

Did Jesus Observe the Passover on the Fourteenth?

Was the meal that Jesus ate with His disciples, on the night of the fourteenth, on the eve of His death, a Passover meal? It was at that meal that Jesus presented the bread and wine as symbols of His death that are to be used at the Passover ceremony. However, the meal that Jesus ate with His disciples on the night of the fourteenth was several hours before “...Christ our Passover [was] sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus died at the ninth hour (about 3:00 P.M.) on the fourteenth day. His death was required before we could “...have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

Do you see a problem here with the order of these events? How can the Passover ceremony be held before the Passover is killed? The children of Israel never once ate the Passover sacrifice before it was slaughtered and prepared. However, some people say that we are to observe the Passover on the eve of the fourteenth, which is approximately eighteen hours before His death.

The Eternal’s plan follows a logical order of events. Observing the Passover before the death of the Passover is not a logical order. In fact, it is an impossibility to observe the Passover before the death of the Passover. Without the death of the Passover there cannot be a Passover ceremony, because the sacrifice is the focal point of Passover. No sacrifice—no Passover!

When something is out of order we need to ask questions—not just accept it because that is what we have been taught. We are going to examine the events that occurred on the fourteenth day of the first month, to see if the meal that Jesus ate with His disciples was indeed a Passover meal.

On the night that He was betrayed, Jesus “...took bread: and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in **remembrance** [364, *a memorial*] of Me...Also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, **This is the new testament in My blood**: this you do, as oft as you drink it, in **remembrance** [364] of Me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, **you do show the Lord’s death** till He come” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Jesus stated that the bread and wine were to be **memorials of His death**. A memorial of one’s death **has to be after he is dead**, but Jesus was very much alive when He made that statement. Therefore the bread and the wine that He presented at that time were to become memorials of His death **after He died**, which did not happen until the ninth hour (about 3:00 P.M.) the following afternoon.

What day did God establish to be a memorial of Passover? We have to look to the ordinance of the Passover in the Old Covenant to make that determination. In Egypt, after performing the Passover sacrifice, the people were to “...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” (Exodus 12:7). Obviously they could not place the blood of the sacrifice around the entrance of their dwellings while the sacrificial animal was still alive. After preparing the Passover they were to eat the “...flesh in that night, roast with fire, and **unleavened bread**...” (Exodus 12:8).

The shed blood of the Passover sacrifice was crucial to the Passover ceremony, for the Eternal said, “...I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt...**And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where you 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” (vv. 12, 13). The shedding of blood prior to the Passover ceremony was absolutely necessary before the Eternal would pass over them.

“**And this day shall be to you for a memorial** [2146, *a remembrance*]: and you shall keep it a feast to the LORD...**by an ordinance forever**. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread...And in the first day there shall be **a holy convocation**...” (Exodus 12:14-16). The day established as a memorial is the fifteenth. “**And on the fifteenth day**...is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD: seven days you must eat unleavened bread. **In the first day you shall have a holy convocation**...in the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation...” (Leviticus 23:6-8).

The Passover ceremony was established as a memorial of the events that took place that night in which they were released from the bondage of Egypt (sin). “**Remember** [2142, *a memorial*] **this day, in which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage**: for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out...there shall **no leavened bread be eaten. This day you came out in the month Abib**” (Exodus 13:3, 4).

What was the “strength of hand” that brought them out? “By strength of hand, the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt...” (vv. 14, 15). On the night of Passover, Pharaoh “...called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among [8432, *the midst, middle of anything*] my people, both you and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD...” (Exodus 12:30, 31).

On what day did they begin their journey out of Egypt? “And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the **fifteenth day** of the month; on the morrow [4283, *next day, morning*] after the Passover the children of Israel went out with a high hand **in the sight of all the Egyptians**” (Numbers 33:3).

The fifteenth was established as a memorial of the death of the Passover. On that night the children of Israel were released from the bondage of Egypt (sin), because of the **blood of the Passover**. The sacrifice of Jesus fulfills this. “In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

On the night of the fourteenth Jesus said, “This is the New Testament in My blood...” Jesus’ statement was pointing to His death, “For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be **the death of the testator**. For a testament is of force **after men are dead**: otherwise it is of **no strength at all while the testator lives**” (Hebrews 9:16, 17).

Jesus’ death had to **precede** the instituting of the New Covenant. The bread and wine are symbols of our agreeing to the terms of the New Covenant. “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains **no more sacrifice for sins**” (Hebrews 10:26). The person who turns away from the covenant to which he has agreed, “...has counted the **blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing...**” (v. 29).

The blood of the Passover sacrifice and the covenant are inextricably tied together. Without the shedding of blood the New Testament could not be instituted, “Whereupon neither the first covenant was dedicated without blood” (Hebrews 9:18). The wine that represents the blood of the covenant must be taken after the blood of the sacrifice was shed, because it symbolizes our agreeing to the covenant.

“Now the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed [2380, *sacrificed*] the Passover, His disciples said to Him, Where will you that we go and prepare [2090, *to make the necessary preparations*] that you may eat the Passover?” (Mark 14:12). Did Jesus’ disciples slaughter and prepare the Passover sacrifice?

In Jesus’ day the Passover sacrifices were being performed at the temple. The “...priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover...slay their sacrifices, from the **ninth hour** to the eleventh...”¹ They began to slay the Passover sacrifices at the exact time of Jesus’ death. (Is that just a coincidence, or did Jesus’ death fulfill the timing of the Passover sacrifices perfectly?)

There is an argument that, like as in Egypt, the sacrifices were to be performed at home by each family, and the Passover sacrifice was never intended to be a temple service. First of all, the children of Israel did not have a priesthood or a temple in Egypt; therefore it was impossible for it to be a temple service in Egypt. However, after bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, the Eternal established the priesthood, and the tabernacle/temple service.

The Eternal’s instructions were, “You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates...But **at the place which the LORD your God shall choose to place His name in**, there you shall sacrifice the Passover...” (Deuteronomy 16:5, 6). Where did God place His Name?

At the dedication of the temple Solomon prayed, “That Your eyes may be open toward this house [*the temple*] night and day, even toward the place of which You have said, **My name shall be there...**” (1 Kings 8:29). That is where the sacrifices were to be performed.

¹ William Whiston, translator, *Josephus*, 12th printing 1974, Kregal Publications, p. 588.

King Hezekiah held a Passover in Jerusalem, at the temple, and “...**according to the law** of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of the hand of the Levites...**the Levites had charge of the killing of the Passovers...**” (2 Chronicles 30:16, 17). King Josiah also held a Passover, “And they killed the Passover, and the priests sprinkled the blood from their hands, and the Levites flayed them” (2 Chronicles 35:11).

According to the Scriptures, the Passover sacrifices were performed at the temple by the priests and the Levites. Jesus’ disciples were not priests or Levites, and were not qualified to perform sacrifices at the temple. When they went to prepare for the Passover they were making sure that everything was ready, but they were not killing and preparing the Passover.

Jerusalem became filled with pilgrims who had come for the Passover festival, so the disciples asked a logical question about where they were going to eat the Passover. If they had waited until the night of the Passover observance it would have been too late to find a place to observe the Passover. They had to make preparations well in advance of the Passover meal. This is actually an indication that the Passover meal was not on that night.

“And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. And He said to them, **With desire** [1939, *a longing for what is forbidden*] I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: for I say to you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:14-16). *Strong’s* 1939 is used thirty-six times in the New Testament, and it always means that which is forbidden. It is often translated as lust, which is forbidden by the commandment, “You shalt not covet...” (Exodus 20:17). It can also mean a longing for something that is good, but is unobtainable at that time.

The apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians, we “...endeavored to see your face with great desire [1939]. Wherefore we would have come to you, even I Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered [1465, *impeded, prevented*] us” (1 Thessalonians 2:17, 18). To the Philippians Paul said, “For I am in a strait between two, having a desire [1939] to depart and be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you” (Philippians 1:23, 24). In both instances, that which Paul desired was good, but it was not possible at that time.

Why was Jesus forbidden to eat Passover? Because He was going to be the Passover sacrifice that year, and He would be both dead and buried before the Passover meal would have taken place.

The meal that Jesus ate on the night of the fourteenth was not the Passover supper, because it was “...**before** [4253, *in advance of*] the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end, and supper **being ended...**” (John 13:1, 2).

Some Bible versions have it “during supper,” or similar variations, but it is stated that the supper was “before the Feast of the Passover.” This fits perfectly with the timing of the Passover

sacrifices that were to begin about 3:00 P.M., which would place the Passover supper on the next night—the fifteenth.

On the night of the fourteenth Jesus was taken prisoner, and He was taken before the high priest (John 18:12-14). Later, “...led they Jesus from Caiaphas to the hall of judgment; and it was early [4405, *early morning*]; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they **might eat the Passover**” (v. 28). By early morning on the fourteenth the Passover had not yet been eaten.

Pilate said to the Jews, “I find in Him no fault at all...will you therefore that I release to you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying not this man, but Barabbas...Then Pilate took Jesus, and scourged Him” (vv. 38-40; 19:1). After having Jesus scourged Pilate brought Him out again, and Pilate “...sat down in the judgment seat in a place called the Pavement...And it was the preparation [3904, *day of preparation*] of the Passover and about the sixth hour...” (John 19:14).²

The sixth hour here is still early morning, and it is called the preparation day of the Passover. *Strong's* 3904 is used six times in the New Testament, and it is always used of the fourteenth, which is the preparation day for the annual holy day on the fifteenth (Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42).

After Jesus had been crucified, “The Jews therefore, because it was the **preparation**, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath was a high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away” (v. 31). The Sabbath spoken of here is the annual holy day on the fifteenth.

Conclusion: The meal that Jesus ate on the eve of His death was not the Passover. The bread and the wine which He presented were to be a memorial of His death, which did not occur until the following afternoon. You cannot have a memorial of someone's death before he is dead. The fifteenth, which followed shortly after Jesus' death and burial, was established to be a memorial day, as are all of God's holy days. Each one of them is a holy convocation, i.e. a commanded assembly where our presence is commanded by the authority of God. God has never established any common day (a day that is not holy) to be a memorial. The fourteenth is not a holy day, and therefore it is not a memorial day. There is no holy convocation on it. Since God does not command an assembly on the fourteenth, then by whose authority is the fourteenth a commanded assembly?

² The times given in the Gospel of John vary from the Synoptic Gospels and the Book of Acts, because it was written long after the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., and the Hebraic method of keeping time was no longer being used. Also, John wrote his message to non-Jews, who were not familiar with the Hebraic time or the temple ceremonies. The sixth hour is not noon as it would be in the Synoptic Gospels, but it is still early morning.