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Dear Dr. Ruhn,

People keep asking me about that Passover change in Mr. G.T.A.'s new book, and I put the blame on the Systematic Theology Project researchers. Can you help me?

Did Jesus actually move the Passover (lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs) back 24 hours so that He could observe it (or that section of it) with His disciples that year of the Crucifixion? Then where is the expression of surprise that should have come from Peter? And what of the statement in John 13:29, "For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag (was the treasurer--Fenton), that Jesus had said unto him, buy those things that we have need of against the Feast." I'm quoting this from Mr. H.W.A.'s article in the April 1954 Good News entitled What You Should Know about the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. It is obvious that the disciples were still planning to eat "the Feast" the following night!

Surely the Jews were wrongfully eating their Passover Lamb 24 hours late on the night of the Feast, hence the term in John, "Jew's Passover". Just as they wrongfully accused and caused the death of Jesus 24 hours late. But note that statement with regard to Judas. These disciples knew that what they were eating was not the Feast; the money reserved for the Feast had not been spent it was still early enough in the evening (dusk) for Judas to go out and buy things for the "Feast" of the Passover season.

If our view all these years has been correct, note the sequence of events. Judas is told to do quickly what he intends to do. This is the moment that Jesus gives His life for mankind. It is still early enough to be "between the two evenings". Satan enters into Judas and thus Satan is the real betrayer. And it is only because of the wickedness of that generation that His life is allowed to continue through suffering and persecution till 3 pm.

In Egypt, the Death Angel struck at midnight on the 14th. In 31 A.D., Judas (Satan) returns at midnight on the 14th, and death could have been inflicted on the Passover Lamb at that time. But more hours of mental anguish plus physical punishment are intended instead.

Contrast the Jewish method of killing an animal. The sharpest knife, no torture, no apprehension, a quick and certain death by the draining of the blood. Note now the Gentile method, strangulation. Note that Jesus on the cross would have suffered death by strangulation had not a Roman in mercy (and certainly at God's direction) brought death to Him in an instant. Note that His accusers should have been the first to stone Him, that unconsciousness and death would then have come quickly, but here false accusers, and an unjust trial, and at night, and the High Priest tears his clothes; all illegal. Dr. Hoeh covered the trial of Jesus well in an article in the Good News.

Do some insist that the children of Israel left Egypt the same night that the Death Angel struck. Neither Jerusalem nor Babylonian Talmud (the sections available to me at the moment) allow that; both insist that they stayed in their houses until sunup, then burned the inedible portions of the Passover lamb.

Consider the implications of Israel leaving almost immediately after midnight. The Scripture states the opposite in a double fashion. "Thus did ~~the~~ the children; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they." Exodus 12:50. That alone is proof that they obeyed the entire sequence of instructions. Add the fact that if they had taken off in haste during the night without waiting for sunrise to burn the leftovers, these would have been left for the dogs and hyenas and maggots of Egypt; surely the Egyptians did not clean up after their slaves! And this Sacrifice, the one portraying man's Creator . . .!

The main problem scholars face is this tradition of the Jews of killing the Passover lambs at 3 in the afternoon of Nisan 14. Does this practice fulfil the commands of Moses and Aaron? The rule of the Rabbis as stated in the Talmud is that if scholars disagree, then go back and accept what it plainly seems to say.

Let's review the sequence of events and see whether anyone during the time of the Exodus would have waited 21 hours after the arrival of Nisan 14 to kill the lamb.

1) Select an unblemished lamb on the 10th. Obviously the selection and close examination will be during the daytime portion of the 10th. In the New Testament parallel, Jesus was accepted by the people as He rode toward Jerusalem, a voice from Heaven approves Him, and the Hellenistic Jews "examined" Him closely. Thus we have a daytime examination and approval, though the anointing was the previous evening as Nisan 10, the weekly Sabbath also, began.

2) Keep that lamb "up until the fourteenth day", which would surely mean sunset at the completion of Nisan 13 in any common understanding, and especially since a supper is going to be involved. (Nothing takes place on the 13th, despite the statement of one in Pasadena that "the evidence for Nisan 13-14 is quite weak". I'm baffled how Nisan 13 got into the discussion.) Jesus was "kept" at Bethany by a worthy family Nisan 10 till Nisan 14, spending daytimes in Jerusalem, yet avoiding a premature death. The priests said, "Not on the holy day" and Jesus knew "Not until the 14th".

3) "Kill it in the evening" or "between the two evenings". Scholars in any age might begin at this point to debate exactly what the term two evenings might mean. But to the hungry laborer, the humble carpenter, and to the butchers, the instruction is obvious. And the Talmud says that the "plain" obvious meaning is to be accepted where there is confusion among the learned.

Quoting again from Mr. B.M.A.'s article (p.29) "They kept it UNTIL--not after--the 14th day of the same first month, AT EVEN, at DUSK as the Jewish translation has it --between the two evenings, or between sunset and dark, when it was killed."

The butchers did not dabble that evening. They killed the selected Passover lamb, not at a precise moment but "between the two evenings" or "in the evening". One would suppose that the killing and roasting of the lambs was done rather promptly; suppertime was approaching. They did not stand around the lamb with a wicked hungry look in their eyes for 21 hours, like the Pharisees of 31 A.D.

4) "Eat the flesh in that night . . . roast with fire . . . unleavened bread . . . bitter herbs." Note that this is not a "Feast", it is not a time of rejoicing or celebration, but participation in a Sacrifice that in some manner yet to be understood by them was to make them free men. Nor was that Last Supper for Jesus with His disciples a joyous occasion. Rather a time for sober reflection. And for us also.

January 22, 1978

5) Then note the night of the 15th, the night they left Egypt after having spoiled the Egyptians throughout the daytime of the 14th. They demanded wages for their long service, and as promised to Abraham came out "with great substance". Genesis 14:14. This was a night to celebrate and they had a feast at the Egyptians' expense at Succoth. But the Pharisees' feast of 31 A.D. was spoiled by "blood on the moon" (a partial lunar eclipse) following the sun's turning black, and with "blood", innocent blood on their hands. Repentance for some would come on the day of Pentecost. (Wouldn't it take time to pack the treasures of Egypt?)

Israel went out of Egypt "armed", or in an orderly fashion like a well mannered army; they did not flee Egypt as an undisciplined mob in the early hours after the Death Angel struck. Millions of people, millions of cattle, sheep, goats, geese, ducks, chickens had to be organized into this procession before they could leave the night of the 15th just after sunset. It had to be the following night, they had seen the Egyptians burying their dead during the daytime between. It was the haste of the Egyptians "lest we be all dead men" that urged Israel to hurry.

You are certain to have objections from many many of the older Members of God's Church who have had such thorough teaching under Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong in those earlier years. It is only they who ask me, and I don't rightly know how to properly answer them.

Having had a hand in this area of teaching for so many years, and especially in the production of the Sacred Calendar and related items, I would want to be among the first to review my own beliefs and convictions.

Is there anything you can send me by way of explanation for this apparent doctrinal change. Had I been appraised of the fact that it was being discussed and allowed to study the objections raised, I would have presented research on it earlier.

Sincerely,

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P.S. The above material is in addition to the article in that issue of the Good News. In reading it and in rereading each quote in its context, there seems no room to doubt the accuracy of our belief of these many years.