

The Passover of Jesus

By Dianne D. McDonnell

Many are confused about the “Passover” that Jesus ate the last evening of his life. Why was it so important to Jesus? What does it mean to us today as Christians? How does it all tie together?

Many churches refer to it as “the last supper” but that is not what our Messiah called it. It was a Passover meal. And Jesus knew ahead of time that he would die at Passover time. What is the significance of this? Why did Jesus say:

“I have eagerly desired to eat **this Passover** with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” Luke 22:15, 16.

And yet the next morning the Jews who wanted Jesus to be condemned said they would not enter Pilate’s palace because “they wanted to be able to eat the Passover,” John 18:28. They were planning to eat a Passover meal that evening twenty-four hours after the meal that Jesus called Passover. Jesus did not indicate in any way that his Passover was an “early” Passover as some teach. How do we understand all these things? Did God pick Passover day as the day Jesus would die for us? God does not do things randomly, and the death of Jesus Christ on a certain day was pre-planned for an important reason! Jesus understood that reason but most Christians today don’t understand at all. This article will explain the awesome meaning of these events, explain the seeming contradictions, and what it all means to YOU personally.

The Israelites first kept Passover as slaves in Egypt. God instructed the people to sacrifice a lamb on the evening which was the beginning of the 14th day of their first month. The lamb’s blood was painted on the facings around their doors and that night the Death Angel came overhead and “passed over” the houses that were marked by the blood. All who were firstborn among the Egyptians died that night but God spared the Israelites who had painted the lamb’s blood around their doors. See Exodus 12. What was the symbolic meaning of this event?

John the Baptist was inspired by God to call Jesus “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” See John 1:29, 36. Did the lambs sacrificed at Passover really symbolized Jesus who would save all mankind by the shedding of his blood as a sacrifice for our sins? Did Jesus actually die on Passover day? Does that mean that we should honor the day that Jesus called Passover? Wasn’t he already dead when the Jews ate their Passover? How does it all fit together? The Passover of Jesus is critical for all Christians—may God help us to understand it!

A Biblical day begins at sunset, and the night portion of the day comes first, then the daylight part of each day. Sunset begins a new day as shown in the chart comparing Roman days with the older Biblical day:

Biblical Day from sunset			Biblical Day from sunset			
Night	Night	Daylight	Night	Night	Daylight	Night
Roman Day from midnight			Roman Day from midnight			

So when Jesus was eating his Passover meal it was after dark on the first part of the day on the 14th of Abib. He had observed Passover many times before but he knew this one would be his last as a human being. Jesus knew he would die before the next sunset ended that Passover day! After the meal he was arrested that same night, tried early the next morning and crucified from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. Then Joseph took down his body, prepared it for burial, and put the body into his own tomb before Passover day was ended by sunset starting the next day. As the Bible counts time, Jesus died on the same day that he ate his Passover meal. He became our Passover Lamb that day!

But why were the Jews referring to a Passover night twenty-four hours later, on the 15th of Abib? God set aside **two days** of memorial and celebration **side by side**. One, the 14th, marked the final plague upon the Egyptians and the saving of the Israelites on Passover night. During the morning part of the 14th the Israelites plundered the Egyptians as wages for their 430 years of bondage, then packed their meager belongings, and quickly baked unleavened bread to eat on their journey. When sunset marked the beginning of the 15th the Israelites left Egypt by night with a pillar of fire leading the way! God ordered the Israelites to remember that day every year as The First Day of Unleavened Bread. He told them they were to keep it as a day of rest and worship. It was a yearly "Sabbath" but it could fall on any day of the week. They were to prepare for it ahead of time. So there were TWO separate events to remember side by side. One was the night the Death Angel passed over because of the blood of the lamb, the 14th of Abib. The second event was the following night when they left Egypt free at last due to the great power of God!

Over the years some Jews began to merge the two events together and observe the Passover on the 15th—the night set aside to remember coming out of Egypt. Some Jews remained true to the original orders of God. The Jews at Qumran, made famous by the Dead Sea Scrolls, observed the 14th as Passover and the 15th as The First Day of Unleavened Bread.¹ In the first century time of the early Christians there was a disagreement among Jews about which day should be called Passover.² Jesus kept Passover on the 14th as God originally decreed. Next is a chart revealing the events of the Passover of Jesus and the following day.

Understanding the Passover of Jesus

(Abib is the First Month of the Year in God's Calendar)

March/April of the Roman Calendar

<p>14th of Abib PASSOVER (Evening portion of the day, as each Biblical day begins at sunset.)</p> <p>Jesus calls this evening meal Passover commemorating the night the death angel passed over. It begins at sunset, the start of the 14th day. Luke 22:15, Lev 23:5, Exodus 12:27, Num 9:3</p> <p>Jesus washes his disciples feet after the Passover meal.</p> <p>Jesus prays as his disciples sleep, then is betrayed by Judas and arrested.</p> <p>(Work can be done on this day, and it is also called Preparation Day, Luke 23:54)</p>	<p>15th of Abib FIRST DAY of UNLEAVENED BREAD (Evening portion of the day, as each Biblical day begins at sunset.)</p> <p>A yearly Sabbath that can fall on any day of the week. Called a "High Sabbath" John 19:31. This night commemorates leaving behind slavery and being free. Exodus 12:42 and John 8:34-36.</p> <p>(Some call this evening the Night to be Much Observed.)</p> <p>First of 3 Nights in the Tomb for Jesus Matthew 12:40</p> <p>Many 1st Century Jews called the 15th of Abib "Passover" as Jews do today, but Jesus called the 14th the Passover.</p>
<p>PASSOVER continues into the daylight part of the day.</p> <p>Jesus is brought before Pilate and Herod</p> <p>Crucifixion begins at 9 a.m. Darkness begins at noon and lasts for three hours.</p> <p>Jesus dies at 3:00 p.m. and becomes our Passover Lamb</p> <p>An earthquake splits the Temple veil, Matt 27:50-51. Joseph prepares Jesus' body for burial right before sunset. The women see where tomb is, go home, and rest as sunset begins the First Day of Unleavened Bread.</p>	<p>FIRST DAY of Unleavened Bread goes into daylight part of the day.</p> <p>The First of 3 Days in the Tomb for Jesus</p> <p>A Holy Day of Rest and Worship</p> <p>Mary Magdalene and the other women rest according to the Biblical commandment to rest on this yearly Sabbath, even though it was not the seventh day of the week. (Luke 23:56, Lev 23:7).</p>

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 NIV, "...Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival (or Feast in other translations)..."

Paul is pointing out the need to observe **both days** that God set aside! All the Spring Holy Days have deep meaning for Christians as this chart explains:

Days that God Calls His Own	Old Testament Meaning	New Testament Meaning	See these verses In the Bible
Passover	Lamb's blood protects as Death Angel passes over.	The day that Jesus, the Lamb of God, died for us saving us from the death penalty for our sins.	Exodus 12, Lev 23 John 1:29, 36. 1 Peter 1:18-19. 1 Cor 5:7-8. John 14:6
1 st Day of Unleavened Bread or Feast of Unleavened Bread	Leaving Egypt in triumph, free from slavery, and looking forward to the Promised Land	Accepting Jesus, Christians are no longer slaves to sin, now looking forward to eternal life in God's Kingdom.	John 8:34-36 1 Peter 1:13-22.
7 Day period of Eating Unleavened Bread	Eating unleavened Bread, and escaping from Pharaoh's army pursuing them	Jesus is Resurrected on 4 th day of UB! We escape from sin while obeying Jesus throughout our lives	Matt 12:39-40 John 6:32-40 John 11:25 Luke 11:28 Matt 28:20
7 th and Last Day of Unleavened Bread	Day of Celebration, Rest and worship	Christians are resurrected and given Eternal Life after a lifetime of resisting sin.	Matt 13:43 Matt 16:27 Rev 20:4 John 6:44-51

We are to keep Passover evening when Jesus instituted the bread and wine symbols of his body and blood, and the yearly Sabbath day that begins seven days of eating bread made without leavening. Since Jesus is our sacrifice we do not need to offer a lamb sacrifice³, but we need to remember that leavening --baking powder, yeast, and baking soda, all represent sin during these seven days. We are to remove these products from our houses, together with all food that is leavened in the same way that we must put aside our sins and renounce them when we accept Jesus as our Savior. The unleavened bread represents Jesus, John 6:47-51; Luke 22:19. We leave behind our slavery to sin just as the Israelites left behind slavery in Egypt. See Jesus' words in John 8:34-36. And at the end of the seven days of eating unleavened bread with our meals, God commanded an additional day to be observed as a yearly Sabbath, the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, Leviticus 23:1-8.

Since Biblical days begin and end differently than the days we are familiar with it can be difficult to keep it all straight. Here is how these days fall in our Roman calendar in 2010:

- Passover evening memorial service with the symbols of bread and wine is held on Sunday night, the evening of March 28.
- The next day, Monday, March 29 continues Passover day and is the day when Jesus died for us. Work may be done on this day.
- The night of celebrating ending our slavery to sin behind, is on the evening of Monday, March 29, and is celebrated with a feast meal. We are to avoid all leavening and leavened products for seven days and have our houses free of leavening which represents sin during this period.
- The rest and worship day called the First Day of Unleavened Bread continues into Tuesday, March 30. It is a yearly Sabbath and no work is to be done other than the preparing of food. Unleavened bread should be eaten every day together with our other food.
- The Last Day of Unleavened Bread is on Monday, April 5. The time of eating bread without leavening and avoiding all leavened products ends at sunset this night.

God made Passover a pivotal part of His plan for mankind. We need to honor that day, and as Christians STOP ignoring the time our Savior called Passover. We are NOT told to pick when we want to commemorate a "Last Supper" however we wish to do it. We are given a specific time, and a certain day of the year to take the bread and wine, and we are given a specific seven days to remember to get sin, symbolized by leavening, OUT of our lives. We are given times to remember, days to celebrate and times to act out the life-long process of living free of sin because we have accepted the sacrifice of Jesus our Savior and his Way of Life. It was important to Jesus and it should be important to us as followers of Christ!

What an honor it is to finally understand the true meaning of these days! May God help each of us to treat them with respect for they outline God's own Plan! They reveal how He brings mankind to Himself! The Simplicity of the Gospel is portrayed every Spring in the days that He has ordered us to observe. This year if you prayerfully participate in these days and let it all sink in, you should begin to comprehend how these days reveal God's own magnificent Plan and your own part within His Plan. God's Plan includes loving and saving you, not just now but for all eternity! But you must have a heart that responds in a willingness to obey, and a heart overflowing with love and reverence for Him.

¹ The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English by Geza Vermes, page 336. The 14th was called Passover according to the Calendars of Priestly Courses, 4Q320-30. Also see translations of The Temple Scroll

XVII, as both the 14th and the 15th are described separately. The 14th is the day that the lamb was killed and the 15th is a yearly Sabbath rest which falls on a week day. Ibid, Page 194, 195.

² Some first century Jews argued for the 14th of Abib, some argued for the 15th. See articles by L. H. Schiffman, an expert on Jewish religion in the first century.

³The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English by Geza Vermes, pages 82 and 110. In the latter part of the first century, the Qumran Community who called themselves “Sons of Light” did not kill a lamb at Passover unlike the rest of the Jews of that time, but considered prayer as “an acceptable fragrance of righteousness”. 1QS-IX, 4-5. Their community was destroyed by the Roman army in about 68 A.D. and their scrolls which were hidden in caves were not discovered until hundreds of years later.