

# The Passover Controversy

by Michael Burman and Les Chapman

**W**E WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN THIS article by asking the reader a question: On which day of the month is the Lord's Passover?

There are some who believe that the Passover is to be kept on the fourteenth day of the first month (Nisan), while others claim that it should be observed on the fifteenth. But who is right? Which day of the month reflects the correct biblical teaching? Is it the 14th of Nisan or the 15th?

Our intention is to confirm the biblical teaching of 14th Nisan as being the correct date on which to observe the Passover, and to prove why 15th Nisan is an unbiblical date for the observance of this festival. With an open mind let us carefully review this solemn Feast Day. As with all biblically-related subjects it is important to begin our study after having established an accurate premise.

With this in mind let us look into the Bible to find out the date that it gives for the observance of Passover.

## 14th versus 15th

"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 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... So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance" (Exodus 12:6, 14).

An important aspect in regards to

the killing of the lamb is mentioned here. God commanded Israel to kill the lamb at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. The English word twilight has been translated from the original Hebrew word עֶרֶב (*ereb*, Strong's Concordance, entry no. 6153), which means *dusk, evening, or sunset*. Dusk occurs at the going down of the sun (sunset) or between the two evenings (Deuteronomy 16:6).

In Genesis 1:5 we are told that: "God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day." The English word evening has also been translated from the same Hebrew word *ereb*, which means dusk or sunset.

So the beginning of each new day, according to the Bible, is at *sunset* (not midnight or sunrise). An evening followed by a morning make up one complete 24-hour day. It is important to remember that in God's calendar each new day begins in the evening.

Let us now examine Numbers 9:2-3, which explains: "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."

Notice carefully that the children of Israel were to keep the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight. We have already established that the English twilight has been translated from a Hebrew word meaning dusk, and the book of Genesis revealed that one complete 24-hour day begins at the going down of the sun (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The children of Israel

would have killed their lambs between the end of the 13th day and the beginning of the 14th day.

This is confirmed in Leviticus 23:4-6, where it says: "These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. 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." The Bible clearly states that the Passover occurs on the 14th day of the first month at twilight. The Bible does not say that the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are together to be kept on the 15th.

Now there are some who will say that the children of Israel actually killed their lambs between the evening that marked the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th. However, each new 24-hour day begins in the evening; therefore, if the children of Israel had killed their lambs between the evening ending the 14th and beginning the 15th, they would have observed the Lord's Passover on the 15th day of the first month and not the 14th day as God had instructed.

After each household had killed a lamb, God commanded the people, saying: "And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it... For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike

all the firstborn in the land of Egypt... Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:7–8, 12, 13).

After God, via Moses, had explained to the children of Israel

Passover.

However, the lamb is at times referred to as the Passover, but only because it was slaughtered on the day of the Passover, i.e. the day on which God had passed over the houses of the children of Israel.

If the lamb had not been sacrificed and its blood had not been put on the two door posts and on the lintel of their houses, the Passover would not have occurred, and their firstborn would not have been delivered from death. The Passover sacrifice took place during the twilight period ending the 13th day of the month and beginning the 14th day, whereas the actual Passover was not until midnight on that night of the 14th (Exodus 12:29).

To deny the 14th day of the first month as being the correct date on which to observe Passover is to openly reject the inspired word of God. Notice very carefully what the Bible says about Israel’s eventual departure from the Egyptians: “They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the month; on the day after the Passover...” (Numbers 33:3).

When did the children of Israel finally depart from the land of Egypt? We are told that they departed from the land of Egypt on the 15th day of the month. Was that the day of the Passover? No! It was not. It was the day after the Passover.

It figures then, that if the day after the Passover is the 15th, then the day of the Passover must be the 14th. Therefore the correct date on which to observe the Passover is the 14th, not the 15th day of the first month.

### The Eating of Unleavened Bread

Why did God command the children of Israel, saying: “Then they shall

eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it” (Exodus 12:8)?

Those who claim that the Passover is on the 15th have used the above Scripture to substantiate their belief. Because the children of Israel were commanded to eat unleavened bread on the night of the Passover meal, some individuals are now teaching that the Passover meal must have been eaten on the night of the 15th, the first annual Holy Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But after carefully examining all relevant Scriptures pertaining to the night of the Passover meal, there is no solid proof of that meal ever having taken place on 15th Nisan.

Leviticus 23:4–6 explains: “These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. 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.”

Notice that the Passover is not the 15th, but the 14th. And notice, too, the feast mentioned here is not the 14th (though the Passover is elsewhere called a feast), but the feast day is the 15th.

Therefore the Passover cannot be identified as one of the seven days of Unleavened Bread. The Holy Bible confirms the date of the Passover as 14th Nisan, and explains very clearly that 15th Nisan, the day after the Passover, is the Feast of Unleavened Bread — seven days (Numbers 28:16–17). But there are passages of Scripture that appear contradictory.

In Luke 22:7 we read: “Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed.” This passage of Scripture appears to be saying that the Passover sacrifice

***If the day after the Passover is the 15th, then the day of the Passover must be the 14th***

that the Passover lamb was to be killed at dusk on the 14th day, He then told them to put some of the blood on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they were to eat it.

They were to eat it roasted that night. But what night is the Bible referring to? Was it the night of the 15th? No! It was not. Why? Because God had commanded them to observe the Passover on the 14th day, not the 15th.

### The Lamb and the Passover

Let us now consider the claim, by some, that the lambs which the Israelites slaughtered were the Passover. Does the Bible refer to the killing of the lamb as the Passover? Speaking of the Passover we read: “And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households...’” (Ex. 12:26–27).

The lamb is here referred to as “the Passover sacrifice”, not the

was killed on the 15th. But why? It is true that by New Testament times the Jews did kill the Passover lamb between the evenings of the 14th and 15th. After killing their lambs on the evening ending the 14th they would then enter their houses and prepare the Passover meal on the night of the 15th. But why did they eat the Passover meal on the night of the 15th? Biblical history provides us with an answer.

One can be somewhat more precise in estimating the time when the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread were combined into one festival. This event is connected to the centralization of the Israelites under Josiah, king of Judah (c. 640–609 BC).

That is reflected in the Deuteronomic tradition of the Pentateuch. Josiah's Passover (2 Kings 23:21–23; 2 Chronicles 35:1–19) is described as unique since the most ancient times, and the Deuteronomic ordinances (Deuteronomy 23:1–8) insist that the feast must be celebrated at the Jerusalem Temple.

Josiah had made the shepherd Passover a pilgrimage festival as well, and since it nearly coincided in time with the Feast of Unleavened Bread — and also in its connotations, the latter recalling the hardships of the Israelites' flight — the two were eventually held to be parts of one festival. (*New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 10, page 1069).

According to the above quote the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread — originally two separate feast days — were combined into one festival. Instead of killing the Passover lambs between the evenings of the 13th and 14th, the time of the sacrifice was moved forward so that the lambs could be ceremonially immolated at the Jerusalem Temple. Because of the

time involved in the actual killing of the lambs and the various ceremonial rituals that were performed afterwards, the Jews decided to wait until the daylight part of the 14th before slaying the lambs.

The remainder of the lambs would finally have been killed between the evenings of the 14th and 15th, shortly prior to the first annual Holy Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, page 664, explains:

But basically the Passover referred to the eve of the first day, the fourteenth day of the month (Leviticus 23:5, etc.), on which the sacrifice of the Passover lamb took place, while the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6, etc.) applied to the seven days following.

This indicates a recollection that there were two separate units or feasts in the single complex of observances. But this distinction was not carefully kept (cf. Luke 22:7). Because the two observances fell at the same time, and also because the Passover proper lasted only a single night, this was almost impossible. E.g., the removal of leaven had to be completed before the slaying of the Passover sacrifice took place (Deuteronomy 16:4); and the term "Passover" was used for all the festival days (Deuteronomy 16:2–3; Ezekiel 45:21–25).

Quoting again from the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*:

The oldest Biblical allusions to the festival (Exodus 23:15; 34:18) do not mention the name Passover but enjoin the keeping of the Feast of Unleavened Bread for 7 days in the spring month Abib (the old name for Nisan). Since in the later text this observance forms part of the Passover festival, it is gener-

ally held that two originally distinct feasts were combined into one. (Vol. 10, page 1068).

The original Passover sacrifice, and the eating of it was formally kept on 14th Nisan, 24 hours prior to the festival of Unleavened Bread which was held on 15th Nisan.

In later times it [the Festival of Unleavened Bread] included three rites which appear to have been originally distinct: (1) the paschal meal, or Passover proper, (2) the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread, (3) the wave offering of the first sheaf (omer). (*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 5, page 864).

The Passover sacrifice was clearly in the evening between the 13th and 14th Nisan, and the Passover meal was eaten on the night of the 14th until it was wrongly moved forward by 24 hours to provide enough time to sacrifice the lambs and perform all of the various ceremonial rituals within the Jerusalem Temple. In New Testament times the Passover victim was ritually slaughtered in the Temple, but the meal could be eaten in any house within the city bounds.

After the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, any possibility of slaughtering the victim in ritual manner utterly ceased, and the Jewish Passover reverted back to the family festival it had been in the earliest days — the wheel had turned full circle. (*New Bible Dictionary*, page 938).

### Christ — our Passover

We shall now provide an answer to our earlier question. Why did God command the children of Israel to eat unleavened bread on the night of the Passover? We read in the New Testament: "Knowing that you were

not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Revelation 5:6, 12 reveals: “And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, stood a lamb as though it had been slain... ‘Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing!’”

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 5:7 we read: “...For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”

There is a link between Christ — our Passover Lamb — and the original Passover sacrifice which is essential for us to recognise. The Old Testament Passover lamb was sacrificed on the night of 14th Nisan and its blood was put on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where it was to be eaten. Then, on that night (14th) at midnight the death angel passed through the streets killing the firstborn of the Egyptians. But God passed over the houses of the Israelites where the blood from the lamb was and delivered their firstborn from death. The original Passover was a temporary institution foreshadowing the prophesied death of Jesus Christ.

When we repent and accept the sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness and remission of our sins, and are baptised for the receiving of the Holy Spirit, then God passes over our iniquity and delivers us from the penalty of sin — death. Therefore, the Old Testament Passover lamb was to be eaten with unleavened bread because of what it was symbolically representing.

It was symbolic of Christ, who was without sin (1 Peter 1:19). Since leavened products are a symbol of sin (1 Corinthians 5:7–8), the

children of Israel were commanded to eat unleavened bread on the night of the Passover meal because the lamb that they were eating was representative of Christ, who was unleavened — i.e. without sin. As Christians today we are not required to sacrifice a lamb on the night of the Passover (Matthew 26:26–28; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

Our Passover sacrifice — Christ — died once so that the whole of mankind (Romans 6:10) could have an opportunity of being freed from the penalty of sin. As ancient Israel was commanded to eat unleavened bread during the Passover meal, so Christians today are to do likewise (Luke 22:15–19).

### Night of Passover Meal

We shall now review the time of Israel’s exodus from Egyptian captivity.

Beginning in Deuteronomy 16:1, we read: “Observe the month Abib [Nisan], 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.” The above Scripture undoubtedly reveals that God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt by night. This is important to note, because, establishing the night on which God brought His people out of Egypt helps us to determine the night of the Passover meal.

Notice carefully what is mentioned in Exodus 12:8–10: “Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire — its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire.”

During the night of the Passover the children of Israel roasted the lamb and then ate it with unleavened

bread and with bitter herbs. But after the Passover sacrifice had been eaten they remained in their houses until morning. This means that the children of Israel could not have been brought out of Egypt on the night of the Passover meal, and the Passover itself — i.e. the time God actually passed over the Israelite houses — have been on the 15th?

If it had been the night of the 15th, then the only night that God could have brought them out of the land of Egypt would have been the following night — 16th Nisan. Now notice what Moses explains to the people of Israel: “And Moses said to the people: ‘Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, in the month Abib... Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD’” (Exodus 13:3–4, 6).

God’s people were to eat unleavened bread on the night that He brought them out of Egypt. Seven days they were to eat unleavened bread. Again, if the Israelites had remained in their homes until morning, and if the Passover meal had been on 15th Nisan, the only night they could have gone out of Egypt would have been 16th Nisan. However, if they were brought out of Egypt on the night of the 16th they would not have been able to eat unleavened bread for seven days as God had instructed. God said that they were to eat unleavened bread for seven days, beginning on the night that He brought them out of the land of Egypt.

The Festival of Unleavened Bread began on 15th Nisan and continued over a seven day period (Leviticus 23:6) ending on 21st Nisan (Exodus 12:18). If ancient

Israel were brought out of Egypt by the night of the 16th they would only have had six days to eat unleavened bread, not seven days as God had commanded.

Remember, they were to eat unleavened bread for seven days, beginning on the night that God brought them out of Egypt. Beginning the seven-day count from the 15th, however, would have enabled them to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days. Therefore, the night on which God had brought the children of Israel out of Egypt must have been the night of the 15th.

The Bible plainly explains that the night of the Passover was the 14th, and that the night after the Passover, the night on which God brought them out of Egypt, was the 15th. The night after the Passover meal (15th Nisan) “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.” (Exodus 12:42).

### God Hardens Pharaoh’s Heart

Exodus 10:24–25, 27–29 provides us with additional information: “Then Pharaoh called to Moses and said, ‘Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you.’ But Moses said, ‘You must also give us sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we might sacrifice to the LORD our God.’ ... But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let them go. Then Pharaoh said to him, ‘Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!’ And Moses said, ‘You have spoken well. I will never see your face again.’”

Prior to the tenth and final plague to be poured out upon the Egyptians, God had hardened Pharaoh’s heart

so that he did not allow God’s people to leave the land. When Pharaoh had told Moses that he did not want to see him again, Moses replied by saying, “I will never see your face again.” This is a helpful passage of Scripture providing us with further proof rejecting 15th Nisan as the night of the Passover. This will become clear as you read on.

The Bible explains:

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. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, ‘Rise and go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also.’ And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, ‘We shall all be dead.’ (Exodus 12:29–33).

On the night of the Passover, after the Lord had struck all the firstborn of Egypt, Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron by night. But would Moses and Aaron have left their homes and personally received this message from the mouth of Pharaoh? The answer is most definitely no! God had already commanded His people, saying, “And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning” (Exodus

12:22). Clearly Moses and Aaron would not have gone outside the door of their houses, firstly because God had commanded them not to, and secondly because Moses had said to Pharaoh: “I will never see your face again”.

The message related from Pharaoh to Moses and Aaron would have come via a messenger. The Bible plainly reveals that God had brought His people out of Egypt by night (Deuteronomy 16:1). The chil-

***There is a link  
between Christ —  
our Passover Lamb  
— and the original  
Passover sacrifice***

dren of Israel began their journey on the night of the 15th. Numbers 33:2–3 explains: “Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the LORD. And these are their journeys according to their starting points: They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of the Egyptians.”

The children of Israel began their journey from Rameses the night of the fifteenth, the day after the Passover, and could not have begun their journey on the night which the Passover meal had been eaten. Therefore the night of the Passover meal, and the night on which God had passed over the houses of Israel, could not have been on 15th Nisan.

### Plundering the Egyptians

Let us now take a look at a misconception relating to Israel’s exodus from Egyptian slavery. We shall use

the old King James Version of the Bible to review this particular event, as the New King James Version can be misleading.

Turning to Exodus 11:1–3, we read: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians...”

It has been taught in the past that the children of Israel collected the articles of silver and gold prior to the night of the Passover meal. But is this biblically correct? Just what does the Bible reveal about this event?

Two questions come to mind after reading the above Scriptures:

1. When did Moses relate this information to the people?
2. When did God give the children of Israel favour in the sight of the Egyptians?

Firstly, Moses did not tell the people what the Lord had spoken until after Aaron and he had finished speaking with Pharaoh.

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. “...It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And

the people bowed the head and worshipped. And the children of Israel went away, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they” (Exodus 12:21–22, 27–28, King James Version).

Moses explained to them what they were to do with the Passover lamb and its blood. And all that Moses had told them to do, in regards to the Passover lamb, they went and did. Now remember that prior to the Passover meal God had hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he did not let the children of Israel go (Exodus 10:27–28).

God had said that he (Pharaoh) would only let them go after the death of the Egyptians’ firstborn. It was only after the Egyptians had witnessed the horror of that plague that they were willing to let the children of Israel go from among them. God knew that the spirit of the Egyptian people would be broken after the death of their firstborn.

Not until then did the Israelites have favour in the sight of the Egyptians. That is why God had said to them: “And thus shall ye eat it [the Passover sacrifice]; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste...” (Exodus 12:11, King James Version).

Then, on the morning of 14th Nisan, “the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men. And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading-troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such

things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.” (Exodus 12:33–36, King James Version).

The children of Israel plundered the Egyptians during the daylight part of the 14th before finally starting their journey from Rameses on the night of the 15th.

### Place of Israel’s Departure

Rameses, according to Scripture, was the place from where the children of Israel departed from the land of Egypt. Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset and David Brown’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible* explains: “Rameses... which was probably the capital of Goshen, and, by direction of Moses, the place of general rendezvous previous to their departure.”

The children of Israel had to leave their dwelling place in the land of Goshen and assemble themselves in the city of Rameses before their departure out of the land of Egypt. At this point it is important to note that Rameses was a supply city that had been built by the Israelites prior to the birth of Moses (Exodus 1:11). Situated near a border it was fortified in case of enemy invasion, and was not the residence of Israel prior to their journey out of Egypt.

The *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Jamieson, et. al.) states:

These two store places (Pithom and Raamses) were in the land of Goshen; and being situated near a border liable to invasion, they were fortified cities (cf. 2 Chron. 11–12). Pithom (Greek *Patumos*) lay on the eastern Pelusiac branch of the Nile, about twelve Roman miles from Heliopolis; and Raamses (also spelt Ramases), called by the LXX Heroöpolis, lay between the same branch of the Nile and the Bitter Lakes. These two fortified cities were situated, therefore, in the same valley; and the fortifications,

which Pharaoh (not Thothmes III, who is supposed to have been the king of Egypt at the time of the Exodus) commanded to be built around both, had probably the same common object, of obstructing the entrance into Egypt, which this valley furnished the enemy from Asia (Hengstenberg).

God's instructions to His people were: "And thus you shall eat it [the Passover sacrifice]: 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" (Exodus 12:11).

But why were they to eat the Passover sacrifice in haste, with their belt on their waist, sandals on their feet, and staff in their hands? It was because they had to collect articles of silver, gold and clothing from the Egyptians before meeting at the assembly point in Rameses.

When they were all gathered together, God organised His people according to their armies (Numbers 33:1) before they departed from Rameses on the night of the first annual Holy Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. "So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt..." (Exodus 12:17).

It is evident from Scripture that the children of Israel left their homes on the morning of 14th Nisan, then, after plundering the Egyptians, they made their way to the departure point at Rameses, from where they began their journey out of the land of Egypt, by night (Deuteronomy 16:1).

So prior to the night of the 15th, the children of Israel had been released from slavery and were free to leave the land of Egypt. But their journey out of Egypt (to eventually cross over the border) did not commence until the night of 15th Nisan. The word night in Deuteronomy

16:1 has been translated from the original Hebrew word לַיְלַה (layelah, Strong's Concordance no. 3915) which means "a twist (away of the light), i.e. night". In other words, no light was visible when they departed from Rameses.

But on the night of the Passover meal, God commanded the people: "...And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning" (Ex 12:22).

The word *morning* has been translated from the Hebrew word בֹּקֶר (boqer, concordance no. 1242) and means "dawn (as the break of day); generally morning:— (+) day, early, morning, morrow". Genesis 1:5 explains: "God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening [darkness of Night] and the morning [light of Day] were the first day." The word night here is the same Hebrew word used in Deuteronomy 16:1 (לַיְלַה layelah), and undoubtedly refers to total darkness.

The word *morning* in Genesis 1:5 is the same Hebrew word used in Exodus 12:22 (בֹּקֶר boqer), and undoubtedly refers to the break of day, a time when light is clearly visible. God's people were to remain in their homes during the darkness of night and were commanded not to go out of the door of their houses until the break of day, when light begins to appear. How, when Scripture clearly proves that the Israelites departed from Rameses on the night of 15th Nisan, could the Passover meal, and subsequently the time when God passed over their houses delivering their first-born from the plague of death, possibly have been on that same night?

### The Passover in Deuteronomy 16

In Deuteronomy 16:2–3 we read: "Therefore you shall sacrifice the

Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to put His name. You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, that is, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember

**The word "Passover" can relate to the victim or to the festival of Passover**

the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life."

But those who believe the Lord's Passover to be on 15th Nisan quote the above passage to substantiate their belief. But why? Their reasoning is based on the word Passover. Believing that the word Passover in this Scripture refers to the paschal lamb, it is inferred that the Lord's Passover is on 15th Nisan. Because the Scripture says that they "shall eat no leavened bread with it", and because of the statement "that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life", they conclude that the Lord's Passover cannot be on 14th Nisan.

The children of Israel departed from Rameses on the 15th day of the first month at night. Therefore, it is assumed, if the children of Israel came out of Egypt on the night of the 15th, and Scripture (Deuteronomy 16:2–3) says that they are to eat unleavened bread with the Passover for seven days, then the Lord's Passover must be kept on the night of 15th Nisan.

But that reasoning is based on a false premise, as we shall see from

the Bible. The Hebrew word פֶּסַח (*pecach*, concordance no. 6453), translated as Passover, means “a pretermission, i.e. exemption; used only technically of the Jewish Passover (the festival or the victim):— passover (offering)”.

Passover can relate to the *victim* or to the *festival of Passover* (i.e. the Days of Unleavened Bread). In the case of Deuteronomy 16:2 the victim was not the paschal lamb. The Israelites ate the paschal lamb the night God had passed over them, and in the morning whatever remained of the lamb they burned with fire (Exodus 12:8–10).

The Passover mentioned in Deuteronomy 16:2 was to be eaten with unleavened bread for seven days. How could the paschal lamb be eaten with unleavened bread for seven days when the remains of it had to be burned by fire the morning after it was eaten? The paschal lamb was sacrificed, roasted and eaten, and the remains burnt up in the space of one day.

Unleavened bread could not have been eaten with the paschal lamb for seven days.

The Passover mentioned in Deuteronomy 16:2 refers to the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and to the animal sacrifices offered to God from the flock and the herd during that seven-day period. Notice what the following quote has to say in regards to Deuteronomy 16:2, from the *Commentary on the Whole Bible*:

“[You shall] therefore sacrifice the passover” — not the paschal lamb, which was strictly and properly the passover. The whole solemnity is here meant, as is evident from the mention of the additional victims that were required to be offered on the subsequent days of the feast (Numbers 28:18–19; 2 Chronicles 35:8–9), and from

the allusion to the continued use of unleavened bread for seven days, whereas the passover itself was to be eaten at once. The words before us are equivalent to: “[you shall] observe the feast of the passover”.

The term Passover in Deuteronomy 16:2 does not refer to the paschal lamb, as has been proved, but rather to the animal sacrifices offered to God during the seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread, also referred to as the Feast of Passover. The paschal lamb was undoubtedly sacrificed on the night of 14th Nisan. It was eaten on that night, the same night that God passed over the houses of the children of Israel, and on the morning of 14th Nisan, the remainder of the lamb was burnt by fire. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was kept for seven days, starting on 15th Nisan, in remembrance of the day in which they came out of the land of Egypt.

The Bible makes no mention of the Passover meal as having taken place on 15th Nisan. The Bible unequivocally states: “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” (Numbers 28:16–17).

But, it could be argued, how could the Israelites have begun their journey at night? How would they have been able to see where they were going? Notice carefully: “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people” (Exodus 13:21–22).

On the night of 15th Nisan God provided His people with light from a pillar of fire, and led them out of

the land of Egypt in the sight of all the Egyptians.

### Christ — Our Example

We shall now reflect on some of the events which occurred prior to Christ’s death. “Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover... And He [Christ] sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat’” (Luke 22:1, 8).

On 13th Nisan Christ asked Peter and John to prepare the Passover lamb. The lamb would have been slaughtered between the evening that marked the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th. The disciples prepared the meal on the night of the 14th in a large upper room of Christ’s choice (verses 11–12).

“And when the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God’” (verses 14–16).

And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.

After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher,



have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.'

...When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and the disciples entered (John 13:2–5, 12–14; 18:1).

That night Christ was arrested (John 18:12), and in the morning He was scourged by Roman Soldiers (John 19:1). Then, at about 9:00 am He was crucified, and just before the first annual Holy Day of the seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread Christ's life came to an end (John 19:30–31). He was then buried before the night of the 15th, on the day the Jews call the preparation day.

"Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away...

But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs... Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby. (John 19:31, 33, 40–42).

Christ's eating of the Passover meal with His disciples and the washing of their feet was on the night of 14th Nisan. He was arrested that night, scourged during the early morning hours and then crucified. He died about the ninth hour (3 pm — see Matthew 27:46, 50), shortly

before the first annual high day Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

But why did Christ eat the Passover meal with His disciples on the night of the 14th? Was it because He changed the Passover from the 15th to the 14th? The answer to that is no — He did not. It was the Jewish authorities who changed the night of the Passover from the 14th to the 15th. We read in 1 Peter 2:21: "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."

Christ Himself said: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17–18). Christ fulfilled the law, which includes the Feast Days, by keeping the night of the Passover with His disciples on 14th Nisan. As Christians we are commanded to follow in His footsteps. Those who claim that the Passover is on 15th Nisan are not following the example of Jesus Christ.

The following quote mentions:

The synoptics represent the last supper as a paschal meal; the disciples "prepare the Passover" (Mark 14:12–16; Matthew 28:17–19; Luke 22:7–13), and in Luke 22:15 the supper is explicitly called a Passover meal, though none of the Evangelists mention the lamb. However, John places the supper on the evening before the Preparation Day, i.e., 24 hours before the Jews ate the Passover (John 13:1, 29; 18:28; 19:14, 31). This problem has received no completely satisfactory solution.

Since it is now known that the Qumran community (Asseetic sect of Jews who lived in the Judean desert near the Wadi Qumran along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea roughly 150 BC and AD 70) had a different calendar, it is possible that Jesus celebrated the Passover on a different day than the official Jewish usage. He may have per-

**Christ fulfilled  
the law by  
keeping the  
night of the  
Passover with  
His disciples on  
14th Nisan**

formed the paschal rite without using a lamb that had been ritually immolated in the Temple. (*New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 10, page 1071).

### Conclusion

We shall now conclude with a review of what has been discussed so far. The children of Israel were commanded to take one lamb per household and kill it in the evening between the 13th and 14th. They then took the lamb into their homes where they roasted it with fire and ate it that night (14th Nisan).

At midnight the death angel passed through the land of the Egyptians and all their firstborn were killed. But God passed over the houses of Israel and delivered their firstborn from death. During the early morning hours they burned the remainder of the lamb, and collected from the Egyptians

(who were by now urging them to go) articles of silver, gold and clothing. They then made their way to the assembly point at Ramases during the daylight part of the 14th, before moving out of Egypt on the night of the 15th. Then as God had instructed, they celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread — seven days.

But by New Testament times the Jewish authorities had moved the killing of the lambs forward to the daylight part of the 14th to provide enough time to slaughter them and to allow the priests ample time to perform the various ceremonial rituals within the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus Christ, however, knew that it was not necessary for their lambs to be ritually immolated in the Temple.

He was also aware that it was unbiblical for the people to eat the lamb on the night of the 15th. So He

told His disciples, during the daylight part of the 13th, to go and prepare the Passover sacrifice. So the disciples went into the city where they met a man who invited them into his home and showed them a large upper room where they could prepare the Passover meal. At sunset — in the evening between the 13th and 14th — they would have killed the lamb and then prepared the Passover meal.

That night (14th Nisan) Christ ate the Passover meal with His disciples. Knowing that He was soon to be killed He then went on to explain that they were no longer to sacrifice a lamb on the night of the 14th, but were to eat unleavened bread instead, which is representative of Christ's body, and to drink wine, representative of His blood (life) shed for the sins of mankind (Matthew 26:26–28).

After washing their feet and

commanding them to do likewise, He went out to the Mount of Olives. He was arrested that night, scourged during the early morning hours and then crucified. He died shortly before the night of the 15th. Christ ate the Passover lamb with His disciples on the night of the 14th and was sacrificed as our Passover Lamb on the same day because He knew that the correct biblical date for the observance of Passover was not the 15th day, but the 14th day of the first month. The Old Testament reveals that the night of the Passover was 14th Nisan. Christ confirmed this to be true by observing the Passover on the same night. As Christians we should be following the example that Christ set.

The correct biblical date for the observance of Passover is undoubtedly 14th Nisan, not 15th Nisan as some have assumed. □

## “The Passover Controversy”

This article is provided free in the public interest and may be freely copied without modification, alteration, any additions or deletions, and must not be sold nor copied for commercial gain.

The Passover Controversy ©1996 – 2001

FOURTH EDITION

*Editor:* Leslie Chapman

*Written by:* Michael Burman

*Layout:* David King

*(members of God's Church)*

e-mail: [info@biblicalarticles.org.uk](mailto:info@biblicalarticles.org.uk)

Internet: <http://www.biblicalarticles.org.uk>

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the New King James Version.

Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All Rights Reserved.