

Did Jesus Fulfill the Timing of the Passover Sacrifice?

Many believe that the Passover lambs were sacrificed at twilight under the Old Covenant. However, Jesus, who fulfilled the Passover sacrifice, died at the ninth hour, which is about 3:00 P.M. There is a discrepancy of about twenty-one hours between the two times. That is almost a full day. Why is there such a big discrepancy between the two times—or is there?

The Hebrew phrase “Ben (between) Ha (the) Arbayim (evenings)” is used eleven times in scripture. Many versions of the Bible interpret the phrase as twilight. However, as we shall see, the interpretation of twilight is incorrect. It is important that we understand the correct meaning of this phrase if we are going to correctly understand the timing of the Passover sacrifice, and by extension the timing of the Passover ceremony.

The first place that “between the evenings” is used in scripture is Exodus chapter twelve. This chapter is where the ordinance of the Passover was established. “This month shall be to you...the first month of the year to you...In the tenth day they shall take to them every man a lamb...without blemish...And you shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening [lit. *between the evenings*]” (vv. 2, 3, 5, 6).

Jesus was the fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice, “...For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:6). Christ “...is a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). Jesus died on the fourteenth day of the first month—at the ninth hour (Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46).

In the New Testament the Hebrew day was divided into twelve equal hours from sunrise to sunset. “Are there not **twelve hours** in the day?” (John 11:9). The sixth hour of the day was at the zenith of the sun (solar noon). The ninth hour was the midpoint between noon and sunset, which would be approximately 3:00 P.M. as we calculate time today.

Did Jesus fulfill the Passover sacrifice in every way except the time of His death? Is it possible that the phrase “between the evenings” and the ninth hour mean the same time of day? We are going to see how the phrase “between the evenings” is used in scripture.

We will begin with the incense offerings that were performed daily at the tabernacle/temple. The altar of incense was placed in front of the veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place (Exodus 30:1-6). “And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every **morning**: when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at even [lit. *between the evenings*], **he shall burn incense upon it**, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations” (vv. 7, 8).

The incense offering symbolizes the prayers of the saints. “And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand” (Revelation 8:3-5).

The times of the incense offerings were called the hours of prayer. Zacharias, “...while he executed the priest’s office before God...According to the custom of the priest’s office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of people were praying without **at the time of incense**” (Luke 1:8-10). This account does not give a specific time, but there are other accounts that do.

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple **at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour**” (Acts 3:1). There is also the account of “...Cornelius, a centurion...a devout man, and one that feared God...and prayed to God always. He saw in a vision evidently about the **ninth hour** of the day an angel of God coming to him...” (Acts 10:1-3). In his recounting of this event to Peter, he said, “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and **at the ninth hour I prayed in my house...**” (v. 30).

The connection between the offering of incense “between the evenings” and the hour of prayer at the ninth hour is made clear by these scriptures. Now we are going to look at the example of the daily offering.

“Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar; **two lambs** of the first year, day by day continually” (Exodus 29:38). Two lambs were to be offered **every day**. “The one [259, *one, or first*] lamb you shall offer **in the morning**; and the other [8145, *double, second, again*] lamb you shall offer **at even** [lit. *between the evenings*]” (v. 39).

The same sequence is repeated in verses 40 and 41. The instructions for the daily offering are repeated again in Numbers 28:3-8. Four times morning is used for the first lamb, and four times between the evenings is used for the second lamb. God is emphasizing the order of the offerings by repeating it four times.

Let us do some critical thinking here. Two lambs were to be offered each day. The first lamb was offered in the morning. In order for the second lamb to be offered **on the same day, it had to be offered before sunset**. Between noon and sunset is the afternoon portion of a day. As a type of the Passover sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the first lamb was offered in the morning and the second lamb was offered in the afternoon, i.e. between the evenings.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ began at the third hour. “And it was the third hour, and they crucified Him” (Mark 15:25). The third hour is the midpoint between sunrise and noon. It corresponds to approximately 9:00 A.M. The morning offering represents the beginning of the

crucifixion. The second lamb that was offered “between the evenings” represents the death of Jesus at the ninth hour, the midpoint between noon and sunset.

The daily offering was a type of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and He fulfilled the timing of it perfectly. The purpose of the sacrifices was to reveal the sacrifice of Jesus Christ far in advance of His fulfilling of them. They offer proof that He is the Messiah.

If “between the evenings” is interpreted as twilight, then Jesus did not fulfill the daily offering, because the crucifixion would have had to have been from about 9:00 A.M. to twilight. If you take the offerings out of order, as some do, the crucifixion would be from twilight to morning. Neither of those scenarios fits anything in scripture, and they certainly do not reveal the Messiah.

Evening is not limited to the period of time after sunset, because it can, and often does, mean the afternoon portion of a day. “Prepare you war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe to us for the day goes away, for the **shadows of the evening are stretched out**” (Jeremiah 6:4). Prior to noon the shadows cast by the sun become shortened. After the sun crosses its zenith at noon, the shadows begin to lengthen until sunset, when they cease. The evening in verse four is obviously the afternoon.

The first evening begins just as the sun crosses its zenith at solar noon, which is when the sun begins its descent, and the second evening is at sunset. These are called the two setting times. The Biblical definition of “between the evenings” is the midpoint between noon and sunset, which corresponds to the ninth hour in the New Testament, which is also the midpoint between noon and sunset.

“In the fourteenth day of the first month at even [lit. *between the evenings*] 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**. In the first day you shall have a **holy convocation...**” (Leviticus 23:5-7).

What event took place on the fourteenth day between the evenings? “And you shall keep it [*the Passover lamb*] up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening [lit. *between the evenings*]” (Exodus 12:6).

Leviticus 23:5 is not referring to the Passover ceremony, in which the Passover was eaten with **unleavened bread**, but rather to the sacrifice on the afternoon of the fourteenth. “And **they shall eat the flesh in that night**, roast with fire, and **unleavened bread**; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it” (v. 8). The killing and preparation of the lambs would have taken them well past sunset and into the fifteenth day, which is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and it is a holy convocation.

The Bible never specifically commands a holy convocation on the 14th, prompting many who believe in a 14th Passover to wonder why Passover is not a holy convocation. The plain truth is

that the Passover ceremony is on the fifteenth—a holy day—and it is a holy convocation! Furthermore, it is a day of Unleavened Bread, and we are commanded to observe the Passover with unleavened bread. Everything in God’s plan follows a logical sequence. Therefore when we follow God’s instructions, everything is done in a logical order, and it presents a perfect picture of His plan of salvation.

Did Jesus fulfill the timing of the Passover Sacrifice? Yes, His sacrifice fulfilled the scriptures perfectly.