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# **The New Testament Passover**

*Doctrinal Paper*

*Approved by the Council of Elders*  
*April 1997*

All scriptures are quoted from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee) unless otherwise noted.

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# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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## Passover in the New Testament Church

*A Christian Responsibility*

The death of Jesus Christ, our Savior, as the biblical Messiah is symbolically represented in the scriptures by the slaying of the paschal lambs on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib, the first month of the Hebrew Calendar. The New Testament Church was taught that “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (*1 Corinthians 5:7*). At the last Passover before His crucifixion, Jesus introduced a new ceremony with the new symbols of unleavened bread and wine, to represent His body and blood. These new symbols, like the paschal lambs of old, are emblems of the Messiah’s suffering and death as a sacrifice for sin—figurative reminders of what He suffered in our stead (*John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19*).

The doctrine and practice of the United Church of God concerning the observance of the Passover is founded solidly on the example and instruction of Jesus and His apostles as recorded in the New Testament. In this paper we will examine that example and the instructions the apostles have left for us to follow.

Because many of the details concerning the observance of the Passover at the time of Christ and the apostles, by both the Jews and the Church, are not fully explained in the New Testament, questions relating to its proper observance among Christians arise. Several controversial ideas that relate to how we should observe the Passover have recently emerged. In this paper we will examine some of the more significant concepts.

## Questions and Controversy

When Israel left Egypt a very special sacrifice took place. The killing of the Passover lambs is recorded in Exodus 12 as a prelude to the departure of Israel from Egyptian slavery. We find the command to observe the Passover in Exodus 12, Leviticus 23, Numbers 28, Numbers 33, etc. The Passover was observed off and on throughout the history of the Old Testament. We also find that in the first century, during the time of Christ, the Jews were observing the Passover in Jerusalem. We have examples of Christ as a child and an adult attending this festival.

How does all this relate to Christians? Are we expected to observe the Passover? It is clear from scripture that Christ and the disciples gathered on the night prior to his death. In Matthew 26:17 we read: “Now on the first *day* of the *Feast of the Unleavened Bread*, the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover”<sup>1</sup> (*New King James* used throughout, unless otherwise noted). This would have been on the afternoon of the thirteenth of Nisan and just prior to the beginning of the fourteenth on the Hebrew calendar. Christ died the next afternoon. Continuing on in this chapter we find that Christ had further instructions for His disciples: “And He said, Go into the city to a certain man,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

---

and say to him, The Teacher says, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples. So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.” Did Christ set an example for Christians to follow? Did He institute a new ceremony in the place of an old sacrifice?

There has been some controversy regarding the validity of this observance for Christians. Some refer to this as the “Lord’s Supper.” Others use the term “Passover.” For some, the term “Passover” is an ancient term that has no relevance for the Church today. What is the truth in this matter? What do the scriptures tell us?

## Use of the Term “Passover”

The Hebrew word translated “Passover” is *pesach* (or *pāsach*) while the Greek word for “Passover” is PASCHA (πάσχα). This term is defined in *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*:

### PASSOVER

PASCHA [πάσχα , (3957)], the Greek spelling of the Aramaic word for the Passover, from the Hebrew *pāsach*, to pass over, to spare, a feast instituted by God in commemoration of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and anticipatory of the expiatory sacrifice of Christ. The word signifies (1) the Passover Feast, e.g., Matt. 26:2; John 2:13, 23; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:39; 19:14; Acts 12:4; Heb. 11:28; (2) by metonymy, (a) the Paschal Supper, Matt. 26:18, 19; Mark 14:16; Luke 22:8, 13; (b) the Paschal lamb, e.g., Mark 14:12 (cp. Ex. 12:21); Luke 22:7; (c) Christ Himself, 1 Cor. 5:7.<sup>2</sup>

As the above quote shows, the word Passover can be viewed literally to mean “passing over.” For the ancient Israelites the sparing of their firstborn was the central theme of this Festival. Other sources point out a similar meaning. Notice *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* under “Passover:”

**Passover, the**, a religious festival commemorating God’s deliverance of the Jews from bondage. The English term translates the Hebrew word *pesach* as used in Exod. 12:13, ‘I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt’ (see also vv. 23, 27). The verb also may have the connotation ‘protect’ in Isa. 31:5, although such a sense is probably already reflective of the Exodus (Isa. 31:3). Elsewhere in the Hebrew the verb means ‘hop, skip’ (1 Kings 18:21, 26; RSV: ‘limp’) or ‘limp’ (2 Sam. 4:4; RSV: ‘lame,’ and see the noun form ‘lame’ from the same root in Lev. 21:18; 2 Sam. 9:13; Isa. 35:6). Unconvincing attempts have been made by scholars to derive the etymology of *pesach* from Akkadian, Egyptian, and Arabic loan words. In the Bible, the noun *pesach* always refers to the sacrifice (Exod. 12:27) or the attendant festival (2 Kings 23:22).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Vine, W. E., *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Achtemier, Paul J., Th.D., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1985.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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This same article adds that there is some dispute among scholars about this Festival. The timing of the Festival, the origin of the Festival, and the meaning of the Festival are all subjects of debate:

Scholars have difficulty reconstructing the origins and historical development of the Passover festival due to the relative paucity of information in the Bible and elsewhere and the differing perceptions of the literary sources and traditions that marshal the evidence. The Bible contains eight chronological references to the Passover.<sup>4</sup>

The term "Passover," as used in scripture has more than one meaning. *Harper's Bible Dictionary* points out that the noun "always refers to the sacrifice (Exodus 12:27) or the attendant festival (2 Kings 23:22)." The term can be applied to the lamb that is sacrificed and eaten or to the Festival itself. This, of course, contributes to some of the controversy that surrounds the Passover. There are several usages which must be addressed if this subject is to be understood. Which meaning is specified in a particular passage? Sometimes the context makes it clear. Other times it does not. The term Passover can be used to describe any one of the following:

## 1. The entire spring Festival season (Passover and Unleavened Bread)

"His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover...according to the custom of the feast...When they had finished the days." (*Luke 2:41-43*)

Here the term "Passover" refers to the whole spring Feast period because they had finished the **days** (plural) not just one **day**. This reference also implies that Jesus and his parents observed the Passover celebration according to the customs of the Jewish community that met at Jerusalem. The same usage is found in the following references:

"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name..." (*John 2:23*)

"And because he [Herod] saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison...intending to bring him before the people after Passover." (*Acts 12:3,4*)

## 2. The Feast of Unleavened Bread

"Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover." (*Luke 22:1*)

In his Gospel, Luke used the term "Passover" to apply to the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

## 3. The fourteenth day of the first month - Abib 14 - at its appointed time

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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"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 unto the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread." (*Leviticus 23:5,6*)

Passover is here equated with the day Abib 14, the fourteenth day of the first month. Passover activities fell on Abib 14 and the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

"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. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it." (*Numbers 9:2,3*)

Here "the appointed time" is mentioned twice as a part of keeping the Passover along with the various rites and ceremonies of the celebration.

## 4. The 14<sup>th</sup> day of the second month - the second Passover

"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or *is* far away on a journey, he may still keep the LORD's Passover. 'On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 'They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it.'" (*Numbers 9:10-12*)

A "second" Passover is provided for anyone who was unclean or away on a journey when the Passover of the first month was observed. This took place in the precise same manner, but one month later.

## 5. The Passover lamb or kid killed or sacrificed on Abib 14

"Now Josiah kept a Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* on the fourteenth day of the first month." (*2 Chronicles 35:1*)

The word lambs is in italics and was added by the translators to amplify the sense of the phrase. Obviously a sacrificial animal was killed.

"Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed." (*Luke 22:7*)

Here the term refers to a living creature that is to be killed when a particular day comes. This seems clearly to refer to the "Passover lamb" to be killed "in the evening"/"at twilight", (Hebrew "between the two evenings") on Abib 14. During the night that followed the lamb was roasted and eaten with unleavened bread [thus the reference to "the Day of Unleavened Bread" above] as instructed in *Exodus 12:6-8*.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

---

The 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib (Nisan) thus became known as a day of unleavened bread. According to Alfred Edersheim, the 14<sup>th</sup> was the day when the Jews removed all leaven from their homes (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, by Alfred Edersheim, Vol. 1, Book III, page 378).

## 6. The roasted Passover lamb or kid eaten during the meal

"This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat it...In one house it shall be eaten...nor shall you break one of its bones." (*Exodus 12:43-46*)

"Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire..." (*Exodus 12:8*)

In the New Testament account of Christ's last evening, there is a reference to eating the "Passover"—even though there is no lamb or kid mentioned in the account.

"Then you shall say to the Master of the house, The Teacher says to you, 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" (*Luke 22:11*)

In this passage Luke uses the term "Passover" to refer to something that will be eaten during the meal that Jesus will have with the twelve disciples. Is this the same as the roasted lamb that is commanded in Exodus 12? Herein lies some of the controversy surrounding what Christ did on this night. What does it mean in Matthew 26:19 where we read ". . . and they prepared the Passover"? There is no further elaboration in the scriptures. *The New Bible Dictionary* makes this comment:

Whether the date of the Supper will ever be conclusively determined is uncertain; but we may certainly believe that, whatever the exact nature of the meal, there were Passover ideas in the Lord's mind when he sat down with the disciples. The Jewish Passover, based on Ex. 12 and interpreted in the Haggādāh for Passover and the Mishnaic tractate Pesaḥim, provides the indispensable key to an understanding of the meal and also the meaning of the Lord's Supper in the early church.<sup>5</sup>

## 7. Christ is called "our Passover"

"Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." (*1 Corinthians 5:7*)

This usage becomes clearly the predominant intent in the New Testament. When the New Testament Church observed the Passover, it was to celebrate the death of Christ.

With the above list of the various usages of the term "Passover" we can begin to see why the subject can become controversial. There is one more usage that is supported by some scholars and rejected by others. Matthew Henry offers an explanation in his *Commentary of the*

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<sup>5</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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*Bible* for the reference in John where the Jews fear the possibility of being defiled and unable to “eat the Passover” (*John 18:28*). He concludes that this reference is to “passover-feast” offerings, which were related to the Feast of Unleavened Bread and not the Passover itself. Notice the following quote:

*The chief priests and elders, though they came along with the prisoner, that the thing might be done effectually, went not into the judgment-hall, because it was the house of an uncircumcised Gentile, lest they should be defiled, but kept out of doors, that they might eat the passover, not the paschal lamb (that was eaten the night before) but the passover-feast, upon the sacrifices which were offered on the fifteenth day, the Chagigah, as they called it, the passover-bullocks spoken of Deu. 16:2; 2 Chr. 30:24; 35:8, 9.*<sup>6</sup>

In order to understand which of the several meanings of “Passover” should be applied in each reference, context is of great importance. But even here it is often difficult to reach a conclusion in the absence of clear scripture.

## Why the Passover?

At this point it is useful to clarify the purpose of the Passover. The Apostle Paul wrote:

“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” (*1 Corinthians 5:7*)

John the Baptist recognized the relationship between Jesus and the symbolism of the paschal lambs. “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (*John 1:29*). And the Apostle Peter wrote that we have been redeemed “. . . with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot” (*1 Peter 1:19*)—a direct reference to the paschal lambs of the Old Testament. In fact, all of the symbolic elements associated with the Passover in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Apostolic Writings represent some aspect of Christ’s sacrifice for our redemption.

## The New Testament Passover

The fact that Christ is our Passover and the symbolism of both the sacrificed lambs of the Old Testament and the bread and wine in the New Testament are reminders of His death is very significant in understanding the reason why more details concerning the Passover observance are not present in the New Testament. The fact that the earlier and later symbolic aspects of the Passover portray Christ’s sacrifice, strongly indicates that the apostles regarded the observance

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<sup>6</sup> Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1991. This view was also supported by Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Erdman’s Publishing Co.) 1958, p 218,252,255.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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of the Passover in the New Testament as simply the perpetuation of the Old Testament Passover, except for the modifications that Christ personally instituted.

Christ's modification of the Passover symbols is consistent with His responsibility as "the Mediator of the new covenant" (*Hebrews 12:24*). One of His responsibilities was to renew, refresh or modify the old covenant (*Hebrews 8:8,13*). That is exactly what Jesus was doing when, after telling them to drink the wine, He said, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (*Matthew 26:28*).

The Jews of the first century observed the Passover and the seven Days of Unleavened Bread. As we have seen the entire period is sometimes referred to as the Passover in some accounts in the New Testament. In Luke 22:1 we read: "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover." It is recognized that the majority of Jews observed and still observe these two distinct Festivals as one unit. The Greek word *pascha* (πάσχα), as it is used in this verse, is defined as follows:

πάσχα, τό indecl. (Aram. ܢܦܫܐ or ܢܦܫܐ for Hebr. פסח.—LXX, Philo, Joseph.) *the Passover*. 1. A Jewish festival, celebrated on the 14th of the month Nisan, and continuing into the early hours of the 15th (Jos., Ant. 3, 284f). This was followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Mazzoth; ἄζυμος 1b) on the 15th to 21st. Popular usage merged the two festivals and treated them as a unity, as they were for practical purposes (s. Lk 22:1 and Mk 14:12 below.—So also Philo and Joseph.<sup>7</sup>

We know that the New Testament Church continued to observe the Passover after Christ's death, but with new meaning. That new meaning is found in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." Christ is called "our Passover." This verse has deep meaning for Christians. Christ is our Passover and we do not need a lamb to sacrifice. This is a major key to understanding how the Passover should be observed under the New Covenant. If we truly believe that Christ is our Passover, then we should follow His instructions for the observance of the memorial to His suffering and death. On the night when Christ was betrayed, He instituted the symbols of the bread and the wine (*Luke 21:14-20*). It is through these symbols that we focus on Christ as our Passover. He also set an example for us to follow regarding washing one another's feet (*John 13:15*).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He

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<sup>7</sup> Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1979.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

---

comes” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The early Church observed this ceremony on an annual basis. It was a memorial of the death of Christ “till He comes.” The emphasis is on His death and suffering, which occurred on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month Abib (Nisan). Christ set the example for us to commemorate His sacrifice in the evening at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>.

In order to get a clear picture of what Christ actually did on that final Passover, a survey of all the pertinent New Testament scriptures is essential. By putting the accounts together a picture begins to emerge. According to Matthew 26:18, Christ observed the Passover: “The Teacher says, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.” Christ is quoted as making reference to “this Passover.” Luke 22:15 “Then He said to them, With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” By reviewing all the relevant scriptures, we will see that Christ did observe the Passover the night before He died.

## Examples of Passover Observance in the New Testament

Christ grew up in a home in Nazareth. His parents observed the Passover in Jerusalem on an annual basis. When Christ became an adult and began His ministry, we read of Him following the same pattern—observing the Passover in Jerusalem. The following scriptures refer to Jesus and the Passover, or the Passover season:

**Luke 2:41-42** “His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.”

**John 2:13-14, 23** “<sup>13</sup>Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. . . <sup>23</sup>Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.”

During Christ’s ministry, we find two clear references to the Passover season (*John 2:13-14, 23; John 6:1-4*). There is a third reference found in the book of Luke which is somewhat ambiguous. Luke 6:1 “<sup>1</sup>Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grainfields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate *them*, rubbing *them* in *their* hands.” This is the only occurrence in the New Testament of the Greek word *deuteroprōtos*. It is translated as second Sabbath. There is some controversy over the meaning of this word as well as its authenticity. *Vine’s* has this to say: “In Luke 6:1, the A.V. translates those mss. which have *deuteroprōtos*, lit., ‘second–first,’ said of a sabbath (see R.V. marg.).”<sup>8</sup> Liddell & Scott translate the word as “the 1<sup>st</sup> Sabbath after the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread”<sup>9</sup> While there is some question about the translation of this verse, the timing seems to clearly be in the spring and some time after the Passover. This would provide a passing

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<sup>8</sup> Vine, W. E., *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Liddell & Scott, *Greek Lexicon*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1929.

# The New Testament Passover

Doctrinal Paper

---

reference to a third Passover during the course of Christ's ministry. Even though these verses make no reference to Christ having observed this Passover, the Greek term *deuteroprōtos* would fill in a time gap, if it can be demonstrated that it refers to the period of the Days of Unleavened Bread. It would then be possible to say that Christ observed the Passover during His ministry on an annual basis.

Now we come to the events of His final Passover. A comparison of all the scriptures dealing with this period of time is most enlightening. By this method, we can begin to more narrowly define what Christ actually did the night before He died. Based on the available evidence (see Summary of the Hebrew Calendar study paper), Christ died on a Wednesday afternoon in 31 A.D., having met with His disciples the previous evening (Tuesday). So we see that His death occurred on Passover day, the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, Abib (Nisan).

## The Final Passover of Christ's Life

The four gospels—the three synoptic gospels plus John's gospel—provide the only authentic accounts of what happened to Christ as He came to the end of His human life. The synoptic gospels present a slightly different perspective on the events than what we find in the book of John. By studying all four accounts we can put together the most complete picture possible of these important events. The table below is provided in an attempt to harmonize the events that took place on the evening prior to Christ's death.

### Harmony of Christ's Last Passover

| Matthew's Account  | Mark's Account   | Luke's Account  | John's Account  |
|--|--|---|---|
| Matthew 26:1-2 “ <sup>1</sup> Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, <i>that</i> He said to His disciples, <sup>2</sup> You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” | Mark 14:1-4 “ <sup>1</sup> After two days it was the Passover and <i>the Feast</i> of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put <i>Him</i> to death. <sup>2</sup> But they said, Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people. <sup>3</sup> And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured <i>it</i> on His | Luke 22:1-2 “ <sup>1</sup> Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover. <sup>2</sup> And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might kill Him, for they feared the people.” | John 11:55-57 “ <sup>55</sup> And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. <sup>56</sup> Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, What do you think—that He will not come to the feast? <sup>57</sup> Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report <i>it</i> , that they might seize Him.” |

# The New Testament Passover

Doctrinal Paper

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## Harmony of Christ's Last Passover

### Matthew's Account

Matthew 26:17 <sup>17</sup>Now on the first *day* of the *Feast of the Unleavened Bread* the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover? <sup>18</sup>And He said, Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples." <sup>19</sup>So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover."

Matthew 26:20 <sup>20</sup>When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. <sup>21</sup>Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me."

### Mark's Account

head."

Mark 14:12-14 <sup>12</sup>Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover *lamb*, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?" <sup>13</sup>And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. <sup>14</sup>"Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples? . . . <sup>16</sup>So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.

Mark 14:17 <sup>17</sup>In the evening He came with the twelve. <sup>18</sup>Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me."

### Luke's Account

Luke 22:7-13 <sup>7</sup>Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. <sup>8</sup>And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat." <sup>9</sup>So they said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare?" <sup>10</sup>And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. <sup>11</sup>"Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' <sup>12</sup>"Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready." <sup>13</sup>So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover."

Luke 22:14 <sup>14</sup>When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. <sup>15</sup>Then He said to them, With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; <sup>16</sup>"for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

### John's Account

John 13:1 <sup>1</sup>Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."

John 13:2 <sup>2</sup>And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, to betray Him,"

# The New Testament Passover

Doctrinal Paper

---

## Harmony of Christ's Last Passover

### Matthew's Account

Matthew 26:26-30 "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."<sup>27</sup> Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."<sup>28</sup> "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."<sup>29</sup> "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's

### Mark's Account

Mark 14:22-26 "<sup>22</sup>And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."<sup>23</sup> Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it."<sup>24</sup> And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many."<sup>25</sup> "Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."<sup>26</sup> And when they had

### Luke's Account

Luke 22:17-20 "<sup>17</sup>Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide *it* among yourselves;<sup>18</sup> "for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."<sup>19</sup> And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."<sup>20</sup> Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."

### John's Account

John 13:3-5 " <sup>3</sup>Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup>rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. <sup>5</sup>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."

John 13:14-15 "<sup>14</sup>If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

John 18:1 "<sup>1</sup>When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered."

# The New Testament Passover

Doctrinal Paper

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## Harmony of Christ's Last Passover

| Matthew's Account   | Mark's Account                                      | Luke's Account   | John's Account |
|---|---|--|----------------|
| kingdom.” <sup>30</sup> And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” | sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” | Luke 22:39 “ <sup>39</sup> Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him.” |                |

We can now proceed to the next afternoon—the daylight portion of Abib 14 when Christ is crucified and buried. Notice *Mark 15:42* “Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath.” Luke records the following: “That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near” (*Luke 23:54*). And we read a similar statement in *John 19:42* “So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.” We see from these scriptures that Christ was crucified and buried before the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> (the Sabbath, a High Day), but He observed the Passover during the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>.

The series of events that are described in the four gospels can be summarized as follows:

1. Christ sends His disciples to prepare for the Passover. This takes place on the afternoon of the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all reference these instructions. In each case, the scriptures clearly state that the disciples were sent to prepare the Passover. Matthew – “Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the **Passover**? . . . I will keep the **Passover** at your house with my disciples.” Mark – “Where do you want us to go and prepare, that you may eat the **Passover**? . . . Where is the guest room in which I may eat the **Passover** with my disciples?” Luke – “Go and prepare the **Passover** for us, that we may eat. . . . Where is the guest room where I may eat the **Passover** with my disciples?”
2. The disciples prepare for the Passover. This also must be late afternoon of the 13<sup>th</sup>. Matthew – “So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and **they prepared** the Passover.” Mark – “. . . and **they prepared** the Passover.” Luke – “. . . and **they prepared** the Passover.”
3. Jesus and the disciples gather in the room prepared for the Passover in the evening, now the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Matthew – “When **evening** had come, He sat down with the twelve.” Mark – “In the **evening** He came with the twelve.” Luke – “When the **hour had come**, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.” John – “And **during supper**, when the devil had 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, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel.”<sup>10</sup>
4. Christ washes the feet of His disciples and instructs the disciples to continue this practice. This occurs after the meal according to the NKJV and the AV: “and supper being ended.” Other translations render this “during supper” (see NASV, ASV, and RSV). The NIV states:

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<sup>10</sup> *The Revised Standard Version*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.) 1973, 1977.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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- “The evening meal was being served. . .”<sup>11</sup> John – “After that, He poured water into a basin and began to **wash the disciples’ feet**, . . . you ought also to **wash one another’s feet**.”
5. Christ breaks the bread and gives it to the disciples, representing His body. Matthew -- “And as they were eating, **Jesus took bread**, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Mark -- “<sup>22</sup>And as they were eating, **Jesus took bread**, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Luke --<sup>19</sup>And **He took bread**, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”
  6. Christ next takes the cup and asks the disciples to drink of it in remembrance of His shed blood. Matthew – “<sup>27</sup>Then **He took the cup**, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. <sup>28</sup>“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Mark – “<sup>23</sup>Then **He took the cup**, and when He had given thanks He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it. <sup>24</sup>And He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.” Luke – “<sup>20</sup>Likewise He also **took the cup** after supper, saying, This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”
  7. After the footwashing, the bread, and the wine, Christ and the disciples depart for the Mount of Olives. Matthew – “<sup>30</sup>And when they had sung a hymn, they **went out** to the Mount of Olives.” Mark – “<sup>26</sup>And when they had sung a hymn, they **went out** to the Mount of Olives.” Luke -- “<sup>39</sup>**Coming out**, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him.” John -- “<sup>1</sup>When Jesus had spoken these words, He **went out** with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.”
  8. Clearly the death of Christ took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, the preparation day for the High Day (the First Day of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 15, *John 19:31*).

The summary of events provides a clear picture. All three of the synoptic gospels state that after preparation, Christ and the disciples ate the Passover. John only makes passing mention of the meal, but does add the example of footwashing. Why doesn't John discuss the meal in the same detail that Matthew, Mark, and Luke do? It is impossible to be certain. John probably had access to the accounts written by Matthew, Mark and Luke. Of these three, only Matthew was actually present on that evening. John's account includes events that were not recorded in the other three. Rather than being contradictory, the four accounts should be viewed as being complementary.

## A Closer Look at John's Account

There is considerable discussion as to why John's account seems to differ from the accounts found in the synoptic gospels. A variety of solutions have been offered by various authors (some of these will be discussed later in this paper). Norval Geldenhuys in *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* offers this simple explanation:

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<sup>11</sup> *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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He (John) assumes that his readers are quite aware of the fact that this meal was the paschal repast which the Lord celebrated with His disciples on the evening before His crucifixion. . . For this reason he merely refers to it by the single word *deipnon* (supper) without stating expressly what precise meal it was. He knew that the first three Gospels and also the Epistles of Paul gave a full account of the celebration of the paschal repast and the institution of the Holy Communion. Consequently he does not repeat the same facts, but mentions a few supplementary occurrences that took place during the meal, as they made a great impression on him and had not been described in the other Gospels.<sup>12</sup>

If we consider the account in John more closely, we can see the possible difficulties that it suggests. On the surface, John's perspective seems to be quite different from that of the other gospel writers. John doesn't refer to the meal with the disciples as being the Passover. John is the only author who mentions the footwashing. In fact, John's focus seems to be more on the footwashing, followed by the lengthy discourse from Christ (John 14-16), culminating in a prayer (John 17). John also makes reference to a Passover meal scheduled to take place after Christ's death (John 18:28). Matthew, Mark, and Luke make no mention of "another" Passover. Yet they clearly refer to what Christ did with His disciples as being the Passover. Notice now the following scriptures from John's account:

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover (*John 18:28*).

But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews? Then they all cried again, saying, Not this Man, but Barabbas! Now Barabbas was a robber (*John 18:39-40*).

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The Pavement*, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"<sup>15</sup> But they cried out, "Away with *Him*, away with *Him*! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led *Him* away (*John 19:13-16*).

There are varying opinions regarding the explanation of John 18:28. The fact that the Jews who captured Jesus and led Him to His trial refused to go into the Praetorium for fear of being unclean prior to the Passover meal must not be avoided in our explanation. How do we explain that Christ and the disciples had already eaten what was referred to as "the Passover," and "this Passover" and that the Jewish religious leaders apparently had not? Were there two Passover meals during that time? Remember, the Passover lamb was to be slain on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib (*Exodus 12:6*). Notice what some authors say about this subject.

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<sup>12</sup> Geldenhuys, Norval, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, 1983), note 5, pp. 659-660

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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In the light of recent researches into the influence of separate calendars which were used for calculating feast-days, it is now possible to consider again the older submissions of P. Billerbeck and J. Pickl that the two strata of Gospel evidence may be harmonized on the assumption that both are understandable, with each reflecting a different tradition. . . This was dismissed by critics as lacking in supporting evidence, but the Dead Sea Scrolls show that there were divergent calendars in use in heterodox Jewry, and it is possible that separate traditions were, in fact, in vogue at the time of the passion. Mlle A. Jaubert has recently reconstructed the events on this basis so as to harmonize the data of the Gospels and early liturgical witnesses (in her book *The Date of the Last Supper*, E.T. 1965. See for an acceptance of her thesis, E. E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*<sup>2</sup>, NCB, 1974, pp. 249f. and Mlle Jaubert's later contribution in *NTS* 14, 1967-8, pp. 145-164.<sup>13</sup>

Whether the date of the Supper will ever be conclusively determined is uncertain; but we may certainly believe that, whatever the exact nature of the meal, there were Passover ideas in the Lord's mind when he sat down with the disciples. The Jewish Passover, based on Ex. 12 and interpreted in the Haggādāh for Passover and the Mishnaic tractate Pesahim, provides the indispensable key to an understanding of the meal and also the meaning of the Lord's Supper in the early church.<sup>14</sup>

The Synoptic Gospels speak of the meal Jesus ate with His disciples as the Passover meal. But the Gospel of John indicates Jesus died on the cross at the exact time that lambs were slain in preparation for the nation's Passover meals (John 19:14). But this can be explained by the fact that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a seven-day feast following the one-day Feast of the Passover, but sometimes all eight days were called "the Passover" (Luke 2:41; 22:1; Acts 12:3-4) or the seven days were the "Passover Week" (John 19:14) A different explanation is that Jews in the first century followed two calendars in observing the Passover. According to this view Jesus and His disciples observed one date, eating the Passover meal before His crucifixion, whereas most of the nation, including the Pharisees, followed the other calendar in which the Passover lambs were slain on the very day of Jesus' death.<sup>15</sup>

While it is impossible to completely resolve the difficulty which John presents in his writings, we must consider the above possibilities in any theory that is brought forward. We can also examine a quote from *Matthew Henry's Commentary* along this line. Following are his thoughts on John 18:28.

Two things are here observed concerning the prosecution:—(1.) Their policy and industry in the prosecution: *It was early*; some think about two or three in the morning, others about five or six, when most people were in their beds; and so there would be the less danger of opposition from the people that were for Christ; while, at the same time, they had their agents about, to call those together whom they could influence to cry out against him. See how much their heart was upon it, and how violent they were in the prosecution. Now that they had him in their hands, they

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<sup>13</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

<sup>14</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

<sup>15</sup> Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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would lose no time till they had him upon the cross, but denied themselves their natural rest, to push on this matter. See Mic. 2:1. (2.) Their superstition and vile hypocrisy: *The chief priests and elders*, though they came along with the prisoner, that the thing might be done effectually, *went not into the judgment-hall*, because it was the house of an uncircumcised Gentile, *lest they should be defiled*, but kept out of doors, *that they might eat the passover*, not the paschal lamb (that was eaten the night before) but the passover-feast, upon the sacrifices which were offered on the fifteenth day, *the Chagigah*, as they called it, the passover-bullocks spoken of Deu. 16:2; 2 Chr. 30:24; 35:8, 9. These they were to eat of, and therefore would not go into the court, for fear of touching a Gentile, and thereby contracting, not a legal, but only a traditional pollution. This they scrupled, but made no scruple of breaking through all the laws of equity to persecute Christ to the death. *They strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel.*<sup>16</sup>

Matthew Henry is not the only one who holds to this view. In his one volume commentary of the Bible, J.R. Dummelow, refers to “critics” who take the same approach. Notice his section on John 18:28. While Dummelow does not personally endorse this view, he does reference these unnamed critics.

It is obvious that St. John places the Jewish Passover, not on Thursday evening, as the synoptists seem to do, but on Friday evening, and regards the Last Supper on Thursday night as an anticipated Passover—a Passover eaten before the legal date, because Jesus knew that He was to suffer on the morrow. Some critics, however, following the *primâ facie* meaning of the synoptists, date the Jewish Passover on Thursday evening, and understand the expression here (“but might eat the Passover”) to refer not to the Passover proper, but to the “chagigah,” a sacrifice offered on the morning after the paschal meal:<sup>17</sup>

David Stern in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* takes a similar view to that found in Matthew Henry’s work.

They didn’t want to become ritually defiled. . . And thus unable to eat the Pesach meal, literally, “unable to eat the Pesach.” Some scholars believe “the Pesach” refers to the Passover lamb and conclude that Yochanan, unlike the Synoptic Gospels, places the Seder (the first evening of Passover) on Friday evening after the execution of Yeshua in the afternoon. I do not believe that Yochanan’s Gospel reports a different date for the crucifixion from the Synoptics (but see 13:29 & N); rather, the meal of 13:1 was the Seder, and it took place on Thursday night; but “the Pesach” in this verse refers to other food eaten during Pesach, specifically the *chagigah* (festival sacrifice), which was consumed with great joy and celebration on the afternoon following the Seder. This is the Pesach meal which the Judeans gathered outside Pilate’s palace would have been unable to eat had they entered, because their defilement would have lasted till sundown. If “the Pesach” meant the Passover lamb, defilement in the morning might not have been a problem, since the Seder meal took place after sundown.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Dummelow, The Rev. J.R., M.A., *A Commentary on The Holy Bible*, (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company) 1956.

<sup>18</sup> Stern, David H., *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, (Clarksville, Maryland: Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc.) 1992.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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To be true to the scriptures (taking into account all four gospels), one must conclude that Christ clearly ate a meal with His disciples the night before He died. Matthew, Mark, and Luke call this “the Passover” and “this Passover.” John makes mention of the Jews not wanting to be defiled so that they could eat “the Passover” some time after Christ’s death. This much seems to be clear. However, the number of meals involved is not the most important aspect of these accounts. The fact that Christ instituted a new ceremony to replace an ancient sacrifice is *most* important. Christ introduced new symbols and a new ceremony on the night at the beginning of the fourteenth of Abib (Nisan). This is the precedent for Christians. We gather today, over 1900 years later and recall the events of that evening. We gather on the same evening that Christ met with His disciples. We are commemorating Christ as “our Passover.” Therefore, we follow His example and meet on the same evening that He did. Christ did not participate alone. He gathered with His disciples on the evening of the fourteenth. We should follow His example today.

It is certainly true that Christ died on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib (Nisan) about 3:00 P.M., which was the time for the slaying of the lambs at the temple. Notice the following quotes from the Jewish historian, Josephus:

And as the feast of unleavened bread was at hand, in the first month, which according to the Macedonians, is called Xanthicus, but according to us Nisan, all the people ran together out of the villages to the city, and celebrated the festival, having purified themselves, with their wives and children, according to the law of their country; and they offered the sacrifice which was called Passover, on the fourteenth day of the same month, and feasted seven days, and spared no cost, but offered whole burnt offerings to God. . .<sup>19</sup>

So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour to the eleventh, but so that a company not less than ten belong to every sacrifice, (for it is not lawful for them to feast singly by themselves,) and many of us are twenty in a company. . .<sup>20</sup>

These two references confirm that the lambs were slain on the fourteenth day of the first month “from the ninth hour to the eleventh.” That means the lambs were slain between 3 P.M. and 5 P.M. in the afternoon. This would appear to be what John is referring to in his account, but there is no definitive statement anywhere in the gospels about the actual slaying of the lambs—only a reference to the plans to eat the Passover at some point (*John 18:28; 19:14*). Mark and Luke do reference the day when the lambs were to be killed (*Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7*), but there is no record of them *actually* being killed.

While it is difficult to correlate what Josephus has written with the view of Matthew Henry and others, our practice does not hinge on being able to come to a definitive conclusion in this matter. Whether the Jews were eating the Passover on the night of the fifteenth or whether

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<sup>19</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, Ch. IV, Sec. 8

<sup>20</sup> Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book VI, Chap IX, Sec. 3

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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they were eating the Passover-offerings of the Feast of Unleavened Bread does not affect our observance of the Passover with new symbols representing the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which clearly took place at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib (Nisan).

## We Follow Christ's Example

Jesus Christ Himself set the time of the New Testament Passover, by His example, on the night before His death. The time at which the bread and the wine are to be taken is not related directly to the time of Christ's death. The timing of the new Passover is clearly at the beginning of the fourteenth.

The apostle Paul corroborates the timing of this special ceremony. "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the **same night in which He was betrayed took bread**; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it [once a year during the evening of Abib/Nisan 14] , in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you **proclaim the Lord's death** till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The Passover of Jesus Christ is the most important event of the year for all Christians. The Church keeps it on the correct day, the same day Jesus was betrayed, the day on which He instituted the symbols of His body and blood, the day on which He gave his life to take away our sins and reconcile us to God. By participating in this celebration, the Christian proclaims the Lord's death until he comes.

Notice how Jesus began His last Passover service with His disciples: "Then He said to them, 'With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you *before I suffer*'" (Luke 22:15).

The New Testament Passover is not just about the death of the "Lamb of God." It also is about His *suffering*. We are to remember the *entire sacrifice* that He made -- both His *suffering* and *death*. His suffering, death and burial occurred entirely on the 14th -- just as the killing of the lambs always occurred on the 14th.

## New Passover Symbols

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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Since the New Testament Passover symbols of bread and wine depict Christ's *suffering* as well as His death, it is only fitting that the Passover ceremony for the Church be held at the beginning of the 14th of Abib (Nisan), when He shared His last meal with His disciples.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, is our Passover. The bread and wine represent His *total sacrifice* -- His suffering and death for all humanity. In ancient Israel, the slain lamb represented only Christ's death. However, we are to remember not only His death but all His *suffering*.

Although Jesus' death occurred near the end of the 14th, His suffering began the night before while He was still with His disciples. "And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death...'" (Matthew 26:37-38). Later, both the Jews and the Romans greatly increased His suffering through His capture, trial, brutalization and execution.

The New Testament Passover service includes a reminder of the beaten and battered body of Christ. "The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; *this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me*'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-24).

Isaiah wrote: "surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5, *New Revised Standard Version*).

In addition, Jesus Christ gave us a symbol to remind us of His shed blood. "In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:25-26).

The Passover service has a deeply spiritual meaning. It is a yearly reminder of how Jesus Christ both *suffered* and *died* on behalf of all mankind (*John 3:16*).

## Lord's Supper or Passover?

What is the impact of Paul's statement about the "Lord's supper" in 1 Corinthians 11:20? This is the only occurrence of the term in the Scriptures. Should we call the ceremony the "Passover" or the "Lord's Supper"? Paul's reference can be interpreted both positively and negatively, hence the statement provides only ambiguous support for renaming the Passover. As an ambiguous statement, it cannot then be a basis of church doctrine, which should only be founded on the clear teaching of scripture.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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While Paul does not directly disallow the term “Lord’s Supper,” neither does he endorse it. Rather he emphasizes that the “tradition” he received involved only bread and wine, not a supper meal. “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is **not** to eat the Lord’s Supper” (*1 Corinthians 11:20*, emphasis ours). There is no scriptural instruction to use the term “Lord’s Supper” to refer to the Passover. .

However, Paul does establish the important part of the keeping of the Passover under the New Covenant, the bread and the wine (*1 Corinthians 11:23-26*). He refers to Christ having taken the bread and the wine that evening and relating them to Himself as the Lamb of God.

History preserves the use of the term “Passover” by Christians instead of “Lord’s Supper” well into the second century. In fact, it wasn’t until the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E., that we find a rejection of this term as being Jewish. Note the following examples:

The *Epistle of the Apostles*, written in Asia Minor around 150 C.E. records an address that was supposedly given by the risen Christ to the Apostles. “And you therefore celebrate the remembrance of my death, i.e. the passover.”<sup>21</sup>

From Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History*: “. . . but the bishops in Asia were led by Polycrates in persisting that it was necessary to keep the custom which had been handed down to them of old. Polycrates himself in a document which he addressed to Victor and to the church of Rome, expounds the tradition which had come to him as follows. ‘Therefore we keep the day undeviatingly, neither adding nor taking away, for in Asia great luminaries sleep, and they will rise on the day of the coming of the Lord, when he will come with glory from heaven and seek out all the saints. Such were Philip of the twelve apostles. . . , there is also John, who lay on the Lord’s breast, . . . and there is also Polycarp, . . . and Thraseas. . . All these kept the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the gospel, never swerving, but following according to the rule of the faith.’”<sup>22</sup>

The Quartodeciman controversy in early Church history is well documented. This controversy dealt with the observance of the Christian Passover on Nisan 14, hence the name Quartodeciman. It is well documented that a majority of the bishops of Asia Minor did not accept the Easter Sunday tradition. Polycarp (who was a disciple of the Apostle John) and later Polycrates were both involved in this dispute.

Historical evidence in conjunction with the Biblical evidence supports our use of the term “Passover” for the annual observance on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.

## Conclusion

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<sup>21</sup> Edgar Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, eds. and trans., *New Testament Apocrypha* (Philadelphia, 1963), vol. 1, p.199.

<sup>22</sup> Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History*, original Greek with an English translation by Kirsopp Lake, (New York, G.P. Putnam’s Sons) 1926, volume 2, pp. 505, 507.

# The New Testament Passover

*Doctrinal Paper*

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The United Church of God, *an International Association*, follows the example of Jesus Christ, the apostles, the elders, and the brethren of the early Church in observing the Passover on an annual basis. We observe it by using the symbols instituted by Christ and by following His example on that final evening. We observe it as He did, in the evening at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib (Nisan) as is stated in the fundamental beliefs of the Church. Questions surrounding the observance of the Old Testament Passover will be addressed in a future study paper.