 35:13). Of all animal sacrifices, *only* the Passover lamb was *required* to be roasted (Exodus 12:8-9; *M. Zebahim* 5:8). All other sacrifices that were eaten could be roasted, seethed, or cooked in some other manner (*M. Zebahim* 10:7; *The Temple*, p. 183).

The Levites prepared portions for the priests, “because the priests, the sons of Aaron, were busy in offering burnt offerings and fat until night” (verse 14). If this translation is correct, it would indicate that the Passover was sacrificed and cooked in the afternoon.

The Hebrew term translated “until night” is *‘ad-layelah*. *Layelah* (paragoge of *layil*) is night. We’ve already seen that in the Old Testament a full twenty-four hour day is commonly divided into two periods, day and night, and that the nighttime period begins at sunset. We’ve also seen that the activities associated with the evening service are described as occurring at “night.”

“During Old Testament times the 'night' was divided into three watches: (1) from sunset to 10 p.m. (Lam. 2:19), (2) from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. (Judg. 7:19), and (3) from 2 a.m. to sunrise (Exod. 14:24)” (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, pp. 160-161). Josiah was careful to keep the Passover according to the instructions in the Pentateuch (verse 6, 12), and we’ve already seen that the requirement there was that the Passover was to be killed beginning at sunset, not in the afternoon. It was thus already “night” when the Paschal sacrifices were killed.

The term *‘ad* is a preposition that could as well be translated while or during. Thus it would read, “...were busy in offering burnt offerings and fat during [the] night.” Leviticus 3 tells us that fatty parts of the peace offerings were to be placed on the altar as burnt offerings, as were the fatty parts of the Passover lambs. And Leviticus 6:9 tells us the burnt offerings were to remain on the altar all night, the fire kept burning perpetually. “The burning of the fat and of the members (of sacrifices) is lawful [from the time of the evening sacrifice] till the morning column rise [dawn]” (Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, Appendix 2: “Extracts from the Babylon Talmud”).

Placing onto the altar the fat from the thousands of Passover sacrifices would no doubt have kept the priests busy for hours. Even on ordinary nights, “...some priests remained inside [the Temple court] to offer the limbs and entrails which had not been consumed during the day”

(*Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 15, "Temple," p. 976). "And the fat of My festal offering shall not be left lying until morning' (Exod. 23:18). [but must be burned before the morning, which would mean that they are offered throughout the night..." (*The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, vol.13, trans. Bruch M. Bokser, *Yerushalmi Pesahim* 6:1.VI.B, p. 260). "The entire night is valid for... offering up the fats and the sacrificial parts" (*M. Megillah* 2:5). Even for those who erroneously assume the Passover was offered in the afternoon by Josiah and his countrymen, until would not be a good English translation of 'ad in the verse in question, because even then it would not fit the circumstances at hand.

Moses' instructions in Deuteronomy 16:6 were to "sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun." Here the Hebrew word translated "twilight" in the New King James Version is 'ereb, evening. Once again, evening is associated with sunset. The Hebrew could as well be translated "in [the] evening." When we put these instructions together with that of Exodus 12:6, to "kill it at twilight [between the two evenings]," the intent is clear. Evening, 'ereb, sunset, begins the period of twilight, or sunset to dark, and this is when the killing of the Passover was to begin, not before.

Chapter 5

“Keep the Passover”

What does it mean to "keep the Passover"? Under the sacrificial system it meant in part **to kill** the Passover (Exodus 12:21, 24-27). But it meant as well **to eat** the Passover (verses 11, 43-48). Additionally, it was a **festival day** to be kept as a **memorial** of God passing over their homes and sparing them the plague of death with which he afflicted the firstborn of Egypt (verses 12-14, 29-30). It also is sometimes used of the entire spring festival season, which included the Passover proper and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Deuteronomy 16:1-7; Luke 22:1). But the Passover proper is a festival separate and distinct from the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Everywhere the Bible designates a specific day on which the Passover proper was kept, it is **always the fourteenth** day of the first month (Abib or Nisan, or, in the case of the “second Passover,” the second month, see Numbers 9:6-13; 2 Chronicles 30:2, 13, 15), never the fifteenth or any other day (Exodus 12:6; Leviticus 23:5; Numbers 9:2-6; Numbers 28:16; Joshua 5:10; Ezra 6:19). The Eternal sent the plague of death in the **middle of the night**, and the day chosen to memorialize his **passing over** the homes of the Israelites during the night was the **fourteenth** — evening to evening. The very term for the observance, "Passover," (Hebrew: *pesach*) originates from the idea that when God saw the blood on the houses of the Israelites, he would "pass over" them (Exodus 12:13, 23, 27). God commanded Israel, "On [or in, or within] the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight [between the two evenings], you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it" (Numbers 9:3). The "rites and ceremonies" would surely include the instructions regarding the cooking and eating of the sacrifice (Exodus 12:8-10). Thus Scripture leads us to the conclusion that the slaying, the eating and the memorializing of the Passover were all to occur **on the fourteenth day of the month**, beginning in the evening as the day commenced.

Those who defend the practice of slaying the lambs in mid-afternoon of the fourteenth and the partaking of the Passover on the fifteenth have no real way of justifying their position from a Biblical standpoint. They are left only with the weak plea that God didn't really mean what he said about the time to observe Passover and to kill the Passover Sacrifice, and an appeal to the late developing and error laden Pharisaic tradition. It is true that "evening" (*'ereb*) sometimes is used of "night" and when used in a general sense can include the time immediately preceding and especially immediately following sunset, but to stretch either it or "between the two evenings" to include early to mid-afternoon is simply not credible. And this is especially true when the terms are being used to lay out a specific time schedule for the keeping of the Passover or other important ceremony. Additional evidence will make this even clearer as we develop the subject further.

The course of events related in Scripture when God liberated Israel from Egypt also reveal clearly that the lamb was slain and eaten on the fourteenth, and that the "passing over" also occurred on the fourteenth. After killing the lamb after sunset, and smearing the blood on lintels and doorposts, the Israelites were instructed, "**...none of you shall go out of his house until morning**" (Exodus 12:22). "Morning" is from the Hebrew word *boqer*, meaning morning, daybreak, sunrise, end of night (see *Gesenius and Brown, Driver, and Briggs*

Hebrew lexicons). The daily sacrifice which was to be offered in the morning, *boqer* (Exodus 29:39), was slain at dawn. "...the morning sacrifice was only to be slain after the morning light had lit up 'the whole sky as far as Hebron,' yet before the sun had actually risen upon the horizon'" (*The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, p. 114).

In Deuteronomy 16:1 we are told, however, that "God brought you [Israel] out of Egypt by **night** [Hebrew: *layil*]." In Genesis 1:5 *layil* is associated with darkness and *boqer* with light. Since Israel was told to stay in their homes on the night of the Passover until morning, or daylight, they could not have left Egypt the same night. Accordingly, "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" (Numbers 33:3). Putting these statements together we find that it was at night on the fifteenth, the day following the fourteenth, that Israel began their journey out of Egypt. The previous night, the fourteenth, the Israelites had killed, roasted and eaten the Passover lamb. That same night, the fourteenth, God passed over the homes of the Israelites where they stayed until daybreak, as he sent the plague of death on the Egyptian firstborn. The Israelites had only the daytime portion of the fourteenth to gather themselves, their belongings and animals together at Rameses in order to begin the journey. So they left Egypt in haste (Exodus 12:33; Deuteronomy 16:3).

After Judah returned from the Babylonian captivity they rebuilt the Temple and dedicated it in the month Adar, 515 B.C. The month following, Nisan, they "kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month" (Ezra 6:19). Following the Passover they "kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy" (verse 22). In these verses the distinction between the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is clear.

From the Elephantine papyri we catch another glimpse of Passover observance near the end of the days of Nehemiah. A Jewish colony had been established at Elephantine in Egypt. The Jewish authorities wrote to them, under authority of the Persian king, instructions regarding keeping the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The letter dates from the fifth year of Darius II (c. 419 B.C.). Nothing is mentioned in the letter about sacrificing a lamb, because that could only be done lawfully in Jerusalem, but instructions are given about remaining ritually clean and avoiding leavening. The document appears to clearly delimit Passover and Unleavened Bread, consistent with the original practice. It says, "...count four[teen days of the month Nisan and ke]ep [here is where "Passover" was most likely in the original before this part of the papyrus decayed], and from the fifteenth day until the twenty-first day of [Nisan].... Anything whatever [in] which the[re is] leaven [do not eat...from] sunset until the twenty-first day of Nis[an]..." (*Documents from Old Testament Times*, Harper Torchbooks, 1961, D. Winton Thomas, ed., p. 259). Note that the implication of the text is that from the fifteenth day at sunset (beginning the day), until the twenty-first day (inclusive) leaven was not to be eaten. The contributor for this part of the book, H. H. Rowley, comments concerning the above text, "The order for the fourteenth day was probably...to keep the Passover, since Passover preceded the days of Unleavened Bread" (*ibid.*, p. 258).

Chapter 6

The New Testament

Confusion reigns among Biblical scholars concerning the Passover Jesus ate with his disciples just before his crucifixion. Indeed scholars are divided over even the question of whether in fact it was the Passover that Jesus partook of. There is confusion about what date the meal occurred. And the date of Jesus' crucifixion, was it the fourteenth or fifteenth? Not to mention the day (or days, as some view it) of the week on which these things took place.

The solution to these “problems” relates directly to understanding the correct time for killing and eating the Passover lamb as originally established by God's command. And understanding that the Pharisees — whose influence ultimately prevailed among the Jews — became confused in their teaching and practice and distorted the command by eating the Passover a day later than God had commanded it to be eaten.

It's difficult to determine precisely to what extent Pharisaic influence prevailed during the earthly lifetime of Jesus Christ. The Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed on a variety of issues, including, as we've seen, the proper time to kill and eat the Passover sacrifice. They struggled against one another for influence for about 200 years, from mid to late second century B.C. to near the time of the destruction of the Temple (70 A.D.).

The influence of one as opposed to the other tended to wax and wane somewhat with the vicissitudes of politics. For example, John Hyrcanus I, (ruled Judah as High Priest 134-104 B.C.), favored the Pharisees at first, but later in his reign aligned himself with the Sadducees and forbade the observance of Pharisaic traditions (*Antiquities* 12.10.6). When Alexandra, widow of Alexander Jannaeus, succeeded her husband as ruler of Judah in 76 B.C., she gained the support of the Pharisees by restoring the observance of their traditions, and giving them a great deal of political power as well (*Antiquities* 13.16.2). For the first time, the Pharisees were given seats on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court and council (*Jerusalem in the time of Jesus*, p. 262). The Pharisees' fortunes waxed and waned under succeeding rulers. Herod (37 - 4 B.C.) upon seizing power killed many of the leaders of the lay nobility (Sadducees), and exterminated the Hasmonean line of descent. Subsequently the Pharisees enjoyed favor until 6 B.C. However, “In the following era, until the beginning of the revolt against Rome (AD 66) the influence of the Pharisees on the political life of the Jewish people was limited. To be sure, they were still represented on the supreme council, but it was the priestly and lay aristocracy, the Sadduceans, who had the determining role” (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 263).

During the early Christian era the Sadducees were politically dominant. Nevertheless, according to Josephus, in religious matters it was the Pharisees who held the upper hand, due to their greater popularity with the people (*Antiquities* 18.1.3-4). It would be well to keep in mind, however, that Josephus wrote near the end of the first century, and his remarks in regard to the subject may reflect circumstances as they had developed near the end of the second Temple era, rather than as they were at the time of Jesus' death. Even so, there's little doubt, based on the testimony of Josephus and Philo, that during the early Christian era, most

Jews killed and ate the Passover sacrifice in accordance with Pharisaic tradition (*Wars of the Jews* 6.9.3; Philo *The Special Laws II* 145). Scriptural evidence supports the same conclusion.

But it's a mistake to assume that there was a complete uniformity in Jewish practice at this time. As *The New Bible Dictionary* points out, "...there were divergent calendars in use in heterodox Jewry, and it is possible that separate traditions were, in fact, in vogue at the time of the passion" (ed., J.D. Douglas, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962, "Lord's Supper," p. 749). The Essenes followed a calendar system in which Passover always fell on a Tuesday evening. A minority faction of Sadducees and others followed a similar calendar, the Passover meal reportedly again occurring always on a Tuesday evening (*The Gospel of Luke*, ed., E. Earle Ellis, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1966, p. 249).

The Essenes rejected the Temple worship of their day and putatively did not offer animal sacrifices, but the Sadducees controlled the Temple. "The Sadducean hierarchy had its stronghold in the Temple, and it was only during the last two decades of the Temple's existence that the Pharisees finally gained control" (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14, "Sadducees," p. 622). Like all other sacrifices, the Passover could lawfully be sacrificed only at the Temple in Jerusalem (Leviticus 17:8-9; Deuteronomy 12:11-15, 26-27; 16:5-6; 2 Chronicles 7:12; *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 57, 78-79; *M. Megillah* 1:11; *M. Zebahim* 5:8.B; 14:4-9; *M. Keritot* 1:1.J). Those among the Sadducees who wished could have arranged for lambs to be slain for Passover according to the time of their preference. That some Sadducees customarily took the Passover meal on Tuesday evening indicates that this was done. In the year of Jesus' crucifixion (31 A.D.), the evening of the fourteenth of Nisan also fell on a Tuesday. There's also a hint in the Mishna, which reflects Pharisaic opinions in controversial matters, of the memory of a practice of which they disapproved: "The Passover which one slaughtered on the morning of the fourteenth [of Nisan] not for its own name... Ben Beterah declares invalid, as if it were slaughtered at twilight [of the fourteenth]" (*M. Zebahim* 1:3.A, D, E). The latter was the very time prescribed by the Pentateuch. And by the Sadducean Halakah, "which," as Jeremias notes, "the members must follow" (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 231). There's no reason to believe that someone of influence, sympathetic to Jesus, could not have sacrificed a Passover lamb in the Temple on the early evening of the fourteenth, and provided it for Jesus and his party.

That accords perfectly with the Biblical record. One of the major sources of confusion among commentators is a careless assumption that Jesus, according to the "synoptic" gospels, ate the Passover on the evening of the fifteenth of Nisan and was slain on the afternoon of the fifteenth. In reality, all the gospel accounts place Jesus' crucifixion on the "preparation day" not of the weekly Sabbath, but of the annual Sabbath which begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31, 42). In other words, they all place the crucifixion on the afternoon of the fourteenth.

"Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.' So they said to Him, Where do You want us to prepare?' And He said to them, Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house

which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, "The Teacher says to you, 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.' So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover" (Luke 22:7-13).

Matthew and Mark refer to the day on which Jesus sent his disciples to prepare the Passover as the "first day of unleavened bread" (Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12). But Luke and Mark delineate the day as the day on which the Passover was sacrificed. This could only be the fourteenth of Nisan, as the Bible clearly states that the Passover was to be killed on the fourteenth (Exodus 12:6). All parties agreed on this, the controversy being the time of day for the sacrifice (and the diverse calendar systems).

But, some may ask, why would the fourteenth be referred to by the Biblical writers as the "first day of unleavened bread"? The Biblical writers wrote in the everyday language of their age, using terminology familiar to them and to ordinary people, especially Jewish people, since the gospel writers, except for Luke, were themselves Jews. In common Jewish parlance the *entire eight day festival period* beginning on the fourteenth and ending on the twenty-first was referred to interchangeably as either the "Passover," or as the "Feast of Unleavened Bread," though technically the two were separate feasts (cf. *Antiquities* 17.9.3; *Wars of the Jews* 5.3.1). Josephus wrote, "...we keep a feast for eight days, which is called the *feast of unleavened bread*" (*Antiquities* 2.15.1). Elsewhere Josephus explains that this eight day period properly consists of the Passover and the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Antiquities* 3.10.5). The Jews of Jesus' time customarily put leaven out of their dwellings on the fourteenth, and were, by Rabbinical tradition, to eat nothing leavened past 11 a.m. of that day. Hence, the fourteenth was commonly regarded as the first day of unleavened bread, as reflected in Matthew and Mark, and also in the following passage from Josephus: "...the feast of unleavened bread, which was now come, it being the fourteenth day of the month Xanthicus, [Nisan,]..." (*Wars* 5.3.1).

Most Biblical scholars agree that the day on which Jesus sent his disciples into Jerusalem to prepare for the Passover was the fourteenth. But many assume that it was on the afternoon of the fourteenth, and that Jesus and his disciples, according to the "synoptics," ate the Passover in the evening on the fifteenth. This conflicts with John's account, however, which places Jesus' crucifixion on the fourteenth, the "Preparation Day" prior to the "high day" beginning the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:6-7).

As the *People's New Testament Commentary* and other sources point out, however, a large number of reputable scholars hold that the disciples were sent into the city on the early evening of the fourteenth, and that Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover on the night of the fourteenth. Accordingly, they maintain that Jesus died on the afternoon of the fourteenth about the time that the Passover lambs were being slain for the "regular" Jewish Passover. With this understanding all apparent conflict between the "synoptics" and John regarding this question disappear. But these scholars are at a loss to explain adequately why Jesus would have eaten the Passover a day earlier than other Jews.

The simple truth is, Jesus ate the Passover not according to the time prescribed by mistaken

Pharisaic tradition, but in strict accordance with Scripture. Jesus generally honored the prevailing traditions among his people where they were in harmony with Scripture, but where there was a conflict, he did not hesitate to follow the teaching of Scripture in contradiction to tradition. This often brought him into sharp conflict with Jewish leaders, and it is one reason they persecuted and killed him (e.g., Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:7-11). He condemned the Pharisees' practice of putting aside God's commandments to keep their own traditions (Mark 7:1-13).

Of the four gospel accounts, John wrote his last, probably in the last decade of the first century. To clarify any misunderstanding, he expressly states that the preparation day was the "Preparation Day of the Passover" (John 19:14), not of the weekly Sabbath. As in Deuteronomy 16:1, "Passover" was used generically by the Jews to refer to the entire eight day festival season of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Notice the following statement by Josephus, "...the feast of unleavened bread...which we call the passover" (*Antiquities* 14.2.1, also 17.9.3).

The day immediately preceding a Sabbath is its "preparation day" (Exodus 16:22-23; *Antiquities* 16.6.2). This principle applies alike to the weekly Sabbath and annual Sabbaths, amply attested to in the treatise "Bizah" (frequently referred to as "Yom-Tob" — Holy Day) of the Mishnah and Talmud (1:2; 2:1-2; 3:2; 3:4; 3:6; 3:8; 5:2; 5:7; cf. *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Bezah"). Moreover, the fourteenth of Nisan was the day for final preparation for the Passover, at the beginning of which leaven was searched for and removed. "...John 19:14 describes the Crucifixion as on the 'day of Preparation for the Passover.' The day preceding Passover, known [in Pharisaic tradition] as Passover Eve, was, indeed, a day of intense preparation (cf. M Pes. 1-4)" (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 874). The fourteenth is called the "Preparation Day of the Passover" not only because it preceded a Holy Day, or annual Sabbath, but also because the prevailing tradition among the Jews of the time, led by the Pharisees, was to kill the Passover on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan and eat it on the evening of the fifteenth. Hence the fifteenth came to be regarded as "the Passover," and the fourteenth it's eve. While defending the Pharisaic practice in this matter Alfred Edersheim admits, "The special preparations for the Passover commenced on the evening of the 13th of Nisan [Roman reckoning], with which, according to Jewish reckoning, the 14th began, the day always computed from evening to evening" (*The Temple*, pp. 171-172).

John makes it clear that the "Sabbath" following the "Preparation Day" on which Jesus died, was not an ordinary weekly Sabbath, but "that Sabbath was a high day" (19:31). In other words it was an *annual* Sabbath, or required day of rest, the first day of the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread proper (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:6-7; compare Leviticus 23:24-25, 32, 34-36, 39). According to Arndt and Gingrich's *Greek-English Lexicon* "high" (*megas*) day as used by John refers to "the sabbath day that begins a festival period" (p. 498), though it could as well refer to other annual Sabbaths (compare John 7:37 where *megas* is used of the last day of the fall festival). "...the curious reference to 'that sabbath' (John 19:31) could refer to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Except for the Sadducees, first-century Jews identified that day of holy convocation (Lev. 23:7) as 'the sabbath' (vs. 11), on the basis of which the date for the Feast of Weeks was computed" (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 874). The Jews even now continue to refer to annual

Sabbaths as "high holidays" (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, "Festivals," vol. 6, p. 1238).

Some commentators, however, assert that John's reference to the "Preparation Day of the Passover" was the preparation day for the weekly Sabbath during the feast. In this scenario the "Preparation Day" for the weekly Sabbath is said to have been the fifteenth of Nisan, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread proper. For this to be true the fifteenth would have to fall on a Friday. A major problem with this view is that it renders pointless John's meticulous concern for distinguishing the preparation day as of the Passover and prior to a high day. If he meant it was an ordinary preparation day for the Sabbath it would have been much more natural to simply state it as such. Also, as we've seen, the term "high day" refers to annual Sabbaths associated with the Festivals, not the weekly Sabbath. It seems quite unlikely that John would have referred to a high holy day as merely a "Preparation Day" instead of a Sabbath or high day. In addition, according to the rules of the Hebrew calendar, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread proper (the fifteenth of Nisan) can *never* fall on the sixth day of the week (the Roman Thursday evening to Friday evening).⁶ And there is good reason to believe that these rules were in effect at the time of Jesus and before.

A careful reading of Scripture reveals clearly that the "high day" that followed the "Preparation Day" on which Christ was slain was an annual Sabbath that fell on a Wednesday evening to Thursday evening. According to Mark, when Jesus was buried, at sunset at the close of the preparation day, "...Mary Magdalene and Mary [the] [mother] of Joseph observed where He was laid. **Now when the Sabbath was past**, Mary Magdalene, Mary [the] [mother] of James, and Salome **bought spices**, that they might come and anoint [or *embalm*, Darby translation] Him" (Mark 15:47-16:1). Mark plainly tells us that the women did not buy the spices they intended to use to anoint, or embalm, Jesus' body until **after the Sabbath was past!** After Jesus died Joseph of Arimathea, having received permission from Pilate, took the body of Jesus, and with the help of Nicodemus hurriedly wrapped it in linen with spices enfolded in the cloth and placed the body in a nearby tomb hewn out of rock in a hill, and rolled a stone against the opening of the tomb to close it (Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:38-42). They did not have time to embalm the body because "evening had come," it was very late on the preparation day, or fourteenth, and "the Sabbath drew near [Greek: *began to dawn*]" (Luke 23:54). So Jesus was buried just as the sun was setting at the end of the fourteenth of Nisan.

The women, as we've seen, waited until after the Sabbath, that is the high day that begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread, **before** they bought the spices. So they bought their spices the day after the annual Sabbath. Having bought the spices, Luke tells us that they prepared them along with fragrant oils, "And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56). Thus the women kept **two Sabbaths**, the annual Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath, between which was a day on which they bought and prepared spices to

⁶ Tishri 1 can fall only on a Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Sabbath (beginning the preceding evening). The annual Sabbath that begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread always occurs 163 days before Tishri 1. Hence it can only fall on a Sabbath, Sunday, Tuesday or Thursday.

anoint, or probably embalm, Jesus.

“Ancient embalming methods consisted of removal of the brains and viscera, and the filling of bodily cavities with a mixture of balsamic herbs and other substances” (*Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*, “Embalming,” Vol. 8, p. 489). For this purpose “the Jews used spices and aloes” (*ibid.*). It was also the custom of the Jews to lay the body in a bed of sweet smelling spices and fragrant woods such as myrrh and aloe (2 Chronicles 16:14), or as in the case of Jesus, to wrap these in with the grave clothes. When he was buried, there was only time for hurried wrapping of the body with aloes and myrrh but not time for embalming as the high Sabbath approached. The next morning, guards had been posted at the sepulcher to make sure that no one opened it for at least three days (Matthew 27:62-66). The women, had they had time to complete the embalming on the day they bought and prepared the spices after the high Sabbath, would not have been able to enter the tomb because it had been sealed, and three days had not passed since Jesus had been buried. Hence the women were returning with their spices to the burial site early on the morning of the first day of the week (Luke 24:1). Three days had passed, and this was the earliest daylight period they could expect to be allowed into the tomb to embalm the body.

This is in perfect harmony with the preeminent sign that Christ gave of his Messiahship, that of Jonah, who preached repentance (Luke 11:29-32). “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be **three days and three nights in the heart of the earth**’” (Matthew 12:38-40). The Hebrew idiom permitted the use of inclusive reckoning, so that “three days” *might* include only a part of the first and last days in three successive twenty-four hour days. However, “...when,” as *The Companion Bible* states, “the number of ‘nights’ is stated as well as the number of ‘days’, then the expression ceases to be an idiom, and becomes a literal statement of fact.

“Moreover, as the Hebrew day began at sunset the day was reckoned from one sunset to another, the ‘twelve hours in the day’ (John 11.9) being reckoned from sunrise, and the twelve hours of the night from sunset. An evening-morning was thus used for a whole day of twenty-four hours, as in the first chapter of Genesis. Hence the expression ‘a night and a day’ in 2 Cor. 11:25 denotes a complete day...” (Appendix 144; also compare Leviticus 8:35-9:1; Numbers 11:32; 14:14; Deuteronomy 28:66-67; 1 Samuel 25:16; 28:20; Nehemiah 4:9; Psalm 121:6; 136:8-9; Mark 4:27; and numerous other Scriptures revealing that “day and night” or “night and day” indicates a full 24 hour day).

Therefore Jesus, as is plainly stated in Scripture, was buried for **three full twenty-four hour days**, or literally, **three days and three nights**. He could not then have been buried on Friday evening and resurrected Sunday morning, which would be only two nights and one day. Since Jesus was buried at the end of the preparation day, evening or sunset, and was already risen on the morning of the first day of the week (Sunday of the Roman calendar), in order to fulfill the sign of his Messiahship he must have been buried on a Wednesday at sunset, as the Scripture indicates, and resurrected the following weekly Sabbath at sunset, as

the day ended — a full three days and three nights.

Thus, in summary, the Biblical evidence reveals that Jesus ate the Passover on the night of the fourteenth, in accordance with Scriptural command. Then he was slain on the following afternoon, still the fourteenth, and buried as the sun was setting. He lay in the sealed grave for three days and three nights, until his resurrection as the weekly Sabbath ended. The day following, the first day of the week, he appeared to his disciples to reveal himself as having been resurrected “after three days” (Matthew 27:63; Mark 8:31), yet also “in three days” (John 2:19-22), having been “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40), just as he had promised.

Chapter 7

More on the Time of the Crucifixion and Resurrection

Despite the fact that Jesus said he would be buried “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40), most professing Christians believe he was buried late on Friday afternoon and rose on Sunday morning, after only one day and two nights. When read carefully, it's evident that the Biblical record is fully consistent with Jesus' prediction. Yet a few Scriptures have been misconstrued by those eager to prop up the tradition of the Friday burial - Sunday resurrection. Let's now consider two particular Scriptures which have been misused to support this popular belief, which contradicts Jesus' own statements about how long he would be in the grave.

The first is Mark 16:9, which in the New King James translation reads: “Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.” The placement of the comma leads the reader to the conclusion that Mark is saying Jesus rose early on the first day of the week. Many other translations follow this same pattern in the placement of the comma, although a significant number do not.

The reader should keep in mind that placement of commas in English (or other) translations of the Bible is arbitrary, as commas do not appear in the original Greek or Hebrew texts.⁷ Scholars, such as A. T. Robertson, as well as others, admit that in Mark 16:9 “early on the first day of the week” could refer to when Jesus appeared to Mary, rather than when he rose (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. I, p. 403). Some versions (e.g., New World Translation, New English Bible) leave out commas entirely in the disputed phrase. The Montgomery New Testament renders the verse as follows: “Now after his resurrection, early on the first day of the week he appeared first to Mary Magdalene....” Cassirer's translation reads, “Having risen to life, early on the first day of the week Jesus appeared, first of all, to Mary of Magdala...” (*God's New Covenant*, Heinz W. Cassirer).

Within the context of the overall evidence, it's plain that the phrase refers to when Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. When the women appeared at the grave early on the morning of the first day of the week Jesus had already risen, the grave was empty, and the stone already rolled back (Mark 16:1-6; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1). The women had come the previous day, the Sabbath, near sunset to visit the grave. “Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first [day] of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre” (Matthew 28:1, ASV; a number of other versions translate the verse in a similar manner). Robertson uses the ASV translation in his *Harmony of the Gospels*, and on Matthew 28:1 he comments, “... the usage of the vernacular *Koine* Greek amply justifies the translation” (p. 239). Elsewhere he further comments on the same verse, “This careful chronological statement according to Jewish days clearly means that before the sabbath was over... this visit by the women was made to see the sepulchre.” He comments further, “Both Matthew here and Luke (23:54) use dawn (*epiphosko*) for the dawning of the twenty-four

⁷ The Masoretes added accent marks to the Hebrew text, which serve in part as punctuation.

hour-day at sunset, not of the dawning of the twelve-hour day at sunrise. The Aramaic used the verb for dawn in both senses. The so-called Gospel of Peter has *epiphosko* in the same sense as Matthew and Luke as does a late papyrus." (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. I, p. 240).

Matthew goes on to tell us that sometime between the visit of the women to the tomb late on the weekly Sabbath and their subsequent visit the next morning, an angel came and rolled away the great round stone that blocked the entrance. The precise time that this was done is not given. The guards who were posted there fainted dead away, and did not awaken until about the time the women arrived (Matthew 28:2-4, 11-15). It must be born in mind, as Robertson and other commentators have observed, "The stone was rolled away not to let the Lord out, but to let the women in to prove the fact of the empty tomb" (*ibid.*, p. 241). Taken together, the Scriptural evidence shows Jesus arose not in the early morning of the first day of the week, but on the previous day at sunset.

On the same day the women visiting the tomb had found it empty, two of Jesus' disciples were walking to Emmaus, a village near Jerusalem (Luke 24:13). Jesus appeared to them as they were walking and began to converse with them, but they failed to recognize him. After telling about Jesus, in whom they had hoped, and his crucifixion, they said, "Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened" (NKJV, Luke 24:21). This statement, as translated in the NKJV or similarly in other versions, is used by some in an attempt to prove that Jesus was crucified on Friday, although his own plain statements are sufficient evidence to falsify a Friday burial and Sunday morning resurrection scenario.

Being disciples of Jesus it's likely the two would have known of Jesus' statements that he would be killed and rise again *after* three days (Mark 8:31), and that he would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). The conversation in question occurred sometime — probably in the afternoon — on the first day of the week following Christ's crucifixion. The time of his death was about 3:00 p.m. (Matthew 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37). If Jesus had died on Friday, the conversation would have occurred only about 48 hours afterward, and less than two days after his burial. If they had been paying attention to what Jesus had said, they would have had no reason to think that sufficient time had elapsed for Jesus' prediction regarding his resurrection to be tested. Consequently they would have had no particular reason to make the statement as translated regarding the third day, as though it were significant.

However, another altogether different translation of the statement is possible, one that makes much more sense in the context of what Jesus had said regarding the timetable for his resurrection. If he had been slain and buried late the previous Wednesday, and resurrected on the Sabbath at sunset, exactly three days and three nights after his burial, as he predicted, then on the following day, the Roman Sunday, three full days would have passed since his crucifixion. Hence sufficient time would have passed for his prediction to be tested, and the fact would have been a natural one to remark on in the conversation under discussion. The key Greek word in the phrase is *agei*, third person singular present indicative of *ago*, which means in this context to *spend* or *pass* time (Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon; Thayer's*). Normally the present indicative in Greek implies present and continuing action.

“But the present is sometimes used as a lively expression of past action” (*Analytical Greek Lexicon*, p. xlii; e.g., John 9:13). Also, “Some phrases which might be rendered as past tense in English will often occur in the present tense in Greek. These are termed ‘historical presents,’ and such occurrences dramatize the event described...” [*Strong's Revised Lexicon in Online Bible*, “Tense-Present” (#5774)]. Thus Cassirer translates the phrase: “Moreover, to crown it all, three days have already passed since all this happened” (*God's New Covenant*). Hence we find that this statement certainly does not prove that Jesus was crucified on Friday, and is indeed in harmony with the rest of the Scriptural evidence and Jesus' own statement that he would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Chapter 8

The Praetorium

Before moving on, let's examine another matter of controversy in the New Testament relating to the Passover. "Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover" (John 18:28). Those who defend the idea that Jesus was crucified on the fifteenth, after the Jews had eaten their Passover, claim that the "Passover" referred to in this verse is not the Paschal lamb, but the *Chagigah* of the fifteenth (cf. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, pp. 865-866 or 2.567-568). On the other hand, if Jesus was led before Pilate on the fourteenth, before most of the Jews had eaten the Passover, the term "Passover" used in the verse in question would naturally apply to the Passover lamb, and also perhaps to the supplemental peace offerings accompanying the Passover, as well as possibly other peace offerings during the feast.

It should be noted that the custom of the time, however, was to strive to avoid the ambiguity that would result from referring to festal offerings in a way so as to confuse them with the Passover sacrifice. "...it is forbidden for a person to say to his fellow, Here are the monies, and go and buy with them meat for the Passover [for someone might assume that the individual meant the Passover *Lamb* and not the festival of Passover.] Rather [a person] says, Here are the monies and go and buy meat with them for me to roast" (*The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, vol. 13, *Yerushalmi Pesahim* 7:1.G, p. 305). The Mishna was written subsequent to the New Testament era, but many of the usages, customs and traditions it reflects date back to that era and before. In the Mishna the Passover lamb is referred to as "Passover," "Passover offering," and "Passover sacrifice," and it's clearly distinguished from other offerings. Festal offerings (*Chagigah*) are called "festal offerings" or "peace offerings." Even a festal offering eaten alongside the Passover lamb is clearly distinguished from the Passover sacrifice by such terminology (cf. *M. Pesahim* 6:3-4). Philo, who lived during the New Testament era, writes of "the sacrifice of the passover..., in which the first month and the fourteenth day of the month are appointed for the offering of the sacrifice" (*On the Life of Moses II* 42). The odds are that in using the term "eat the Passover," John was referring primarily, if not exclusively, to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb prescribed for the fourteenth (cf. Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:8-11).

Consider also that the slaying of the Passover lamb and the smearing of its blood on the doorposts and lintels of the houses at the time of the original Passover in ancient Egypt, providing redemption for the firstborn of Israel from the death angel, portrayed in a unique way the redemption from the penalty of sin provided by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the spotless and unblemished Lamb of God (Exodus 12:5-7, 22-23; John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18-19).⁸

⁸ After the Tabernacle and its altar was built and the priesthood established, the Passover lambs were slain there (or at the Temple, after its construction), except for aberrant practices during the period of the Judges and early monarchy, when (according to the Mishna) Passover lambs were sacrificed at major — but not minor — high places. Further, instead of the blood being smeared on the lintel and doorposts, as in Egypt, a token quantity of the blood was tossed

Unlike other sacrifices that were eaten, the Passover lamb was roasted whole, not a bone being broken, also reflecting the manner of Jesus' death (Exodus 12:9, 46; John 19:36). The Passover anticipated and now memorializes not only the deliverance of the ancient Israelites from the death angel, but more so the deliverance of mankind from the penalty of sin through the shed blood of Jesus. It's in perfect harmony with the symbolism of the Passover, the fourteenth of Abib, that Jesus should have been slain on that day, giving his life as a sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins and make possible our redemption from death.

Nonetheless, it's argued that while entering the home of a Gentile would render a Jew unclean, the uncleanness would be for a day only. The person could bathe and then after sunset partake of the Passover in a state of ritual cleanness.⁹ Therefore, entering the Praetorium would not have prevented the conspirators from eating the Passover. Hence, John was speaking of the *Chagigah* of the fifteenth, which was slain and eaten during the daytime.

There are several problems with this argument. First, and perhaps most obvious, is that if the conspirators had been rendered unclean only until evening by entering Pilate's residence, that would not have prevented them from eating the *Chagigah* either, because if it was not offered on the first day (meaning the 15th, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread), it could be offered on any other day of the Feast (*M. Hagigah* 1:6).

Moreover, among the conspirators were many Sadducees, whose custom was to eat the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth. It was common to include supplemental festal offerings (the “first *Chagigah*”) as part of the Passover meal, the meat of which could be kept over and eaten the next day. If the “second *Chagigah*” can be termed “Passover,” the first could be more so. Presuming the Sadducees kept their own tradition regarding the Passover, and not that of the Pharisees, becoming unclean, even for a day, would have rendered them — on the fourteenth — unfit to eat the remnants of the festal offerings and holy things left over from the Passover meal the previous night.

Let's examine more closely the facts concerning what was happening, keeping in view the overall context. We've already seen that the gospel writers clearly place Jesus' arrest and crucifixion on the preparation day for the annual Sabbath that begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6-8; Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42). That would be the fourteenth of the first month (Abib or Nisan).

at the base of the altar. These changes in the ordinance were made in conformance with Leviticus 17:8-9 and Deuteronomy 12:26-27; 16:5-6; cf. 2 Chronicles 30:1, 8, 15-19; 35:1, 5-11; *M. Pesahim* 5:6, 7, 8.D; 9:5; *M. Megillah* 1:10.XII.A; *M. Zebahim* 14:4.I; *Talmud Jerusalem Pesahim* 5:8.II.D.3; *Talmud Babylonian Megilla* 1:10-11, trans. Rodkinson, p. 19.

⁹ It's interesting that the Pharisees associated “evening” (*'ereb*), as it applied to ritual uncleanness, with sunset and the dark portion of the day, in contradiction to their views concerning the time for the evening sacrifice and the killing of the Passover (*M. Kelim* 19:5-6; *M. Tebul-Yom* 4:4; cf. Leviticus 15:4-12; Ezra 9:4-5; Psalm 141:2; Deuteronomy 16:6).

Generally, it should be understood that observant Jews, particularly Palestinian Jews, would have been extremely reluctant to enter the abode of a Gentile under any circumstance (Acts 10:28). “...every Gentile... was to be regarded as unclean...” (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 62 or 1.90). “They should, so far as possible, be altogether avoided, except in cases of necessity or for the sake of business” (*ibid.*, p. 63).

Above and beyond the customary aversion to contact with Gentiles, was there anything in particular about the fourteenth that would have led to even greater caution concerning contact with them? Normally, only those who were Levitically clean could partake of the Passover, although there were exceptional circumstances, specifically when the priests as a group or a majority of the congregation was unclean (Numbers 9:13; 2 Chronicles 30:17-19; *M. Pesahim* 7:6; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14, “Temple Mount,” p. 994). And of course, no one Levitically unclean, ordinarily, could have any part in sacrificing the Passover victims (Numbers 9:6-7; 13; 2 Chronicles 30:3, 15-17). A *tebul-yom* (a person who had immersed in a ritual bath, awaiting sunset to complete the purification ritual) was forbidden to enter the inner courts of the Temple, and for that reason alone could not have participated in offering the Passover lamb or any peace offerings (Leviticus 7:19-21; 22:3; 2 Chronicles 23:19; *M. Kelim* 1:8; *Wars of the Jews* 5.5.6; exceptions noted).

The days leading up to Passover were a time for self-examination and purification. “...many went up to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves” (John 11:55; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:28). A month before Passover graves in the open fields in the countryside were “whitened” so pilgrims would not accidentally come into contact with them and be defiled thereby (*The Temple*, p. 169; cf. Numbers 19:16; Matthew 23:27). Finally, “On the 14th of Nisan every [male] Israelite who was physically able, not in a state of Levitical uncleanness, nor further distant from the city than fifteen miles, was to appear in Jerusalem” (*The Temple*, p. 167). Rabbinical law (Pharisaic practice) provided that in certain cases where one was in a state of uncleanness on the day of the 14th, but expected to be clean after sunset, the Passover could be slain on his behalf by someone else, and then partaken of in a state of cleanness after sunset (*M. Pesahim* 8:5; 8:8; cf. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 865 or 2.567). Even so, it seems unthinkable that a Pharisee or a Priest or any other observant Jew of the day would *deliberately* allow himself to be defiled on the fourteenth of Nisan.

The crowd that had brought Jesus to the Praetorium consisted of the chief priests, officers, elders, scribes and a “multitude” (Matthew 27:1-2, 12, 20; Mark 15:1, 3, 8, 11; Luke 22:66; 23:1, 4-5; John 19:6). The “chief priests” were priests who had administrative offices in the Temple. They were also members of the Sanhedrin (cf. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 177-181). The “officers” were Levite Temple police and servants of the High Priest (*ibid.*, p. 209-211). The “elders” were lay nobility — in this case also members of the Sanhedrin — who were heads of prominent families (*ibid.*, pp. 222-223; the term “elders” also is used loosely to refer to any of the groups of leaders, including chief priests and scribes, e.g., Luke 22:66). The “scribes” were ordained teachers of the Law. Not all scribes or elders were members of the Sanhedrin. But it was those who were, along with the chief priests, who took the lead in condemning Jesus (with some exceptions, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who were followers of Jesus).

At the time of Jesus the Sanhedrin was divided between Sadducees and Pharisees (Acts 23:6-7). The chief priests and elders of the Sanhedrin (the priestly and lay nobility) were predominately — if not exclusively — Sadducees (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 228-230; *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, William B. Eerdmans revised edition, “Sanhedrin”). The scribes of the Sanhedrin included both Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:9; *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 231; *The Trial of Jesus*, Frank John Powell). Although some scholars would disagree, I believe it's likely that the Sadducees were the more numerous and dominant party in the Sanhedrin at the time of Jesus (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, “Sadducees,” vol. 14, pp. 620, 622; *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 263; *The Trial of Jesus*, Powell). The entire council, Sadducees and Pharisees, were united in condemning Jesus, with a few exceptions, as noted (Matthew 26:59; 27:62; Mark 14:53, 55; 15:1).

These men were the most prominent religious leaders of Judah, and they certainly would have done whatever they could on that day to avoid Levitical defilement so as to participate and lead in the activities associated with the Passover. It seems likely that their desire to “eat the Passover” would include, at least for many of them, the desire to participate in the necessary preliminary activity of slaughtering the Passover, since it was understood that the Passover was “offered only for eating” (*M. Pesahim* 7:4). This is especially true of the Pharisees, whose custom, followed by the majority of Jews, as we've seen was to slaughter the Passover on the afternoon of the fourteenth and eat it on the evening of the fifteenth, in contradiction to the practice of the Sadducees and the Biblical instructions. The priests also, including those who were Sadducees, would be expected to be on duty that day to assist in catching the blood of the Passover victims and burning the fat portions on the altar on into the evening. “The preparation of a great many paschal lambs was an assembly line operation. Every priest in Israel was pressed into duty” (*Reader's Digest ABC's of the Bible*, p. 57; cf. *The Temple*, p. 62; *Illustrated Dictionary of Bible Life and Times*, “Passover,” p. 266; 2 Chronicles 30:3; Ezra 6:19-21).¹⁰

Besides the above, there is a more fundamental problem with the idea that entering the Praetorium would have rendered the conspirators unfit to eat the Passover only until evening.

¹⁰ Though there were many Pharisees among the rank and file priests in the countryside, most if not all the priests on the Sanhedrin were Sadducees. It's likely they had eaten the Paschal lamb on the previous evening, according to their custom. “[Sadducees]... possessed a *halakah* (tradition), based on an exegesis of Scripture, which the members must follow in their conduct of life” (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 231; we've already seen that according to their tradition the Passover lambs were to be slain and eaten on the night of the fourteenth, not the following afternoon). Even so, they would have wanted to remain clean to participate as priests in the sacrificial ceremonies of the afternoon, when the majority of Jews of that period slew their lambs. Other Sadducees on the council — also having already eaten the Paschal lamb, as I believe is likely — would have likewise wanted to remain clean to observe the Passover season without interruption. Meat from peace offerings accompanying the Paschal lamb would remain to be eaten that day (Leviticus 7:16-17; *M. Pesahim* 6:4). As already mentioned, they too are sometimes, though rarely, referred to generically as “Passover” (Deuteronomy 16:2-3). No one could lawfully eat of such Passover offerings in a state of uncleanness (Leviticus 7:19-20; 22:3).

It is a false premise!

As discussed above, supplemental peace offerings killed on the fourteenth often accompanied the Passover meal. These peace offerings, or other peace offerings offered during the festival season, could be generically referred to as “Passover” (Deuteronomy 16:2), though as we've seen, this would have been out of the ordinary. For Priests, sin and guilt offerings, and firstlings, could also be used as festal offerings (*M. Hagigah* 1:4.C) Based on Leviticus 7:33 rabbinical law provided that “[a priest who is] unclean at the time of the tossing of the blood but clean at the time of the burning of the fat does not share in the flesh” (*M. Zebahim* 12:1). The blood was tossed at the time of the killing of the sacrifice. All sacrifices were killed in the daytime under Pharisaic rules. It's possible the Sadducees may have killed some peace offerings on the evening of the fourteenth along with the Passover sacrifice. The fat was burned through the night (*M. Megillah* 2:5-6; cf. Exodus 23:18). Any priests in the group, therefore, having become unclean even for that day only, would not have been able to eat of the “Passover” killed the same day, if “Passover” included reference to a festal offering consisting of the priests' portion of any sacrifice. This would apply equally to either the fourteenth or the fifteenth.

But there are yet other more significant considerations. The issue of entering the Praetorium concerns defilement that would have lasted not for a day only, but for almost the entire festival period.

I've never seen convincing evidence that entering the home of a Gentile — much less the Praetorium — would render a person unclean for a day only. In the comments I've read it seems to be something that's just assumed. As a case in point, Alfred Edersheim dismisses, without justification, the possibility of corpse defilement as the reason the Sanhedrists refused to enter the Praetorium. He overlooks the fact of the imminent possibility of death occurring, if not having already occurred, that very day in the Praetorium. He suggests instead that the refusal was “connected either with the suspected presence of an idol in the house or with contact with an idolator” (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 865 or 2.567 n.). Edersheim also misrepresents the facts relating to tent uncleanness due to the presence of idols, and the suspicion that one might have incurred corpse uncleanness in a dwelling, insofar as they would affect one's eligibility to partake of sacrifices during the Passover season.

As we shall see, the possibility of corpse defilement and the likelihood of the presence of idols in the house were both reasons the Sanhedrists would not have wanted to enter. And either would have resulted in defilement for seven days.

The law provided that a priest who touched certain objects or people who were unclean was unclean until evening (Leviticus 22:4-7). The Pharisees applied such laws more broadly to include non-priests (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 231, 257, 265). The law also provided that whoever touched anything that had been touched by one unclean on account of a corpse was unclean until evening (Numbers 19:22). And there are other similar laws concerning uncleanness (e.g., Leviticus 11:24; 15). One who went into a house shut up because of mold contamination was unclean until evening (Leviticus 14:46). But the latter

has nothing to do with the question at hand, and there's more to consider than what is covered in the other laws mentioned.

According to the law anyone who was in a dwelling when a person died, or who came into a dwelling where the dead lay, was unclean for seven days (Numbers 19:14). The rules concerning uncleanness of Gentile dwellings are found in the tractate *Ohalot* (dwellings; cf. *M. Ohalot* 18:6-10), described as the “Treatise in the Mishna and Tosefta dealing with defilement through a dead human body, through the dead body of an animal, or through contact with one that is diseased; based on Num. xix. 14-16” (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, “Ohalot”). The rules imply that a Gentile dwelling in Israel, with certain exceptions, was assumed to be defiled with corpse uncleanness, which would render any Jew entering unclean for seven days. This interdiction, though it was carried to an extreme, was not without foundation, as it was a custom among the Canaanites to bury the dead beneath the walls and floors of their dwellings (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Ellis Enterprises Bible Library Maxima edition, “Canaan; Canaanites”; William B. Eerdmans revised edition, vol. 4, “Religions: Canaanite,” p. 98). Moreover, it was a widespread custom in the ancient world to bury household idolatrous images in the floors of homes, or keep them on display in private dwellings (*Archaeology and the Old Testament World*, John Gray, p. 45; *The Story of Civilization: The Life of Greece*, Will Durant, p. 175; *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, William B. Eerdmans revised edition, vol. 4, “Religions: Greco-Roman,” p. 112; *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art*, “Burial,” p. 103; “Imagines,” p. 317). The significance of the latter with regard to our subject is discussed below. However, even apart from these customs, there was good reason for the Jewish conspirators to avoid entering the Praetorium.

The Praetorium, or Governor's residence, was Herod's palace, a complex of structures, courts and gardens covering more than 4.5 acres (*The Mountain of the Lord*, pp. 39, 79; *Wars of the Jews* 5.4.3-4). Within the palace compound were garrisoned 400 to 600 Roman soldiers (Matthew 27:27; Mark 15:16; the reference is to a “cohort,” which varied in size but was typically about 600 soldiers; cf. *Thayer's Lexicon*; *Peoples New Testament Commentary*; *Word Pictures in the New Testament*; *Illustrated Dictionary of Bible Life and Times*, “Cohort,” p. 79). Before the palace, which was adjacent to the western wall of the city, was an open court which looked out over the city. Here was placed the portable platform on which was a “judgement seat” (tribunal), from which the Governor pronounced sentence in cases brought before him (Matthew 27:19; John 19:13). Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, had civil, criminal and military jurisdiction over Judea from 26 to 36 A.D.

Pilate was not loved by his Jewish subjects. Philo speaks of “his corruption, and his acts of insolence, and his rapine, and his habit of insulting people, and his cruelty, and his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity” (*On the Embassy to Gaius* 38).

Although formal judgment was pronounced from the “judgement seat” on the outside, interrogation of prisoners was done inside the Praetorium (John 18:33; 19:9). Condemned slaves, robbers and political offenders were subject to crucifixion if not Roman citizens. The condemned were scourged prior to crucifixion.

The scourge was a whip consisting of a handle with leather strips attached, with jagged pieces of bone or metal tied to the ends. Applied to the back, loins, abdomen and face, the bits of bone or metal dug into the flesh with each blow, and when withdrawn could tear chunks of the lacerated flesh from the body. In *4 Maccabees* is described the beating of one Eleazar, "...his flesh was being torn by scourges, his blood flowing, and his sides were cut to pieces" (6:6). Josephus describes some who were "whipped till every one of their inward parts appeared naked," and of another who was "whipped till his bones were laid bare" (*Wars* 2.21.5; 6.5.3; cf. Psalm 22:17; Isaiah 52:14). Eusebius describes martyrs who were "lacerated with scourges even to the innermost veins and arteries, so that the hidden inward parts of the body, both their bowels and their members, were exposed to view" (*Church History* 4.15). "So hideous was the punishment that the victim usually fainted and not rarely died under it" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Ellis Enterprises Bible Library Maxima edition, "Scourge").

The scourging of Jesus occurred outside, but immediately afterward he was dragged inside the Praetorium to be further beaten, mocked and abused by the Roman soldiers (Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20). Scourging was also a means of capital punishment of itself, and a means of torture to elicit confessions or information. The scourging might be done inside where prisoners were interrogated (Acts 22:24; cf. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, William B. Eerdmans revised edition, "Scourge"). Jesus was not the only prisoner being beaten and crucified that day. There were at least two others (Matthew 27:38; Luke 23:32). Any of these, or possibly others being judged that day, could have died in the Praetorium during the proceedings, in which case any Jews in the building would have been rendered unclean not for the day only, but for seven days. No doubt the Jews persecuting Jesus knew very well what occurred on a regular basis in the Praetorium. For all they knew, there might already be corpses of dead prisoners lying inside the building should they enter it. Even an olive's bulk of flesh or a significant quantity of blood (as little as a quarter of a log, or less than half a cup, or according to R. Aqiba, any amount) remaining in the building from a corpse was sufficient to render "tent uncleanness" (*M. Ohalot* 2:1-2).

Even the suspicion that someone might have been rendered unclean through a corpse or similar uncleanness was enough to render him ineligible to keep the Passover. "An individual who became unclean by reason of a condition of doubt [occurring in] a private domain on Passover — R. Hoshaya the Great said, [The person] should be postponed to the second Passover, [for... the person is assumed without a doubt to have become unclean].' R. Yohanan said, [At the time for (offering the) Passover, because the person may still be clean and therefore may not simply be postponed to the second Passover, following a special procedure,] they send him on a long journey [thereby, in accord with Num. 9:10, making him ineligible for the first Passover...]" (*The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, vol. 13, *Yerushalmi Pesahim* 8:8.V.E, p. 431).

Any suspicion that there might be a corpse or any portion of a corpse in the building, or that someone might die while they were there, would have been more than sufficient all by itself for the Jews to refuse to enter, regardless of which day it was. As we've seen, there was plenty of cause to believe that either might be the case. In addition, there was another

compelling reason the Jews would not have entered the building, lest they become unclean not for a day only, but for virtually the entire feast.

We've seen already that it was a common Gentile custom to display idols in private dwellings. For that matter, in Gentile towns public buildings of all kinds were also places for the display and worship of idols (for example, see the description of Athens in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, Conybeare and Howson, p. 274). Herod's palace with its sculpted "figures" and "brazen statues" was from its inception associated with idolatry in the minds of more scrupulous Jews (*Wars* 5.4.4; *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, pp. 61-62 or 1.89-90). Later Josephus was sent as a legate from Jerusalem to Galilee in part to persuade the leaders in Tiberias to demolish the palace built there by Herod Antipas, "...which had the figures of living creatures in it, although our laws have forbidden us to make any such figures" (*Life* 12).

When the Roman Governor took up residence in Herod's palace in Jerusalem, the defilement of the place was only enhanced in the minds of the more punctilious Jews. Rabbinical interdictions against Gentiles were primarily due to their idolatry. Roman custom is described as follows: "In the domus [house], near the entrance, in the atrium or near the kitchen of the domus was the lararium, the shrine dedicated to the Lares (the household gods who protected the family). Food and libations were placed in front of their images. Next to them were kept the imagines maiorum, wax portraits representing the ancestors" (*Ancient Rome*, Liberati and Bourbon, p. 67). The "god shelf" was a normal feature of even the wealthiest Roman homes in the first century. The gods were worshiped daily, often at meals (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, William B. Eerdmans revised edition, vol. 4, "Religions: Greco-Roman," p. 112). Thus the Jewish persecutors of Christ could have expected to be present within the Praetorium the Governor's idols, and those of his household, and perhaps libations and food offerings laid out for them. "Into that heathen chamber the priests and doctors of the separated nation would not enter..." (*The Trial of Jesus*, Alexander Taylor Innes).

To have done so would have been to risk becoming Levitically defiled for seven days, not only because of the possibility of encountering a corpse or portions thereof, but also things sacrificed to idols. "[A community which is] unclean with the uncleanness of idolatry -- they treated it like the uncleanness of a flux or leprosy [and its offering is postponed until the second passover]" (*The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, vol.13, *Yerushalmi Pesahim* 9:1.I.N, p. 437; cf. Leviticus 14:1-10; 15:13-14). A note on the above reads, "Most probably a reference to the view attributed to R. Judah b. Beterah that whatever is offered to other gods imparts tent' uncleanness to those under an enclosure with it."

From the above we can conclude that there is no support in John 18:28 for the view that Jesus died on Abib 15. And the evidence lends itself naturally to the idea that John, when he wrote "that they might eat the Passover," had in mind primarily if not exclusively the eating of the Passover lambs in the coming evening, as planned by many of the conspirators against Jesus.

Chapter 9

The Early Church

The apostolic Church continued to keep the Passover annually after Jesus' death and resurrection. And it was not only Jewish Christians, but Gentiles also, who kept the Passover. Paul gave detailed instructions to the Gentile Corinthian Church regarding how to properly keep the Passover. The service he discusses in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 is the ordinance of the New Covenant Passover (Matthew 26:17-30; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7). In the same context, Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately follows on the heels of the Passover (1 Corinthians 5:8). "Let us keep the feast" (from *eortazo*) is in the Greek in the form of the hortatory subjunctive; it's an *exhortation* — virtually a command — to *keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread* with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. And this letter, I emphasize, went to *Gentile* Christians. So it's clear they kept the Passover and then the Feast of Unleavened Bread in accordance with the command in Leviticus 23:4-8, excepting the portion pertaining uniquely to the service of the physical Tabernacle. They did not offer lambs for the Passover (which could only be offered lawfully in Jerusalem at the Temple, anyway), but partook instead of the symbols of unleavened bread and wine given renewed meaning by Jesus' sacrifice.

In addition to Scripture, there's other clear evidence that the apostles, including Paul, never taught the Gentiles nor other Christians that they were free to reject God's commands concerning festivals and Holy Days and substitute as "holy time" a time of their choosing. Clement, a companion of Paul (Philippians 4:3), wrote the following as Pastor of the Church of God at Rome, about 100 A.D.:

"These things therefore being manifest to us, and since we look into the depths of the divine knowledge, it behooves us to do all things in their proper order, which the Lord has *commanded us to perform at stated times*. He has enjoined offerings [to be presented] and service to be performed [to Him], and that not thoughtlessly or irregularly, but *at the appointed times and hours*. Where and by whom He desires these things to be done, He Himself has fixed by His own supreme will, in order that all things being piously done according to His good pleasure, may be acceptable to Him. Those, therefore, who present their offerings *at the appointed times*, are *accepted and blessed*; for inasmuch as they *follow the laws of the Lord, they sin not*" ("First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 16).

The practice of keeping a Christian Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan continued in the east for several centuries. In the second century in the west, a growing apostasy engulfed the Church and the Sunday Easter service, adapting many pagan influences (cf. Deuteronomy 12:29-32; 1 Corinthians 10:14), supplanted the Passover. It's widely acknowledged among Bible scholars and historians that the Easter tradition was not widely practiced before the second century. "The earliest Christians celebrated the Lord's Passover at the same time as the Jews.... By the middle of the 2nd century most churches had transferred this celebration to the Sunday after the Jewish feast" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Christianity, The Church and Its History, Church Year, History of the Church Year, Easter," Multimedia Edition, 1998).

"In the 2nd century, the Christian [Passover] celebration was transferred to the Sunday following the 14-15 Nisan, if that day fell on a weekday" (*The New Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia*, "Easter," 1993). Sources such as those just quoted reflect an assumption that Christians of the apostolic era kept the Passover on the 14-15 of Nisan like the Pharisees and the majority of the Jews who followed their lead. But as we shall see, they really kept the Passover on the 14th as the day began in the evening.

The Jewish-Christian leaders of Palestine kept the Passover on the 14th of Nisan until the remnants of the original apostolic Church were driven out with the other Jews after the Bar Kokhba revolt (135 A.D., cf. Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 4.5). Epiphanius of Salamis, in arguing against a sect he called "Audians," wrote of them that "they choose to celebrate the Passover with the Jews," meaning not on the same day as the Jews, but once a year at the Passover season according to the Hebrew calendar. He goes on to say, "And indeed it is true that **this used to be the church's custom....**" But, he explains that confusion and disagreement over the Passover observance, "...has been the situation **ever since the church was thrown into disorder after the time of the circumcised bishops [of Jerusalem].**" In describing what transpired prior to the Jewish revolt, Epiphanius writes, "And there were altogether fifteen bishops from the circumcision. And at that time, when the circumcised bishops were consecrated at Jerusalem, it was essential that the whole world follow and celebrate with them, so that there would be one concord and agreement, the celebration of one festival" (*The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, trans. Frank Williams, vol. 2, pp. 410-412).

After the Jewish revolt the circumcised leaders at Jerusalem were replaced by apostate Christians of Gentile origin who rejected the Passover, substituting the "Easter Sunday" tradition. Though it may have originated elsewhere, after its adoption in Palestine this apostasy gained added momentum and was especially strong in North Africa and Rome. Rome thence used its influence to persuade nominal Christians in other areas to abandon the Passover in favor of the Easter Sunday observance.

While churches in the west succumbed to the pressure and adopted Easter Sunday in place of the Passover in the second century, churches in Asia resisted. Eusebius (c. 260-340 A.D.), writing of events occurring in the last decade of the second century, declares, "For the parishes of all Asia [western Asia Minor], as from an **older tradition**, held that the **fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb**, should be observed as the feast of the Saviour's passover" (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.23). Churches elsewhere in the east also were holding fast to the Passover. Athanasius (c. 290-373 A.D.) wrote that the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) was summoned in part because "they of Syria, Cilicia and Mesopotamia differed from us, and kept the [Passover] feast at the same season as the Jews" ["To the Bishops of Africa" (*Ad Afros Epistola Synodica*) 1]. The historical record indicates that until the Council of Nicaea, "In Asia Minor most people kept the fourteenth day of the moon...." But, "...others in the East kept that feast on the sabbath [Sunday] indeed, but differed as regards the month" (*Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus* 5.22). That the majority in the East kept the fourteenth Passover until the Council of Nicaea is further evidenced by Constantine's letter to the Churches on the subject, wherein he states, "It [Easter Sunday in place of Passover] is a becoming order which all the

churches in the Western, Southern, and Northern parts of the world observe, and some places in the East also” (*ibid.*, 1.9; 5.22).

It's interesting that the areas holding most tenaciously to the Biblical Christian Passover were among those where Paul and Peter, as well as other New Testament era apostles, had been most active. This further belies the false claim that the Easter Sunday tradition opposing Passover is somehow linked to Peter and Paul. Paul and Barnabas were based in Syrian Antioch and spent much time there (Acts 13:1-2; 14:26-28; 15:22-23). Paul also evangelized in Cilicia and spent ample time in proconsular Asia (western Asia Minor). “Paul spent three years ministering in Ephesus to the Jews first but also to the Greeks,' and it is very probable that he or his converts carried the gospel message to additional cities in Asia. Certainly many of the churches in the Asian cities addressed by John in the first three chapters of Revelation — Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea — were founded and/or nurtured by Paul” (Carl Rasmussen, *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible*, p. 185; cf. Acts 19:1, 8-10, 22, 26; 20:17, 31). Peter's first epistle was written from Babylon in Mesopotamia (1 Peter 5:13) to Israelite Christians in portions of Asia Minor where descendants of Israelite tribes were numerous at the time (1 Peter 1:1-2).

Besides Peter and Paul, several other apostles were active in the above mentioned regions associated with keeping the Christian Passover into the fourth century. These include Andrew (Northern Asia Minor), Thomas (Syria), Philip (Phrygia), and Thaddaeus (Syria, Mesopotamia, cf. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 427). Finally, by no means least was John, who spent his latter years in Asia, and according to tradition, died in Ephesus (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.1; 5.24). Later leaders in the area traced their practice of keeping the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month partly to the influence of John, the last of the original apostles to die.

Chapter 10

Passover Kept on the Fourteenth

When a controversy in the matter of Passover observance erupted in the last decade of the second century Irenaeus wrote to Victor, Bishop of Rome, who sought to excommunicate churches of Asia and elsewhere because of their adherence to the Passover. Irenaeus had been trained by Polycarp, a leading minister in Asia following the apostolic era. Polycarp was trained by John and other apostles, and ordained by them (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20; Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.3.4). Irenaeus had gone on to become a pastor in Gaul, and although he himself had followed the general apostasy in rejecting the Passover in favor of Easter Sunday, he wrote letters to Victor and others defending the right of churches to observe the Passover in peace.

In his letter to Victor Irenaeus recounts an earlier dispute (c. 154) involving Polycarp and Anicetus, pastor in Rome, over the Passover, “For **neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe what he had always observed with John the disciple of our Lord, and the other apostles with whom he had associated**; neither could Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it as he said that he ought to follow the customs of the presbyters that had preceded him” (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24). It's revealing that in this account Anicetus does not defend the Easter-Sunday tradition on the basis of apostolic teaching, nor on Scripture, but on a custom handed down to him by his predecessors in Rome. In the same account Eusebius quotes Irenaeus naming only Anicetus' predecessors Sixtus (119-128 A.D., fifth pastor of the Roman church after Linus, who was first to be ordained to that office by the apostles), followed by Telesphorus, Hyginus and Pius as having rejected the Passover (cf. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.3.3; *Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 875). Whereas Polycarp and Polycrates based their defense of keeping the Passover on the fourteenth directly on the teaching and example of the original apostles of Jesus, and Eusebius admits the latter is an older tradition!

Polycrates, leader of the churches in Asia, also wrote a letter to Victor: “We observe **the exact day**; neither adding, nor taking away. For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming, when he shall come with glory from heaven, and shall seek out all the saints. Among these are **Philip, one of the twelve apostles**, who fell asleep in Hierapolis; and his two aged virgin daughters, and another daughter, who lived in the Holy Spirit and now rests at Ephesus; and, moreover, **John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord**, and, being a priest, wore the sacerdotal plate. He fell asleep at Ephesus. And Polycarp in Smyrna, who was a bishop and martyr; and Thraseas, bishop and martyr from Eumenia, who fell asleep in Smyrna. Why need I mention the bishop and martyr Sagaris who fell asleep in Laodicea, or the blessed Papius, or Melito, the Eunuch who lived altogether in the Holy Spirit, and who lies in Sardis, awaiting the episcopate from heaven, when he shall rise from the dead? **All these observed the fourteenth day of the passover** according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith. And I also, Polycrates, the least of you all, do according to the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have closely followed. For seven of my relatives were bishops; and I am the eighth. And my relatives always observed **the day**

when the people put away the leaven. I, therefore, brethren, who have lived sixty-five years in the Lord, and have met with the brethren throughout the world, and have gone through every Holy Scripture, am not affrighted by terrifying words. For those greater than I have said 'We ought to obey God rather than man.'" Eusebius continues, "He then writes of all the bishops who were present with him and thought as he did. His words are as follows: I could mention the bishops who were present, whom I summoned at your desire; whose names, should I write them, would constitute a great multitude. And they, beholding my littleness, gave their consent to the letter, knowing that I did not bear my gray hairs in vain, but had always governed my life by the Lord Jesus.'" (Eusebius 5.24).

Note that Polycrates explicitly states that his belief and practice in keeping the Passover on the "exact day" — specified as the fourteenth — is founded on the gospel, in accordance with Scripture, and patterned after the example of Jesus and his apostles. It was observed he says on "the day when the people put away the leaven." The Jewish custom alluded to by Polycrates is described as follows: "...on the evening (of the [Roman] 13th) commenced the 14th of Nisan, when a solemn search was made with lighted candle, throughout each house for any leaven that might be hidden, or have fallen aside by accident. Such was put in a safe place, and afterwards destroyed with the rest" (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Edersheim, pp. 805-806; or 2.481; similar but more detailed descriptions may be found in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Pasch or Passover," and in Edersheim's *The Temple*, pp. 171-172). Although by custom the leaven was not actually destroyed until the morning of the fourteenth, it was "put away" the previous evening. This was the day on which Christ and the apostles and those who followed their example and teachings kept the Passover, according to the testimony of Polycrates. And keeping the Passover on that day was to Polycrates a matter of obeying "God rather than man." It's significant, is it not, that he does *not* say they kept it on the day the people, i.e., the majority of the Jews, ate the Passover, which would have been the fifteenth of the Biblical month?

Meanwhile, a disagreement arose among those in Asia Minor (c. 160 - 170 A.D.) as to whether the Passover should be observed on the fourteenth or on the fifteenth of Nisan. Johannes Geldenhuis in his commentary on Luke (*The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1951) mentions that the extant literature is absent any conflict concerning the actual date of the Passover meal Jesus and his disciples partook of until about 170 A.D. "The first 'council' of Laodicea occurred about 164 C.E.; the only issue had been the dating of Easter [Passover], and the big dispute (*zesis polle*) had been between two kinds of Quartodecimans — what would become the orthodox position in the fourth [sic] century and later was not even represented. Most of the early leaders of the Church in this area were Quartodecimans [a term for those who kept the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan], and the tradition endured into the fifth century..." (*Diaspora Jews and Judaism*, eds. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan, Scholars Press, 1992; cf. Eusebius 4.26; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, "Melito: Fragments," p. 1479).

Claudius Apollinaris (d. 180 A.D.), pastor in Hierapolis, a few miles from Laodicea, wrote of the controversy indicating that some had begun ignorantly teaching that Jesus had died on the first holy day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the Biblical fifteenth). "There are, then, some who through ignorance raise disputes about these things (though their conduct is

pardonable: for ignorance is no subject for blame — it rather needs further instruction), and say that on the fourteenth day the Lord ate the lamb with the disciples, and that on the great day of the feast of unleavened bread He Himself suffered; and they quote Matthew as speaking in accordance with their view. Wherefore their opinion is contrary to the law, and the Gospels seem to be at variance with them” (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, p. 1525).

He went on to explain the prevailing teaching among those who kept the Biblical Passover regarding the day on which Jesus died: “**The fourteenth day, the true Passover of the Lord**; the great sacrifice, the Son of God instead of the lamb, who was bound, who bound the strong, and who was judged, though Judge of living and dead, and who was delivered into the hands of sinners to be crucified, who was lifted up on the horns of the unicorn, and who was pierced in His holy side, who poured forth from His side the two purifying elements, water and blood, word and spirit, and who **was buried on the day of the passover**, the stone being placed upon the tomb” (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, p. 1526). It's clear in Apollinaris' statement that the fourteenth was regarded as the Passover, and that it was on the fourteenth that Jesus was arrested, condemned, died and was buried. Implied, of course, is that it was also on the Biblical fourteenth, the evening prior to his death, that Jesus partook of the Passover meal with his disciples.

Alfred Edersheim in his writings remarks on certain veiled references in the Talmud to Jesus and his condemnation and death. While arguing for a fifteenth crucifixion in his book *The Temple*, Edersheim characterizes these Jewish traditions as, “...not only of a late date, but wholly unhistorical and valueless” (p. 316). But he contradicts himself elsewhere, referring to the Talmudic traditions concerning Christ's death as follows: “It is a curious confirmation of the gospel history, that the death of Christ is there described as having taken place on the eve of the Passover' [a term for Abib 14, as we've seen], remarkably bearing out not only the date of that event as gathered from the synoptical gospels, but showing that the Rabbis at least knew nothing of those Jewish scruples and difficulties, by which modern Gentile writers have tried to prove the impossibility of Christ's condemnation on the Paschal night” (*Sketches of Jewish Life*). Whatever one may think of its historical value, the fact remains that Jewish tradition assigns the date of Abib 14 to the death of Christ. The implication is that Jesus also kept the Passover on the night of the fourteenth. Earliest Christian writings, even by those who did not keep the Passover, universally reflect the same view.

Karl (Charles) Joseph von Hefele affirms that the idea that Jesus died on the fifteenth was contradicted by the earliest Church authorities, and it was not until the fifth century that the notion became generally accepted. “At the same time [era of Pope Leo I, 440-461 A.D.] also was generally established, the opinion so little entertained by the ancient authorities in the Church — one might even say, so strongly in contradiction to their teaching — that Christ partook of the passover on the 14th Nisan, that he died on the 15th (not on the 14th, as the ancients considered), that he lay in the grave on the 16th, and rose again on the 17th” (*History of the Councils*, vol. 1, p. 329). Note that by Roman reckoning days begin at midnight, so the idea that gained acceptance in the fifth century — contrary to the earliest authorities — is really that Jesus ate the Passover at the same time as the majority of the Jews of his day, which by Jewish reckoning was the fifteenth, the days beginning at sunset.

Hippolytus of Rome (170-236 A.D.) wrote of an Arab heretic named Monoimus who taught some very strange gnostic type doctrines. What is of interest to us presently is a statement made in passing concerning the time of the Passover observance, which, despite Monoimus' perverse doctrines, appears to represent the prevailing understanding concerning the time of Passover observance by those claiming an affinity with Christianity who had continued to keep the Passover. "...a new and not antiquated feast, legal, (and) everlasting, a passover of the Lord God kept unto our generations, by those who are able to discern (this mystery), at the **commencement of the fourteenth day...**" (*Refutation of All Heresies* 8.7, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, p. 249). The comment indicates that some Christians were at that time keeping the Passover in the evening *at the commencement of the fourteenth day*.

Hippolytus, adhering to the Easter-Sunday tradition that had become well established in Rome by his day, also labeled as heretics the "Quartodecimans." He says they maintained "that **Easter [Passover] should be kept on the fourteenth day of the first month, according to the commandment of the law, on whatever day (of the week) it should occur.**" He goes on to assert that the Passover was only for the Jews, and states that among Gentiles, "it is not now observed in letter." Truthfully, however, many of the places in which the fourteenth Passover was still being observed among Christians were in fact predominantly Gentile. He goes on to say of the Quartodecimans, "In other respects, however, these consent to all the traditions delivered to the Church by the Apostles" (*Refutation of All Heresies* 8.11; cf. *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis* 50, "Against Quartodecimans," vol. 2, pp. 23-25).

The latter is a classic example of how the teachings and practices of Jesus Christ and the apostles were first abandoned, then vilified and ultimately labeled heresy among the majority of professing Christians in the centuries following the apostolic age. Another example is the literal return of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to reign on the earth, one of the central themes of the prophets and of the New Testament. The historian Edward Gibbon comments on this in discussing the beliefs of the primitive Church, "The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ. As the works of creation had been finished in six days, their duration in their present state, according to a tradition which was attributed to the prophet Elijah, was fixed to six thousand years. By the same analogy it was inferred that this long period of labour and contention, which was now almost elapsed, would be succeeded by a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years; and that Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints and the elect who had escaped death, or who had been miraculously revived, would reign upon earth till the time appointed for the last and general resurrection" (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, The Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*, Harper Torchbooks, p. 25). As the first few centuries after the apostolic era wore on, however, as Gibbon explains, "The doctrine of Christ's reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism" (*ibid.*, p. 26).

And so the overwhelming majority of the professing Christian Church by degrees over a period of a few centuries succumbed to the pressures of persecution and the world's pagan culture, as one after another Biblical doctrine was abandoned and then labeled heresy in favor of manmade traditions adopting beliefs and practices from various pagan idolatrous systems.

Yet for a long while after the majority of professing Christians abandoned the Passover, it was still generally understood that Jesus died on the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan and ate his last Passover meal the previous evening. For example, Clement of Alexandria (c. 153-220 A.D.) wrote, “Accordingly, in the years gone by, Jesus went to eat the passover sacrificed by the Jews, keeping the feast. But when he had preached He who was the Passover, the Lamb of God, led as a sheep to the slaughter, **presently taught His disciples the mystery of the type on the [Roman] thirteenth day**, on which also they inquired, ‘Where wilt Thou that we prepare for Thee to eat the passover?’ **It was on this day, then, that both the consecration of the unleavened bread and the preparation for the feast took place.** Whence John naturally describes the disciples as already previously prepared to have their feet washed by the Lord. And **on the following [Roman] day our Savior suffered**, He who was the Passover, propitiously sacrificed by the Jews.”

Clement continues, “Suitably, therefore, to the **fourteenth day, on which He also suffered**, in the morning, the chief priests and the scribes, who brought Him to Pilate, did not enter the Praetorium, that they might not be defiled, but might freely eat the passover in the evening. With this precise determination of the days both the whole Scriptures agree, and the Gospels harmonize” (“Fragments Found in Greek,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 1178). It’s perhaps worth mentioning that Lactantius (d. c. 325) and Epiphanius of Salamis also clearly express the view that Jesus died on the fourteenth, the day of the Passover sacrifice (*Epitome of the Divine Institutions* 45, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, p. 498; *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis* 50, “Against Quartodecimans,” vol. 2, pp. 24-25).

Another point of interest is that Epiphanius states that Jesus died in the eighteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (*op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 54). Tiberius acceded to his office in 14 A.D. His eighteenth year would have been 31 A.D., so Epiphanius was correct in his assessment of the year of Jesus’ death, as we know from other evidence. Epiphanius contends Jesus was arrested, after having eaten the Passover, late on the third day of the week (Tuesday) (*op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 57, 59). The spurious *Narrative of Joseph* also places Jesus’ arrest on the third day of the week, followed by another arrest two days later (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, pp. 985-986). Both view his crucifixion as having occurred on the afternoon of the fourteenth, which is claimed to be Friday. Of course, the gospel accounts clearly place Jesus’ crucifixion on the afternoon immediately following his arrest. In reality, the fourteenth of Nisan did begin on Tuesday evening of 31 A.D., and Jesus was arrested that night. It’s difficult to know what to make of these garbled and confused accounts of a Tuesday night arrest (and, in Epiphanius’ case, a Tuesday night Passover that Jesus ate before his arrest). Do they represent a vestigial, obfuscated memory of the truth concerning this point that had all but vanished behind a veil of falsehoods? What is perfectly clear is that despite the confusion concerning Jesus’ death and related events that prevailed in the nominal Christian world in the early centuries following the apostolic era, there was near universal agreement that his death occurred on Nisan (or Abib) 14.

In 325 A.D. the Emperor Constantine convoked an assembly of bishops at Nicea in Bithynia to bring the professing Church into harmony with regard to the Passover-Easter controversy (Eusebius *Life of Constantine* 3.5-6). The controversy was between those in the East who

“asserted that the Jewish custom should be adhered to,” and the others who kept Easter Sunday. Also involved were variations on how Easter Sunday should be determined and how it should be observed (*Life of Constantine* 3.5). The council under his leadership agreed that it was “an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews.” He declared, “Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd...” (3.18). It was decreed that the Passover should be abandoned wherever it was kept and that the Roman custom of Easter Sunday should be followed by Christians everywhere (3.19-20).

Following the council, Constantine issued an edict against heretics, forbidding them to assemble at anyplace whatsoever and authorizing the confiscation of their property (*Life of Constantine* 3.64-65). Although quartodecimans were not specifically mentioned as targets of the edict, they would have been included under the general designation of heretics. This status was confirmed and reinforced by the Synod of Antioch in 341 A.D. with the following words: “Whosoever, shall presume to set aside the decree of the holy and great Synod which was assembled at Nice in the presence of the pious Emperor Constantine, beloved of God, concerning the holy and salutary feast of Easter; if they shall obstinately persist in opposing what was [then] rightly ordained, let them be excommunicated and cast out of the Church” (*Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers - Series 2*, vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils, The Synod of Antioch in Encaeniis, The Synodal Letter*).

Afterward, it became not only increasingly unfashionable but difficult and dangerous to observe the Passover. We find that in the early fifth century there were, among those who disliked John Chrysostom, some who felt when he was deposed from his office as archbishop of Constantinople, that it was deserved, “because of the violence he had exercised in Asia and Lydia, in depriving the Novatians and Quartodecimans of many of their churches” (though that had nothing to do with his deposition, *Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus* 6.19).

Later in the same century, when Nestorius acceded to the bishopric of Constantinople, he declared to the emperor, “Give me, my prince, the earth purged of heretics, and I will give you heaven as a recompense. Assist me in destroying heretics, and I will assist you in vanquishing the Persians.” As a consequence, Socrates Scholasticus remarks, “With what calamities he visited the Quartodecimans throughout Asia, Lydia, and Caria... I think proper to pass by in silence” (*Ecclesiastical History* 7.29).

A couple of centuries later the leader of a remnant of the true Church called “Paulicians,” Constantine of Mananali, was stoned to death, and a short time later his successor Simeon and many of his followers were thrown on a pyre and burned alive. Falsely accused by their enemies of being Manichaeans (a dualistic Gnostic heresy), the early Paulicians kept the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan and rejected idolatry and other unscriptural doctrines and practices that had become common in the great professing Church.

The “orthodox” emperors of the period decreed death to the “heretics” and to anyone who might give them a place to hide, and consigned their books to the flames. In the ninth century the empress Theodora, “...exerted herself beyond any of her predecessors against them

[the Paulicians]. Her inquisitors ransacked the lesser Asia, in search of these sectaries; and she is computed to have killed by the gibbet, by fire, and by sword, a hundred thousand persons” (Isaac Milner, *History of the Church of Christ*, second edition, p. 208; cited in *The Protestant*, vol. 2, no. 1).

Such persecutions destroyed the populations of the faithful practitioners of apostolic Christianity in areas where they had flourished for hundreds of years. The Catholic historian Hefele wrote that by the eighth century “the Quartodecimans had gradually disappeared” (*History of the Councils*, vol. 1, p. 329). In reality however, as other sources tell us, and as Jesus Christ had said would happen (Revelation 12:6), the remnant of the Church of God had fled into the wilderness areas of parts of Europe and Asia, where it continued to keep the New Covenant Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan through the long night of persecution which continued more or less unabated until about the seventeenth century or later. Today there are still thousands, possibly tens of thousands, scattered around the world, who keep the New Covenant Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan (Abib), following the command and example of Jesus Christ, rejecting the apostate, popular, heathenized, false Christianity which teaches for doctrine the commandments of men (Matthew 23:23-31; Mark 7:6-13; Luke 11:42-44; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Chapter 11

Bede

Among those who have correctly understood the proper date for the New Covenant Passover, some have made the erroneous assertion that in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of England* is found support for the idea that many Christians in Britain were keeping the Passover on the fourteenth as late as the seventh century. It's important that we understand and speak the truth concerning this matter. The false assertion is based on some comments found in Bede's history that have been taken out of context and misunderstood. For example, Bede quotes Pope John IV, writing to the Scots about 640, "...some in your province... reject our Easter... and contend the same should be kept with the Hebrews on the fourteenth of the moon" (trans. A. M. Sellar, 2.19). The Pope's complaint was *not* that some Scots were keeping Passover instead of Easter, but concerned how to calculate when Easter Sunday should be kept.

Problems inherent in coordinating the solar Roman calendar with the Hebrew lunar-solar calendar had resulted in differing methods of calculating the date of Easter Sunday. Rome did not settle on a consistent method until 457 A.D. Meanwhile, Easter was celebrated on different Sundays in different places. "...when the Pope promulgated the Victorian cycle [in 457], the British and Irish churches continued with their cycle of 84 years" (*The Encyclopedia Americana*, "Easter," 1949 edition, vol. 9, p. 507; cf. Bede *Ecclesiastical History* 2.2). Moreover, as Bede wrote, the Scots and Britons "...thought that the day of the Resurrection of our Lord ought... to be observed between the 14th and 20th of the moon" (2.4). This meant that when Sunday of Easter week fell on the 14th, it would fall on the same day as the Passover, and this was something Rome had decided must not happen. This occasional celebrating of Easter Sunday on the fourteenth is the specific practice of the Scots objected to by the Pope in his letter. Hence Bede related that Pope John instructed the Scots that "Easter Sunday is to be found between the fifteenth of the moon and the twenty-first" (2.19).

Bede relates that the northern Scots and the Picts of the time believed they were following the writings of Anatolius in their manner of celebrating Easter (not Passover, 3.3). Anatolius (d. c. 280) was a Catholic bishop who wrote a treatise on how to calculate Easter. Although he admitted that the Apostle John kept the Passover on the fourteenth, regardless of the day of the week on which it fell, Anatolius rejected that practice in favor of keeping Easter Sunday whenever it fell between the 14th and the 20th, inclusive, of the first month in which the 14th came after the vernal equinox, i.e., the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox (*The Paschal Canon of Anatolius of Alexandria, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, pp. 278-279, 284). Note that Anatolius reckoned Easter Sunday to be on the 14th if the 14th of the moon after the equinox fell on Sunday evening (*ibid.*, pp. 275-277).

In commenting on the character and deeds of the Scottish bishop, Aidan (d. 651), Bede disapprovingly wrote, "...he always celebrated Easter, not as some falsely imagine, on the fourteenth day of the moon, like the Jews, on any day of the week, but on the Lord's day, from the fourteenth to the twentieth of the moon" (3.17). At the so-called Synod of Whitby (664) the issue was, in Bede's words, "that the Scots celebrated Easter Sunday [not Passover] contrary to the custom of the universal Church" (3.25). Defending the Scottish practice,

Bishop Coleman (who had succeeded to Aidan's bishopric) claimed he was following the teaching of the Apostle John. But Wilfrid, the priest speaking for the Catholics, retorted, "Thus it is plain, that you, Coleman, neither follow the example of John, as you imagine.... For John, keeping the Paschal time according to the Mosaic Law, had no regard to the first day of the week, which you do not practice, seeing that you celebrate Easter only on the first day after the Sabbath" (3.25). Subsequently Coleman appealed to the authority of Anatolius in his defense, whose teachings I commented on earlier. It is not valid to portray the controversy Bede wrote about as a contest between defenders of the Biblical Passover and proponents of the Easter Sunday tradition.

Chapter 12

Conclusion

Although we must not base our doctrines and practices concerning Passover exclusively or even primarily on extra-Biblical evidence, nevertheless, three important facts stand out from the historical record:

(1) The Passover sacrifice was originally killed in the evening of the fourteenth and eaten in the nighttime of the fourteenth, in strict accordance with Scripture. The Pharisaic custom of eating the Passover on the fifteenth became prevalent less than two centuries before Jesus Christ's death.

(2) The apostolic Church kept the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan, and did not keep Easter Sunday.

(3) It was almost if not altogether universally accepted in the immediate centuries following Jesus' death that he died on Passover afternoon, the fourteenth of Nisan.

As far as the Biblical teachings themselves are concerned, I hope the explanations I've presented will help remove any and all confusion on the question at hand. I've demonstrated that the Scriptural teaching is clear and consistent, when properly understood. The only real question that remains is will we follow God's instructions, or the customs and traditions of men which run counter to his command? God help us to faithfully follow his instructions.

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