

# WHEN SHOULD THE PASSOVER BE OBSERVED?

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(All quotes are from the "The New Kings James Version of the Bible")

The question as to what night the Passover should be observed often arises around Passover time from year to year. Historically, the Churches of God accepted that the Jews kept the Passover on a different evening than that of the Exodus and Jesus before His crucifixion. We now see a few of those churches debating and changing their observance of Passover and their definitions of the marking of the beginning of a day at sundown. In addition, some have their own unique calendar calculations. There are many individual opinions on how and when to keep God's Holy Feastibles. But what do the scriptures actually say? Let us look at just this one question, when should we observe Passover?

Proving when Passover should be kept is not difficult at all. It can be proved from one chapter alone in the Bible, Exodus 12. While reading one scripture alone out of context can be misleading, when you put all the scriptures together, the ones in Exodus 12 along with the rest of the Bible, it is clear when God intends that we should keep the Passover in relationship to the Days of Unleavened Bread.

**Exodus 12:6 Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.**

In Exodus 12:6 it is stated that the Passover lamb was to be kept up until the fourteenth day of the first month. We can deduct from this scripture that the Passover lamb was not to be killed on the thirteenth. The congregation was to kill it on the evening of the fourteenth, or as many recognize, the Hebrew literally means between the two evenings. Many argue as to when this is, the beginning of the fourteenth right after sunset, or near the end of the fourteenth, just before sunset and the beginning of the fifteenth of the month Abib. However, if the Passover lamb was to be killed and eaten on the fifteenth, would not this scripture state that the lamb was to be kept until the fifteenth? This is not the case. "Keep it until the fourteenth day" in verse 6 indicates the lamb was to be kept alive until the fourteenth day began and then was to be slaughtered for the Passover meal that same evening. If we continue to read this chapter the answer of exactly which day the Passover lamb was to be eaten will become clear.

**Exodus 12:8 Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it.**

God commanded the Israelites that they were to eat the Passover lamb "on that night". Here we are not worried about the definition of what "between the evenings" means. The "night" time portion of a Biblical day can only be associated with one particular day at a time, there is no confusion. This verse says "Then they shall eat the flesh on that night". What night does "that night" refer to? Most should concur that it refers to the Biblical day last mentioned in this context, that of the fourteenth as stated in verse 6.

**Exodus 12:11 And thus you shall eat it: *with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It *is* the LORD's Passover.**

Those who want to argue about which day the Passover is on seem to concentrate only on the unclear scripture relative to the slaying of the Passover lamb between the two evenings. This is only half the story. The eating of the Passover lamb is just as important. In fact, God specifically states in this verse that the eating of the lamb is the Lord's Passover. Obviously, the whole occasion of slaying the lamb and eating it is all part of Passover. But again, notice God's emphasis in this verse -- the eating of the lamb is stated as the "Lord's Passover." When one realizes that the eating of the Passover lamb originally occurred on the fourteenth and that all other scriptures in the Bible state that the Passover is to be kept on the fourteenth, there is no confusion as to when the

Passover lamb must be slain, it must be slain before it can be eaten.

**Exodus 12:22** And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that *is* in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning.

An important point that has been made in the past is that on the night of the first Passover, the Israelites were not to leave their homes -- not until the next morning where they able to leave them and go outside.

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

The Bible states that at midnight, God smote the firstborn of Egypt. This was the night of Passover, and though it does not state so directly, it will be obvious to those who will read the Bible simply for what it says, that all this happened on the night of the fourteenth. This will prove to be true after reading the related scriptures in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The night of the Passover, the slaying and eating of the lamb, God passing over the Israelites because of the blood on their doorpost and the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn all occurred on the same night. This was not the night when Israel left Egypt, the next night, as we shall see. This was the night of the fourteenth.

Verses 39 through 41 describe the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn, Pharaoh calling for Moses and telling him to take the Israelites and leave Egypt, the Israelites “spoiling” the Egyptians of their wealth, getting ready to leave and then actually starting their journey out of Egypt. All of this took some time, the preparation during the daylight portion of the fourteenth and the departure on the evening of the fifteenth as we see by reading verse 42.

**Exodus 12:42** It *is* a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This *is* that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.

Verse 42 states that God brought Israel out of Egypt on a night of solemn observance. So we have another major event that the Bible clearly shows occurred at night, the departure from Egypt. It is impossible for the two major events described in this chapter to have occurred on the same night. The eating of the Passover Lamb had to occur on one night when the Israelites were not to leave their homes, the same night God "passed over" the Israelites and slew the Egyptian first born. The second event also occurred during the night, the night when God brought Israel out of Egypt. These events occurred on two subsequent nights. This would be two different dates on the Hebrew calendar. The only question then is which two? We could possibly stretch things and come up with three choices if one wants to debate which actual dates these two events occurred on. They would be the nights of 13/14 or 14/15 or 15/16. When you think of it that way, it should narrow the selection down to only one spiritually correct decision without even looking at the other scriptures.

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

God states here that the Passover is “on the fourteenth day of the first month”. We have seen from Exodus the twelfth chapter that the Passover includes the killing of the lamb and the eating of that lamb. Passover begins at twilight as the thirteenth comes to a close, the Passover lamb is slain and then eaten, all on the fourteenth. Verse six states that the first day of Unleavened Bread is on the fifteenth – nothing relative to Passover is associated with the fifteenth, only the beginning of the seven Days of Unleavened Bread.

**Numbers 9:2-5** Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it.” So Moses told the children of Israel that they should keep the Passover. And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, at twilight, in the Wilderness of Sinai; according to all that

**the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did.**

The key phrase here is “According to all its rites and ceremonies”. Does Passover only include the slaying of a lamb? No! All of its rites and ceremonies included the roasting of the lamb, eating the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, burning any leftovers before morning. When is the Passover and all its rites and ceremonies to be observed? As it is stated everywhere in God’s inspired word, “on the fourteenth”. When does it begin on the fourteenth? At twilight, at the beginning of the fourteenth. If Passover was to be on another day it would have been so stated as in “on the fifteenth at twilight”. But this is never the case. Those who argue about what the Bible means when it says “between the two evenings” and want to keep Passover on the night of the fifteenth have no scriptural support. They would have to kill and eat the Passover lamb, or partake of the Passover symbols that Jesus Christ gave us, at the close of the fourteenth and quickly finish before the fifteenth began. But this they do not do. And that is not acceptable as we have already seen that the Passover was to be eaten during the “night” time portion of the fourteenth as first observed in Exodus 12. Verse 5 again states that Passover is “on the fourteenth”, yes, at twilight, but twilight of the fourteenth, not twilight on the fifteenth.

**Numbers 9:10-12 Speak to the children of Israel, saying: If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or is far away on a journey, he may still keep the LORD’s Passover. On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it.**

A “second Passover” for those on a journey or defiled was instituted in these verses. There was no “second Days of Unleavened Bread”. The person on a journey or defiled was to keep the seven day feast of Unleavened Bread always in the first month no matter their location or situation. The point being, there is no Holy Day on the fifteenth of the second month upon which to eat the “second Passover”. The “second Passover” was to be kept on the fourteenth day of the second month. The “second Passover” with its instructions that state the Passover lamb was to be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs according to all the ordinances of the Passover help prove that no part of the Passover can take place on the fifteenth.

**Numbers 28:16-17 On the fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover of the LORD. And on the fifteenth day of this month is the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days.**

“On” the fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover. “On” the fifteenth day of the same month begins the feast for seven days. Passover and the first day of Unleavened Bread, a Holy Day, are always mentioned in the Old Testament as separate events on separate days. Confusion arises when following what the Jews did in New Testament times because they did not follow these Biblical instructions. We should obey the instructions of God’s inspired word, not the customs of the Jewish religion when they differ from the Bible.

**Numbers 33:3 They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians.**

The Bible states that the children of Israel departed from Ramses on the fifteenth, “on the day after the Passover.” Exodus 12:42 quoted above clearly states Israel left Egypt during the night time portion of the Biblical day. It should be easy for anyone who will simply accept what the Bible says word-for-word that the Passover is on the evening and night of the fourteenth and that the “night of solemn observance” celebrating the departure from Egypt is on the night of the fifteenth. These two events are closely related to each other but they are two separate events with no overlap in their timing – they are sequential over a two day period.

**Deuteronomy 16:1 Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night.**

We see again that God brought Israel out of Egypt by night (and we remember God forbid the Israelites to leave their homes on the night of the Passover on the fourteenth). There are no dates mentioned in this chapter which summarizes the three “pilgrimage feast” – the specifics of all seven feasts and holy days is not detailed in this chapter. The first few verses of this chapter describe both the Passover and leaving Egypt by night which

begins the seven days of eating unleavened bread without mentioning any calendar dates.

**Deuteronomy 16:6 but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt.**

God commands that the Passover lamb be sacrificed “at the going down of the sun”. The Jews who keep their Passover on the fifteenth do not slay the Passover lamb at the going down of the sun. From many historical references we learn that the Jews would sacrifice the Passover lambs starting as early as noon and continuing until around 6 pm. The Jews departed a long time ago from what God stated regard this matter. Reread this verse. Can there be any doubt when the Passover is to be sacrificed? God is very specific about when the Passover is to be sacrificed, “at the going down of the sun”. The Jews and their liberal interpretation of between the two evenings ignore this plain and very clear scripture that leaves no doubt. And to repeat an important point once again, the Passover lamb was to be eaten on the same night as it was slain, the night of the fourteenth. The only Biblical conclusion one can come to is that the slaying of the Passover lamb must be at the going down of the sun at the beginning of the fourteenth, not at the end of the fourteenth. The phrase “at the time you came out of Egypt” can refer to one of two things. One, referring to the overall time period when Israel came out of Egypt, or, two, that Israel left Egypt at the same time in the evening as when they had eaten the Passover the night before, but obviously on two different nights as we have clearly seen from the previous scriptures. The Bible does not contradict itself.

**2 Chronicles 35:1 Now Josiah kept a Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover lambs on the fourteenth day of the first month.**

As we have seen from many scriptures, the Passover lambs were slaughtered on the fourteenth. The word “day” is in italics as is “lambs”. Most Bible students realize this convention is used in many Bible translations to indicate that the word in italics is not in the original Hebrew or Greek, but has been added by the translators in their attempt to make the translation more readable according to their understanding of the scriptures. The original Hebrew in this verse simply states “... and they slaughter the Passover-offering on the fourteenth of the first month.” (*Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible*)

**2 Chronicles 35:14 Then afterward they prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron, were busy in offering burnt offerings and fat until night;...**

The slaughtering and eating of the Passover lamb and burnt offerings went on for many hours into the night. Which night was this? Verse 16 combined with verse 1 of the chapter answer this question.

**2 Chronicles 35:16 So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD, according to the command of King Josiah.**

The slaughtering of the lamb, the burnt offerings, the eating of the Passover lamb and burnt offerings all took place “the same day”. Verse one tells us which day that was, “the fourteenth.”

There are many other scriptures in the Bible about the Passover. Many do not give a date for the keeping of the Passover, they just describe what happened on this religious event. Those that give a day for the observance all state that the Passover was kept on the fourteenth. See Joshua 5:10, 2 Chronicles 30:15; Ezra 6:19; Ezekiel 45:21

**John 13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, ...**

In the old Kings James version of the Bible this scripture might seem to be saying that Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples before the Feast of the Passover. However, most modern translations give a more proper rendering of this verse.

**Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible: And before the feast of the passover, Jesus knowing that his hour**

**hath come, that he may remove out of this world unto the Father, ...**

**New Living Translation: Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father.**

**Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament: Now Jesus having known, before the feast of the passover, that his hour was come,**

This verse is not saying that Jesus ate the Passover meal before the Passover, but that before He ate the Passover meal, He knew that His death would occur on the day of this Passover.

**Matthew 26:17 Now on the first *day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread* the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?"**

We must be careful when reading the four gospel accounts of Jesus keeping the Passover and His crucifixion. Note again the words "day of the Feast" are in italics and not in the original Greek. When you read this scripture without those added English words it makes more sense – the first time unleavened bread was eaten was at the Passover meal on the fourteenth. To the Jews that kept Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, the total period is eight days. Just as many of us tend to think of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread as one large occasion with several important events, so did the Jews of Jesus' day. Because the language of Exodus 12:18 and other scriptures state unleavened bread must be eaten with the Passover, plus the seven days of Unleavened bread, many tended to think of an eight day period of unleavened bread and they commonly referred to and called the whole eight day period as either Passover or the Days of Unleavened Bread. Leavened bread is commanded to be absent from our homes for only the seven days of the feast. But unleavened bread must be eaten on the Passover night of the fourteenth. Leavened bread could be eaten and could be in the home on the fourteenth, but with traveling to Jerusalem by many for Passover, their homes would be free of leaven before they left, eight or more days.

This is a simple matter and there has never been any confusion as to understanding the timing of this scripture relative to the beginning of the first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread a day later. *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament* states in his comments on this scripture: "As the feast of unleavened bread did not begin till the day after the passover, the fifteenth day of the month, Leviticus 23:5, 6; Numbers 28:16, 17, this could not have been, properly, the first day of that feast; but as the Jews began to eat unleavened bread on the fourteenth, Exodus 12:18, this day was often termed the first of unleavened bread. The evangelists use it in this sense, and call even the paschal day by this name. See Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7." *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*: "The feast continued "eight" days, including the day on which the paschal lamb was killed and eaten, Exo. 12:15. That was the fourteenth day of the month Abib, answering to parts of our March and April." *Life Application Bible Commentary: Matthew*: "The Passover took place on one night and at one meal, but the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was celebrated with it, would continue for a week. The first day of the feast was technically the day after Passover, but the two were combined because they occurred in the same month. Thus, this was either Wednesday night (the day before Passover) or Thursday of Jesus' last week (the night of the Passover meal). Two main questions emerge. First, *was this Last Supper a Passover meal?* Most likely it was. In John, Jesus seems to have this meal on the evening before Passover. But the synoptic writers (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) identify this meal as a Passover meal (Matthew 26:18; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-16). Certain descriptions in the Gospels indicate that this was a Jewish Seder:"

While many Bible commentators can figure out that Jesus kept the Passover on the fourteenth as described in Exodus 12, they seem to have difficulty understanding that not everyone was keeping the Passover at the same time. Why they assume there was total religious unity on these topics back then when there is none in this day and age is something to wonder about. And of course, many commentaries get the days of the week wrong regarding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and all related events.

Bible commentaries are quoted in this article mainly for their historical perspective. We should trust in the scriptures themselves for our understanding, not the commentaries. Commentaries, however, can add interesting facts and points of view. Often they miss the point or are just plain wrong in their understanding of the scriptures. With the variety of commentaries and with the current proliferation of the internet, among all the different points of views written in these mediums, an individual can search and likely find someone else who agrees with their point of view no matter how divergent that view might be.

**Matthew 26:19-20 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve.**

*Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament:* states relative to verse 20: "It is a common opinion that our Lord ate the passover some hours before the Jews ate it; for the Jews, according to custom, ate theirs at the end of the fourteenth day, but Christ ate his the preceding even, which was the beginning of the same sixth day, or Friday; the Jews begin their day at sunsetting, we at midnight. Thus Christ ate the passover on the same day with the Jews, but not on the same hour. Christ kept this passover the beginning of the fourteenth day, the precise day and hour in which the Jews had eaten their first passover in Egypt. See Exodus 12:6-12. And in the same part of the same day in which the Jews had sacrificed their first paschal lamb, viz. between the two evenings, about the ninth hour, or 3 o'clock, Jesus Christ our passover was sacrificed for us: for it was at this hour that he yielded up his last breath; and then it was that, the sacrifice being completed, Jesus said, IT IS FINISHED."

Most of the Churches of God have correctly understood that in the year of Jesus' crucifixion, the first Holy Day was on a Wednesday night/Thursday day. Jesus kept the Passover on the previous Tuesday night, then went to the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives around 9 pm and prayed until around midnight, was arrested by the Jews shortly thereafter, tried by the Jews during the darkness of what we call Wednesday morning, taken before Pilot during the day light portion of early Wednesday morning, crucified around 9 am on that Wednesday and died about six hours later at approximately 3 pm.

It should come as no real surprise that the Jews kept the Passover at a time other than what God originally commanded. Just as we today see different groups from the Churches of God and even the original large body of the church changing the observance of Holy Days and doctrines, so did different groups of religious Jews have different beliefs and doctrines. There were three major religious groups at the time of Jesus: the Sadducees, the Pharisees and the Essenes; and they all had slightly different views and customs relative to the religious practices of the Torah or what we call the Old Testament. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Matt 22:23, Acts 23:8). It is fairly well known these different Jewish groups kept Pentecost on different days. It should then be no real great surprise that Jesus and His disciples and the New Testament Church of God kept the Passover at a different time than many or most of the Jews, they kept it as God originally gave it and commanded it to be kept forever.

Jesus and His disciples kept the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth. Jesus was crucified on the daylight portion of the fourteenth, and died around three hours before sunset and the beginning of the first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread, which is the beginning of the fifteenth. This, as we know, was after He had given what we refer to as the New Testament symbols for the Passover the evening and night before. Jesus did not die "between the two evenings" or "at the going down of the sun". We must also remember the Israelites were commanded to offer the daily sacrifice, a lamb in the morning and a lamb in the evening. Many references fix the time of these sacrifices around 9 am and 3 pm.

**Mark 15:30 Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him.**

**Mark 15:33-34 Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**

From Mark 15 we see that the crucifixion of Jesus began around 9 am as we count time today. Darkness covered the land from noon until 3pm at which time Jesus died. It would seem that Jesus was crucified around the time of the morning sacrifice and died around the time of the evening sacrifice. Why God the Father chose to have the timing of the events of Jesus' last day of this earth occur as they did, we cannot reason why. All we can do is read the scriptures and accept what we read.

In this day and age shortly before the "Second Coming" of Jesus Christ we must contend for the faith originally delivered to the saints. This includes how the Passover was originally kept for over 40 years in the Church of

God. As has been shown from the scriptures of the Bible without arguing over the Hebrew and Greek or other scholarly studies, the Passover sacrifice was killed as the sun went down at the beginning the fourteenth of the first month. The Passover meal was eaten the night of the fourteenth. The Israelites left Egypt at night on the fifteenth, and in following years, observed this momentous occasion as a night of solemn observance, or as we call it today “the night to be much remembered / observed”.

It should also be remembered that the Jews as a whole rejected Jesus Christ as their savior, their spiritual Passover lamb. They did not recognize Him as such when He came to this earth born of a woman. Part of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah can be directly related to the fact that they rejected God's instructions on the proper keeping of the Passover. You cannot reject God's instructions on how to keep a feast of God and spiritually expect to understand what it represents, nor be aware of its literal fulfillment.

When will you keep Passover? As given by God in Exodus 12 and observed by our Savior Jesus Christ? Those whose' eyes and ears are spiritually open should have no problems proving that the Passover is on the fourteenth. Let us hope and pray that our eyes and ears are not closed to these truths as clearly stated in God's inspired scriptures.