

# PASSOVER

Millions of years ago, long before the earth was even created, God the Father and the one who became Jesus Christ agreed a plan which would increase and extend their family. Now that plan must have taken some thinking out, because holy and righteous character, which the family of God must possess, cannot be created, - it has to be chosen and learned, for it entails free choice and the rejection of evil. Not only that, but the cost of mankind's sin needed to be covered, and we can thank Jesus Christ for volunteering to pay the penalty for the sins of those He would later create.

Very much later but still some 3500 years ago, God delivered his chosen people Israel from captivity in Egypt by a series of plagues upon their captors which culminated in the death of the firstborn humans and animals in Egypt, unless they were protected by the blood of a special lamb.

Exodus 12:1-14

“And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month *shall be* unto you the beginning of months: it *shall be* the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of *their* fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take *it* according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take *it* out from the sheep, or from the goats: **And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.** And they shall take of the blood, and strike *it* on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast *with* fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it; *with* your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it *is* the LORD'S passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye *are*: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy *you*, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.”

Notice that a lot of these verses begin with “and” - thus linking them all together into one event. The account continues in Exodus 12:21-23

“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that *is* in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite *you*.”

The Passover then, is a memorial, a memorial of the passing over of the Death Angel, which took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> Abib.

Leviticus 23 lists all of God's Holy Days, starting with the weekly Sabbath. In Leviticus 23:4-5 God explains that Passover contains a holy commanded assembly for God's people. -

“These *are* the feasts of the LORD, *even* holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. In the fourteenth *day* of the first month at even *is* the LORD'S passover.”

1 Corinthians 5:7 adds the extra information we need - “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:”

The first passover lambs were only temporary symbols pointing toward the time when Jesus Christ, God now born as man, though the creator of all, would allow His blood to be spilled to cover all the sins of mankind. Without this special sacrifice mankind would never gain eternal life,

Romans 6:23

“For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This sacrifice, permitting our forgiveness for sin, is the first stage of the Plan of God for mankind, which is completely depicted by the 7 annual holy days listed in Leviticus 23. Only when we keep these days faithfully does God allow us to come to a deeper understanding of that plan, as the years go by.

As late as AD 93-94 when Josephus was recording the customs of the time, he wrote – “ Whence it is that we do still offer this sacrifice in like manner today, and call this festival PASCHA, which signifies the Feast of the passover, because on that day God PASSED US OVER, and sent the plague upon the Egyptians; for the destruction of the first born came upon the Egyptians that night ....” **Antiquities of the Jews Book 2** Chapter 14, section 6.

However, he also adds later, in talking about a particular siege :- “As this happened at the time when the feast of unleavened bread was celebrated, which we call the passover.” – **Book 14 chapter 2** section 1.

So, the traditional naming of both feasts as “the passover” was a later development.

That explains why the following quote has been applied mistakenly to Abib or Nisan 14, when Jesus was killed : “So these high priests, upon the coming of that feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour (3pm) till the eleventh (5pm) .....” Josephus, WARS OF THE JEWS Book 6 chapter 9. Section 3.

So, we cannot rely on this quote from Josephus to prove that the Jews sacrificed lambs in the temple at 3pm on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Indeed, they had a rule that any sacrifices on an afternoon, on a day falling before a sabbath, (and that would include the 15<sup>th</sup> – a High Sabbath) should be sacrificed one hour earlier ie. 1.30. so even if they did sacrifice on the 14<sup>th</sup> it would not have been at 3pm. However it seems more likely that if any lambs were sacrificed in the temple at all this would have taken place on the 13<sup>th</sup>, so that all ate their lamb on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Philo, a contemporary of Christ and a Jewish historian states that the passover lambs were slain at the houses of the Jews during Christ's time before the destruction of the temple. He states that the passover was “called by the Hebrews in their own tongue, the Pasch on which the whole people sacrifice, every member of them, WITHOUT WAITING FOR THE PRIESTS, because the law has granted to the whole nation for one special day in every year the right of the priesthood and of performing the sacrifice themselves.”

De Decalogue, Page 159.

No wonder some of God's people have become very confused about Passover because of the Jews. It is hard to believe, but when I asked a young Jewish student of mine what he was doing on the 14<sup>th</sup>, he did not know anything about it because the Jews have totally dismissed the 14<sup>th</sup> Abib from their religion. Passover, to the

Jews now means the 7 days of Unleavened Bread from the 15<sup>th</sup> –21<sup>st</sup>, which of course also confuses two stages of God’s plan.

Part of the reason for this is that in AD70 the Romans drove the Jews out of Israel and destroyed the Temple. As the Jews were only ever permitted to sacrifice the Passover lambs within the bounds of an area around Jerusalem, this meant that the commands relating to the 14<sup>th</sup> were forgotten, and the sacrifices of the lambs on the 14<sup>th</sup> became confused with the sacrifices that had taken place on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

We, however know that the 14<sup>th</sup> is the Passover. All the instructions relating to the Passover took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> – not just the killing of the lamb, unless we want to ignore God’s words and confound God’s plan.

Now just to be doubly certain that is so, lets read Numbers 33:3-4 “And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians. For the Egyptians buried all *their* firstborn, which the LORD had smitten among them: upon their gods also the LORD executed judgments.”

Israel lived in Goshen, with people scattered over that area, up to 20 miles from Rameses. Remember God’s word said they could not leave during the night – they must not go out of their houses till dawn. They kept that instruction. Exodus 12:28 “And the children of Israel went away, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.” At dawn on the 14<sup>th</sup> they traveled with their children and animals to Rameses, which took all that day. By the time they were organized by Moses it was night. Deuteronomy 16:1 “Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night.” The Egyptians were still busy burying all their dead.

It was not hard for them to see, because of the clear Egyptian skies and the fact that Abib 14 is always a full moon.

Psalm 81 verse 3 (in the original Hebrew ) says – “sound ! lyre and melodious harp tambourine and strike! music begin! for Feast-of-us on-day-of at-the-full-moon horn-of-ram at the New-moon”

In the NIV this is written as – “sound the ram’s horn at the New Moon, and when the moon is full, on the day of our Feast” **and** it is still almost full on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Common sense should tell us that it is impossible to have all the previously mentioned events occur on one night, the night of the 15<sup>th</sup>, as some have been led by the Jews to believe.

This understanding is also clearly and definitively confirmed by God’s word. Mark 14:12 in the original Greek says – “ And to the first day of unleavened cakes when the passover they were sacrificing” Here is proof firstly, that the Jews were sacrificing their lambs even as Jesus walked with His disciples into Jerusalem, as he gave them instructions to prepare the passover meal early on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>. This is biblical proof that backs up what Philo told us in his history.

All this however falls into insignificance before the undeniable words of Jesus himself in Luke 22:7-20 -

“Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the **passover**, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the **passover** with my disciples? And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the **passover**. And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this **passover** with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide *it* among

yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”

What greater evidence can a Christian have than these quite clear and specific statements of our Saviour .Note He repeated them 4 times in order that there should be no doubt remain in our minds.

Jesus could not remain sinless and lie. To reject these words, these red letter words of our Saviour, would be to make His sacrifice for us worthless.

These words also prove that the trial of Jesus took place that same night, and that was not several days gap between that Passover meal and his death on the day part of Passover the following afternoon. These words throw a huge spanner in the works of those who would have us follow the traditions of men. Mark 7:8-9

“For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.”

So, now that we have proved from God’s word that the true Passover occurred on the 14<sup>th</sup>, should we still keep it on that same time, the early 14<sup>th</sup>, today? Let’s go back to Luke 22, this time to verse 19 -

“ And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.”

Yes, says Christ, we should keep it, with the altered symbols of the bread and wine, signifying Christ’s body and blood, sacrificed for us, as the true lamb of God.

How often should we keep it ? 1 Corinthians 11:25 “ After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.”, and verse 2 “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered *them* to you.”; which ordinances ? Exodus 12:14 “And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.” Christ was keeping Passover, just as he always did, with his disciples.

But, some would say, these ordinances are for the Jews - gentile Christians don’t need to keep them! Wrong. They were not given to the Jews but to the whole of the 12 tribes of Israel, and most countries in NW Europe are descended from Israel. Secondly, there are many references throughout the N.T. to the gentiles being told to keep these holy days, or, to them keeping them -1 Corinthians 5:7-8 “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.”

Obviously, the Plan of God is not just for the Jews, but for ALL mankind! Here of course Paul was addressing the church in Corinth which was mainly Greek and so gentile.

So, brethren, I hope I have cleared up any questions you may have had. There is one question I have been asked about the TIME of Christ’s crucifixion. Turn to John 19:14 “And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!”

Now we are told in several scriptures that Christ was crucified at 9.00am, so how come this seems to show that he was brought before Pilate at noon, the sixth hour – for don’t the Jews count from the start of the night, and the start of the day at 6am. Some have reasoned that if Christ was brought before Pilate at noon, his trial took more than 9 or 10 hours and therefore his last meal would not have been a Passover meal on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Lets look at the Greek inter-linear translation of the New Testament, the Emphatic Diaglott and read a footnote at the bottom of page of John 1 -- which is referring to verse 39 -

“Now it was the way of the ancients to divide the day into twelve hours, and the night into as many. The first hour of the day was an hour after the sun rose, and the twelfth was when it set. This was the way in Judea, and to this the other Evangelists adhere but **St John appears to have reckoned the hours as we do**, from midnight to noon, and again from noon to midnight. And it may be observed, that he mentions the hour of the day oftener than any other evangelist: as if with design to give his readers an opportunity of discerning his method by comparing one passage with another. If the time here intended was that which we may call Jewish, (to distinguish it, not from the Greek and Roman which were the same with the old Jewish, but from the modern; the tenth hour was about four in the afternoon or two hours before the day ended in Judea; with which time neither the words nor circumstances of the narration seem to agree. For the words *they abode with him that day*, rather imply, that they spent a good part of the day with him. Therefore the most responsible account of this tenth hour is, that it was ten in the morning.”

Well, I hope that solves that one, but brethren I believe there is an extra lesson for us here. Jesus has given us specific guidelines that can be applied when we are in any doubt about doctrine. 1 Peter 2:21 “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:”

We are not to look to theories or traditions of men when in any doubt, no matter who they are. Instead we are to look to two sources – the written word of God, and the living example of Jesus Christ.

We don't need anything else brethren, for these alone can provide our sure foundation. May God grant us the faith to believe our Saviour.