

Is Nisan 14 the Feast of Passover?

A Scriptural Study



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Part 1 - Is Nisan 14 the Feast of Passover?

Introduction

There is much confusion and many opinions about the timing of Passover, Jesus' death and resurrection and the timing of First Fruits and Pentecost. Among the various theories most at least would agree and say that Nisan 14 is the day of the feast of Passover. However, Nisan 14 is never called a feast day. In fact, the Bible never even calls it "Passover day" or "the day of Passover." Actually, the Bible refers to Nisan 14 as the preparation of the Passover implying that Nisan 14 is the day before the Passover just as Friday or the sixth day of the week, what the Bible calls the preparation of the Sabbath, is the day before the seventh-day Sabbath.

And we could ask some questions. Which is more important: the preparation for the Passover meal or the Passover meal itself? Is Passover just about when to kill the lamb or is that sacrifice part of a bigger process? So when is Passover? Where does the idea that Nisan 14 is Passover come from?

I have studied much about timing issues especially those around Jesus' death and resurrection and would like to share what I have found in regard to the timing of Passover. An in-depth look at the Biblical evidence will help to understand the significance of Nisan 14 and sort out the timing of Passover.

Part 2 of this study looks at every use of the original words translated as Passover. It shows that in almost every case a word needs to be added or at least understood in order to clarify what Passover is referring to.

Part 3 looks at the importance and implications of correctly understanding the meaning and timing of Passover. It helps to sort out some of the incorrect understandings of when Passover is to be observed.

Note that this study is not looking at other issues of the timing of Passover. These include which new moon to use to determine the start of the year and whether to start the month with the astronomical new moon (moment of conjunction) or the visible crescent. The focus here is on Nisan 14 and how it fits in with the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Old Testament Instructions for the Timing of Passover

The first instructions regarding Passover were given with the first observance of Passover in connection with Israel's flight from Egypt. At the time of the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites were commanded:

“ ... In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:” (Exo 12:3)



Each household was to select a lamb and then verse 6 says:

“And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.” (Exo 12:6)

Note that the King James Version marginal reading for "in the evening" is "between the evenings" which is correct because the original word translated as "in" (Strong's H996, beyn) can be seen, in its other uses, to have the meaning of "between."

"And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." (Gen 9:16)

"And they said, We saw certainly that the LORD was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee;" (Gen 26:28)

If the lamb is killed "between the evenings" there must be two times that are considered evening. Another verse that can help to establish this time is:

"But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt." (Deut 16:6)

The words "evening" in Exodus 12:6 and "even" in Deuteronomy 16:6 are both from the original Hebrew word "ereb" (Strong's H6153). So there must be two times daily that qualify as "ereb" and there must be a connection with the going down of the sun.

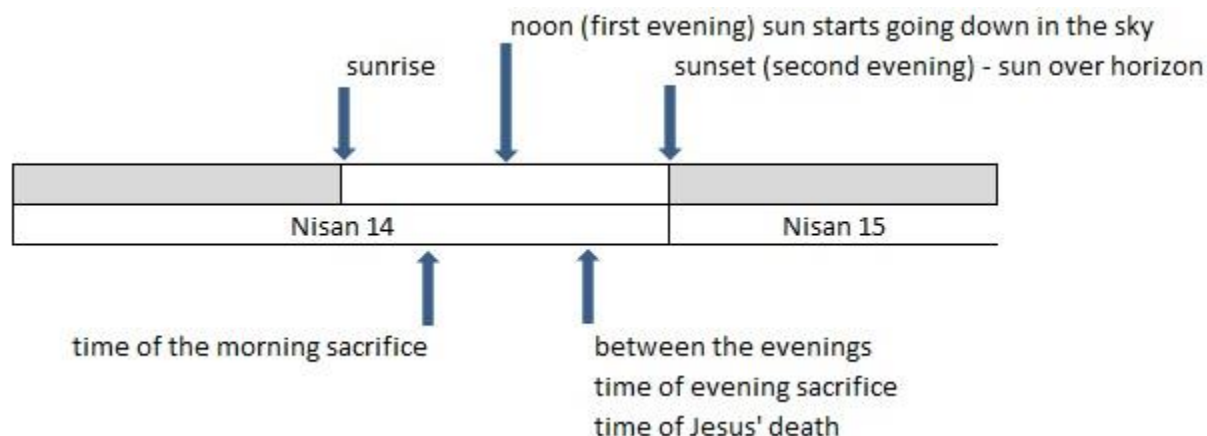
So the next question is: what does the going down of the sun mean? There are two logical ways to understand this. The sun starts to go down at noon, the time at which it has reached its highest point in the sky. The sun also goes down over the horizon at sunset. Between these two times, the exact midpoint would be the middle of the afternoon. This also happens to coincide with the time of the evening sacrifice referred to later in scripture. Killing the lamb then allows time to butcher and roast it in time for a later meal.

Ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day and kill it **ben ha-arbayim** (between the evenings).

Of course, it is also true that the going down of the sun, the time when the sun is going down in the sky is the whole afternoon from noon until sunset. However, since the meaning is between two points it seems we must identify those as noon and sunset, with the midpoint being the time of the evening sacrifice, which seems to fit very well with other scriptures.

The expression "between the evenings" (Hebrew ben ha-arbayim) is not unique to the Passover. It is also used to specify the time for the daily evening sacrifice in Exodus 29:39,41 and Numbers 28:4,8.

"The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even:" (Exo 29:39)



We have established the time at which the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed - midafternoon on Nisan 14. Does that mean that Passover is at the specific time of midafternoon on Nisan 14 or does Passover refer to the whole day of Nisan 14 or is there even another possibility?

It is very instructive to look at how the Bible uses the word Passover and its connection to the Feast of Unleavened Bread with which it is closely associated.

Nisan 14 is Not an Annual Feast

The annual feasts are listed in Leviticus 23. Verse two says that the feasts are holy convocations:

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts." (Lev 23:2)

After mentioning the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, it goes on to introduce the annual feasts which are holy convocations.

"These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons." (Lev 23:4)

The different days are then listed:

Special Days in the Annual Calendar

Passover

"... **the fourteenth day** of the first month at even is **the LORD'S passover**." (verse 5)
No mention of a holy convocation.

Unleavened Bread

"... the **feast of unleavened bread** ... seven days ye must eat unleavened bread." (verse 6) This verse determines the extent of the whole feast.
 "In the first day (of the **feast of unleavened bread**) ye shall have **an holy convocation** ..." (verse 7)
 "... in the seventh day (of the **feast of unleavened bread**) is **an holy convocation** ..." (verse 8)

First Fruits

"... When ye be come into the land ... bring a sheaf of **the firstfruits** of your harvest ..." (verse 10) No mention of a holy convocation.

Pentecost

"... Even unto **the morrow after the seventh sabbath** ... number fifty days ..." (verse 16)
 "... proclaim **on the selfsame day**, that it may be **an holy convocation** ..." (verse 21)

Trumpets

"... a memorial of blowing of **trumpets**, **an holy convocation**." (verse 24)

Day of Atonement

"... a **day of atonement**: it shall be **an holy convocation** ..." (verse 27)

Tabernacles

"... the **feast of tabernacles** for seven days unto the LORD." (verse 34)
 "On the first day shall be **an holy convocation** ..." (verse 35)
 "... on the eighth day shall be **an holy convocation** ..." (verse 36)

"**These are the feasts** of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be **holy convocations** ..." (verse 37)

Notice that Nisan 14 and First Fruits are not called holy convocations. Thus there are exactly seven annual feasts/holy convocations:

Spring Feasts:

Unleavened bread day 1
 Unleavened bread day 7
 Pentecost

Fall Feasts:

Trumpets
 Atonement
 Tabernacles day 1
 Tabernacles day 8

Passover and Unleavened Bread Used Interchangeably

Even today, the terms Passover and Unleavened Bread have come to be used somewhat interchangeably. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, biblically, is just the seven-days from Nisan 15 to 21 inclusive.

"Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters." (Exo 13:7)

This verse could cause some confusion:

"In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, ~~ye shall have~~ the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten." (Eze 45:21)

The words "ye shall have" are not in the original (see the Interlinear versions). Obviously, the seven-day feast cannot fit into just the 14th day of the month. You cannot have a feast of seven days in one day. It is referring to when the feast starts and other verses clarify exactly when on the 14th - at sunset, the end of the 14th which is also when the 15th day starts, the time at which they were to begin to eat only unleavened bread for seven days. The other point about this verse is that Passover came to be used interchangeably with Feast of Unleavened Bread as seen elsewhere in scripture and in other historical writings.

There are other verses that mention both the fourteenth day of the first month and Passover. Two of these (one using the pronoun "it") specify that Passover is "at even."

"In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S passover." (Lev 23:5)

"In the fourteenth day of this month, at even, ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it." (Num 9:3)

In our culture, we might say something like "the fireworks are going to happen tonight at midnight." In that case, midnight marks the starting point but they are really happening tomorrow.

Another verse that might seem confusing at first is:

"And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the LORD."
(Num 28:16)

However, [when this verse is examined in its context](#), it is apparent that it is referring to the Passover sacrifice and not the day.

In the New Testament, there is definitely a mixing of the terms and even a combining of Nisan 14 with the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Matthew, Mark and Luke all refer to Nisan 14, the day on which the lambs were killed in preparation for the feast and include it as part of the feast of unleavened bread:

"Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?" (Matt 26:17)

"And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?" (Mark 14:12)

"Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed." (Luke 22:7)

This verse speaks of a coming day which is described as being both Passover and Unleavened Bread:

"After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death." (Mark 14:1)

This verse directly indicates that the two terms were used interchangeably:

"Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover." (Luke 22:1)

The verses above obviously indicate that the Passover was coincident with the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

It is helpful to understand that, by the time of Jesus, the term "Feast of Unleavened Bread" was often used to refer to the whole period of eight days. For instance, the Jewish historian Josephus wrote:

"Whence it is that, in memory of the want we were then in, we keep a feast for eight days, which is called the feast of unleavened bread." (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 2, Chapter 15)

So Nisan 14 seems to have been considered part of the feast in popular usage but isn't Passover a day on its own in the Bible? Isn't Passover a feast on its own distinct from the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

The Bible Never Uses the Terms "Passover Day" or "Day of Passover"

Actually, the Bible never uses the term "Passover day" or "day of Passover" to specifically designate the day itself. The word "Passover" is often used as an adjective with the noun it is modifying not specified. For example, the very first use of the word in the Bible is:

"And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover." (Exo 12:11)

The verse speaks of eating "it" with "it" referring to the passover. Obviously, what is being eaten (the Passover) is not the day but the Passover lamb, spoken of in the previous verses. It is not a reference to the Passover day. The second use is:

"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." (Exo 12:21)

In this case, again, it is not the day but the Passover sacrifice that is to be killed. They were not killing the Passover day.

Therefore, it is helpful (indeed, usually necessary) to add a word after "Passover" to clarify what is being referred to. The words that might be appropriate, depending on the context, include feast, lamb, meal and sacrifice. Adding a word is not changing the meaning, it is actually clarifying it from the context which must be used to determine what is being referred to.

If a person was to go through [all 73 verses](#) (done in part 2, below, of this study) that use the original words for Passover in the Bible and determine carefully, from the context of each case, what "Passover" is referring to, it will be discovered that it never refers to "Passover day" or "the day of Passover."

Here is an interesting use of "Passover":

"That ye shall say, 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." (Exo 12:27)

In this case, "it" is a reference to "this service" (verse 26) which was done in commemoration of "the LORD'S passover," the actual passing over the houses of the Israelites by the Lord. It is useful to remember that it is that event and the subsequent rescue from their taskmasters that the whole commemoration is about and that event happened on Nisan 15.

I believe it is important to remember here that the Lord's action was to not suffer (meaning allow) the "destroyer" to come in and smite the firstborn:

"... when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you." (Exo 12:23)



When did the original "Passover" occur in Egypt? It was at midnight on the fifteenth. The Passover was observed by the ceremonial meal on the evening hours of the fifteenth before the actual Passover and showed faith in God's promise to see the blood they had applied and "pass over" them.

"And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt." (Exo 12:13)

So Passover, in its original sense, refers to the passing over and that happened on Nisan 15. What is referred to in the following verse as being eaten is not the day but the Passover meal:

"And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?" (Luke 22:11)

People get confused thinking that the Passover meal must be eaten on Nisan 14 without understanding that, in Egypt, the meal happened on Nisan 15 and Nisan 14 is not the day of the Passover but the day of preparation for the Passover observance.

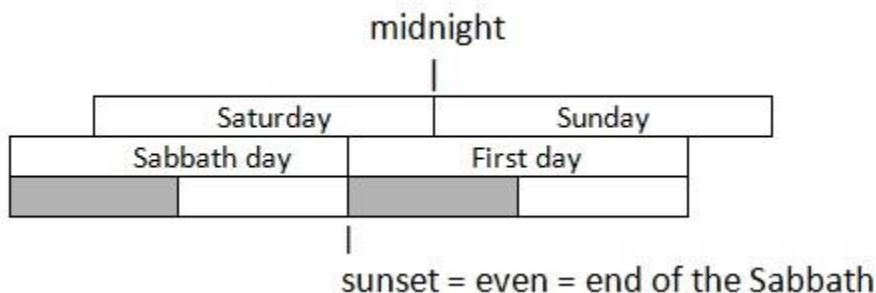
Some people reason that since the Passover was named because the Lord "passed over" the houses of the Israelites that the sacrifice of the Passover lamb must have occurred on the same calendar day that the Lord passed over the houses. But nothing in the scriptures requires that. It only specifies that the Lord passed over in the same night that the sacrifice was eaten (Exo 12:11-12). The slaying of the Passover lamb was simply done to prepare it for the meal to be observed later.

Even and Sunset in the New Testament

Verses that refer to the fourteenth at even often cause confusion. However, it must be recognized that "at even" corresponds to the end of the day and thus the beginning of the next day. That "at even" can correspond to sunset is also supported in the gospels:

"And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils." (Mark 1:32)

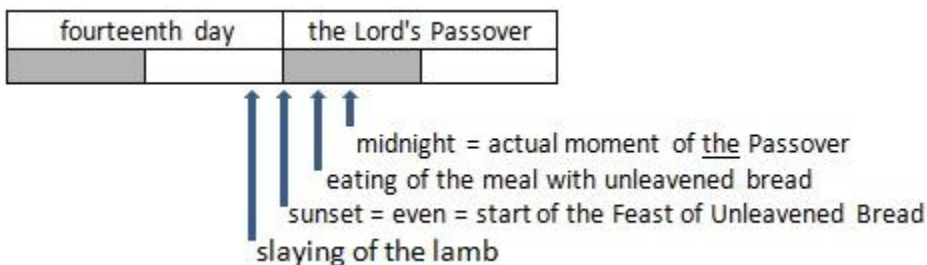
Jesus was teaching on the Sabbath (v 21) "and at even when the sun did set" and the Sabbath was over, those in need of healing were brought to Him. Being the end of the Sabbath the people felt free to do this without violating traditional law.



So the point in time referred to in Mark 1:32, read in context, is:

- at even
- when the sun did set
- at the end of the Sabbath day

Similarly, the point being referred to in Lev 23:5 ("the fourteenth day of the first month at even") is the end of the fourteenth day, marking the start of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.



"The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs." (Num 9:11).

The Israelites sacrificed their lambs on the fourteenth and prepared them to be eaten after sunset on the evening of the fifteenth.

The Timing of the Passover of Crucifixion Week

Now let's consider the events and timing surrounding the crucifixion and on which day of the week Nisan 14 was in that year. To get the timing right, we need to start at the beginning, even a little before Passover and look at all the evidence.

From the tenth to the fourteenth day they were to have this lamb “without blemish, a male of the first year,” (Exo 12:5). Since each house did not necessarily include a shepherd and they would have to keep the lamb for that house separate from others, they may very well have kept it in or right close to their house. They would get to know it almost like a pet and perhaps become quite attached to it.

The whole reason for taking a lamb was to help them recognize the real Lamb of God Whom John the Baptist introduced later:

“... John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

Jesus is described in later scriptures in terms consistent with a lamb and its character:

“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:” (1 Pet 1:19)

“For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;” (Heb 7:26)

Doesn't “harmless” and “undefiled” describe a lamb of the first year?

When was the Tenth of Nisan in the Year of the Crucifixion?

We have seen (page 6) that Matthew 26:17, Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7, in their descriptions of the disciples preparing for Passover, refer to the day before the crucifixion as the day when the Passover lambs are killed and the Passover prepared (although it was commonly included as part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread) making that day Nisan 14. This provides a solid anchor which can be used to help determine the other days.

Now we need to examine what John's gospel says about Passover. We can start with this verse:

“Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. ... On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.” (John 12:1, 12-13)

There are some apparent differences in the timing John used relative to the other gospel writers. John must have used the term "Passover" in reference to Friday Nisan 15, the day when the Passover feast was celebrated, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 15.

Since the actual celebration of Passover was on Friday the 15th of Nisan, one day before Passover would be Thursday, Nisan 14 and six days before Passover would be Sabbath, Nisan 9.

So Jesus arrived in Bethany on Sabbath and the next day was what is commonly called the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem which was the day the Passover lambs were selected. According to scripture, this was the tenth day of the first month:

"... In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:" (Exo 12:3)

In the year of the crucifixion, that day was on a Sunday. Here is a diagram of the relationship of the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Sunday to the other days of the week:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Nisan 10	Nisan 11	Nisan 12	Nisan 13	Nisan 14	Nisan 15/ Unl. bread	Nisan 16/ First Fruits
1st day	2nd day	3rd day	4th day	5th day	Preparation	Sabbath
						
E				S P	C	

E = Entry into Jerusalem; S = Sacrifice of lambs for Thursday evening Passover observance; P = Passover meal (Jesus' observance); C = crucifixion.

The above reasoning puts John in agreement with the other gospel writers since, if Nisan 10 is a Sunday, then Nisan 14 would be a Thursday, the day before the crucifixion.

Some might object that Jesus would not have travelled that far on Sabbath to arrive in Bethany but we are not told how far He travelled or where He travelled from. It could have been a short distance and, besides, Jesus did not generally regard Rabbinical restrictions. A short time before this Jesus was in Jericho and Luke 19 records His route to Jerusalem but does not reveal the timing.

The next chapter of John brings us to Passover:

"Now **before the feast of the passover**, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;" (John 13:1-2)

This verse is in the setting of the last supper which was on Thursday evening. Note that there is a problem with the phrase "supper being ended." There is no reason to translate "ginomai" (Strong's G1096) as "being ended." In 677 other uses it is never translated that way. It is most commonly rendered as "be" (255 times), "come to pass" (82 times), "be made" (69 times) and several others. After washing their feet, verse 12 says He sat down again and then there is much more in the next few chapters to happen before the supper is really ended.



So "before the feast of the passover" could be a valid reference to before the actual feast day (Nisan 15) if they were sitting down to eat Thursday evening shortly before sunset.

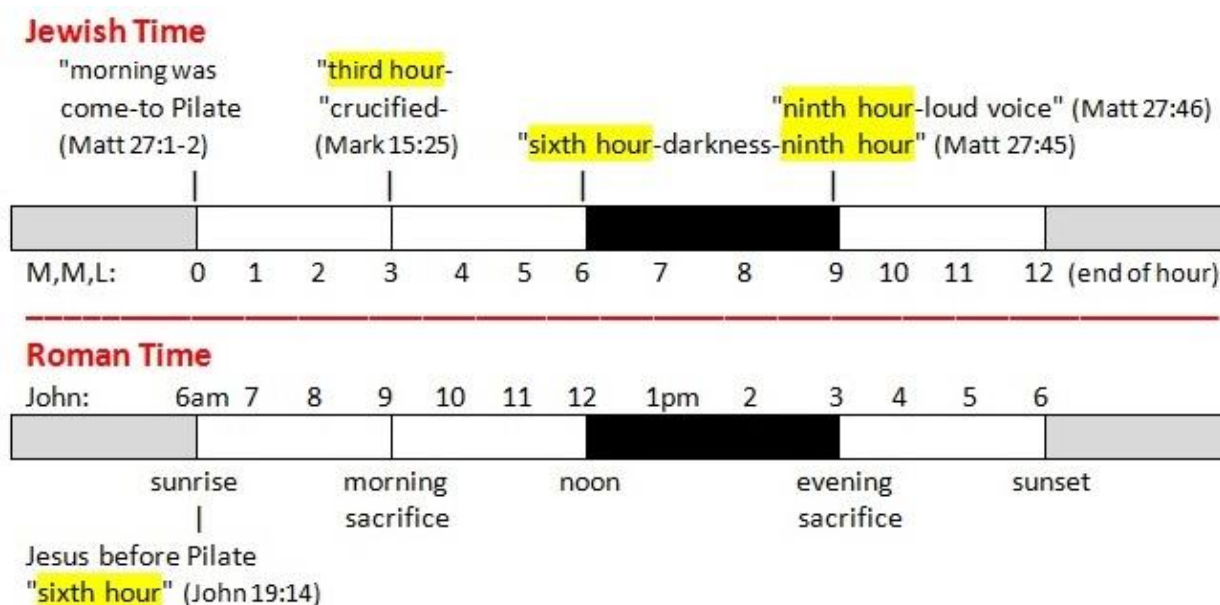
"Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but **that they might eat the passover.**" (John 18:28)

Note that John is not saying that the Passover had not yet occurred but simply that they (the Sadducees) had not yet eaten the Passover meal. They had a different reckoning for the feast day.

"And it was **the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour:** and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!" (John 19:14)

Why would John refer to that day, the day of the crucifixion as "the preparation of the passover?" Likely because, to the Jews who had not yet eaten of the Passover (John 18:28), it was the day of preparation. He was speaking of the Jews and their situation and made a time reference that corresponded to their estimation. He did the same thing in this one verse in relation to the Romans.

He wrote the "sixth hour" or 6am as he described events that were related to Pilate and occurring in the Roman court. This was using the Roman method of time reckoning which started the first hour at midnight as we do today. The timing is obviously different as seen in the following diagram:



John, later in the chapter, makes reference to the crucifixion day being the preparation day for the seventh-day Sabbath:

"The Jews therefore, because **it was the preparation**, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." (John 19:31)

Again, for the Jews, in their understanding, it was the day to prepare for the Passover meal/observance as they had not yet eaten of it. That Sabbath day was a high day because, in the estimation of the Jews (who John is talking about), it was both the seventh-day Sabbath and the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread.

But Didn't He Have to Die on Nisan 14?

You will notice, in the diagram on page 15, that the crucifixion is assigned to Nisan 15. Most people would object to this and say "but He had to die on Nisan 14." Let's examine this reasoning - He had to die on Nisan 14 - says who?

Unblemished Passover Lambs were selected on the 10th and further examined until the fourteenth. They were to be examined for any fault and, if found faultless, to be accepted and then sacrificed on 14th. Jesus was thoroughly examined and questioned:

"And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him **the chief priests**, and **the scribes**, and **the elders**, And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?" (Mark 11:27-28)

"And they send unto him certain of **the Pharisees** and of **the Herodians**, to catch him in his words. .. Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" (Mark 12:13-14)

"Then come unto him **the Sadducees**, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying, ... In the resurrection ... whose wife shall she be ..." (Mark 12:18,23)

"And **one of the scribes** came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?" (Mark 12:28)

"And there were **certain Greeks** among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus." (John 12:20-21)

It came to the point that:

"... no man after that durst ask him any question." (Mark 12:34)

Pilate, who also examined Him, verified Christ's faultlessness when he proclaimed: "I find no fault in this man." (Luke 23:4) And, while no fault could be found, Jesus was rejected as the Passover Lamb. Was that His fault? Of course not; it was a choice of people whose God-given free will He always honors.

Think of the story of King Jeroboam.

"And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made." (1 Kings 12:32)

Jeroboam instituted a feast to rival the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem and held it a month later. Here is the question: was it the fault of the animals that were sacrificed that they were offered at the wrong time? - Of course not. What sacrificial animal ever determined its own time to die? God gave His Son:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

If God gave His Son because He loved the world, it makes sense that He gave His Son to the world. They (or, more generally, we) did to Him what they (we) wanted. God did not force people to accept the Offering or follow the normal

observance. My book [In the Heart of the Earth](#) reveals more about the significance of Jesus' crucifixion in relation to God honoring man's free will.

The Bible nowhere says that Jesus had to die on Nisan 14.

Did We Get it All Wrong?

It can be reasoned that not only did Jesus die on the wrong day but also that He died in the wrong place and by the wrong method. If the sacrificial system was followed, He should have died by the hand of the high priest (think of Abraham's almost-sacrifice of Isaac) on the altar of sacrifice in the temple inside Jerusalem. Instead, He died outside the city on a Roman cross, one the worst forms of torture man had yet devised. And, think of it, what sacrificial lamb was ever nailed to a cross? There is plenty wrong with the scenario but we got it wrong, not God.

The parable of the owner of the vineyard in Luke 20 illustrates this. In trying to collect the fruit of his vineyard the landowner finally sent his son:

"...I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him." (Luke 20:13)

A few verses later Jesus even linked this parable directly to His rejection by the chief priests and the scribes:

"And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?" (Luke 20:17)

Preparation of the Passover

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, as specified in Leviticus 23, does not include Nisan 14; rather, that day is the preparation day for the feast. It is the equivalent of the preparation day (every Friday, the sixth day of the week) for the seventh-day Sabbath.

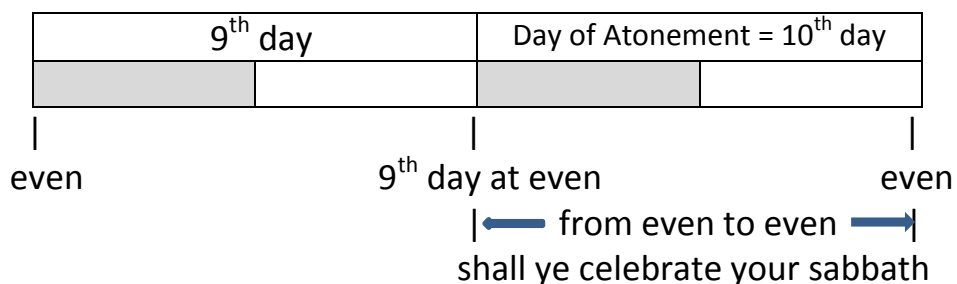
The Passover observance starts at sunset on the 14th which is really the start of the 15th. Evidence that the 14th at even (sunset) begins the 15th comes from various scriptures including from this description of the Day of Atonement:

"Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD." (Lev 23:27)

The Day of Atonement was to be on the tenth of the month. Follow through from verse 27 above to the verse below and you will see that the "it" of verse 32 is still referring to the Day of Atonement which is then described as:

"It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath." (Lev 23:32)

So they were to keep the tenth day of the month as a special day starting at even (or the end of) the ninth day. That makes sense - start observing a day at the close of the previous day. (Some readers may not be aware that there is a controversy among some Bible students as to when a new calendar day begins.)



The "ninth day at even" is the equivalent of how we would say today at midnight which, in our system, would also mark the beginning of the next day.

Is Nisan 14 the Feast of Passover? - Summary

- The Bible never calls Nisan 14 a feast or holy day.
- Nisan 14 is the day of preparation for the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- Passover lambs were to be sacrificed in the midafternoon of Nisan 14 as part of the preparation for the Passover meal eaten on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- Jesus and His disciples observed the feast at the right time.
- Jesus, having been rejected as the Passover lamb, was slain on Nisan 15, a day late, in the wrong place and by the wrong method.
- Jesus, was given (John 3:16) to the world (us) and look what we did to Him!

Part 2 - Every Use of the Term "Passover"

There is confusion among many over the use of the term "Passover day" or "the day of Passover. Passages using the word "passover" in scripture are often not clear as to whether they are speaking of the Passover day, observance, feast, lamb, meal or sacrifice. The text usually does not specify exactly what is being referred to so that must be determined by the context. For example, Jesus definitely did not eat the Passover "day;" He ate the Passover "meal" but Luke 22:15 just says "I have desired to eat this passover with you ..." Basically, in most cases, "Passover" is an adjective with the noun it is describing being understood from the context.

Actually, there are only a few verses where "Passover day" is even a possible option but even in those cases, when examined in context and with the weight of evidence, "day" is not the most reasonable understanding.

The point of this study is to show, from its use in scripture, that "Passover" does not refer to Nisan 14 as many people think. This will help to clear up many misunderstandings of the timing of the spring feasts.

In the Old Testament, "Passover" is translated from the Hebrew "pesach" (Strong's H6453) which is rendered as "Passover" 45 times, as "Passover offerings" 3 times and as "Passovers" 1 time.

In the New Testament, Passover is translated from the Greek "pascha" (Strong's G3957) which is rendered as "Passover" 28 times and as "Easter" 1 time.

Here is a summary of the uses of "Passover:"

	Original word	Strong's number	Number of uses	Number of verses
Old Testament	pesach	6453	49	46
New Testament	pascha	3957	29	27
Total			78	73

It turns out, upon careful examination, that scripture never uses the term "Passover day" or "the day of Passover." The following pages show every verse in

the King James Version that uses the original words translated as "Passover." In each case (except three that actually say "Passover offerings"), I have added a word or more [in square brackets] to show more specifically what "Passover" is referring to. In many cases, further explanation is included.

Old Testament Verses Referring to the Passover

Here are the 46 verses in the Old Testament that include 49 occurrences of the word "pesach."

1. "And thus shall ye eat it [the lamb, first referred to in verse 3]; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it [the lamb] in haste: it [the lamb] is the LORD'S **passover** [meal or sacrifice]." (Exo 12:11)

2. "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** [lamb]." (Exo 12:21)

3. "That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of **the LORD'S passover** [the actual physical act of the LORD passing over the houses], 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." (Exo 12:27)

Note: In this verse Passover is referring to the passing over of the houses of the Israelites. This is what all the other references to Passover observance are commemorating.

4. "And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the **passover** [meal]: There shall no stranger eat thereof:" (Exo 12:43)

5. "And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the **passover [meal]** to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep **it**; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof." (Exo 12:48)

We tend to associate the word "keep" with keeping a feast not eating a meal but "keep" is translated from the Hebrew word "asah" which is most often translated as "do" (1333 times) or "make" (653 times). The word "eat" later in the verse indicates what is being spoken of. It says "eat thereof" (we would more commonly say "eat of it") with "thereof" referring to the Passover. If they are going to eat of it, what is being spoken of must be the meal rather than the day/feast.

6. "Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven; neither shall the sacrifice of the feast of the **passover [sacrifice]** be left unto the morning." (Exo 34:25)

7. "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S **passover [meal]**." (Lev 23:5)

"At even" on the fourteenth marks the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th when the meal was to be eaten, the lamb having been killed earlier on the 14th and then prepared along with the rest of the meal.

8. "Let the children of Israel also keep the **passover [meal or observance]** at his appointed season. In the fourteenth day of this month, at even, ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it." (Num 9:2-3)

The "it" of verse three is referring to the Passover which is to be kept at even, so this is a reference to the meal, the observance at the start of the fifteenth, the sacrifice having been made hours before. All the rites of "it" (the Passover) and all the ceremonies thereof (of the passover) would include more than just sacrificing the animal.

9. "And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, that they should keep the passover [meal]. (Num 9:4)

10. And they kept the passover [meal] on the fourteenth day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel." (Num 9:5)

Verse four, on its own, could be seen as "they should keep the passover day" but the next verse specifies when they kept it - at even, at the end of the day, which also marks the beginning of the next day. The actual observance was on the fifteenth.

11. "And there were certain men, who were defiled by the dead body of a man, that they could not keep the passover [meal] on that day: and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day:" (Num 9:6)

"That day" is a reference to the day in verses 4-5 which is the fifteenth. The advice given to Moses in regard to the situation in the verse above was:

12. "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover [meal, or whole service] unto the LORD. The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs." (Num 9:10-11)

The "keep it" of verse 11 seems to be referring to the lamb specifically, not the whole meal since "it" is to be eaten "with" other items. This helps to show that "Passover in verse 6 is a reference to the meal.

13. "They shall leave none of it **[the Passover lamb]** unto the morning, nor break any bone of it **[the Passover lamb]**: according to all the ordinances of the **passover [service]** they shall keep it." (Num 9:12)

14. "But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbearth to keep the **passover [service]**, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin." (Num 9:13)

In this verse, not keeping the Passover seems to be equated with not bringing the offering (Passover lamb).

15. "And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the **passover [meal or service]** unto the LORD; according to the ordinance of the **passover [meal or service]**, and according to the manner thereof, so shall he do: ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land." (Num 9:14)

This doesn't likely mean to sacrifice a lamb as not every person did that - it was a lamb for a household (Exo 12:4) not a lamb for each person.

Here is the one verse that seems to most strongly suggest that Nisan 14 is the day of Passover:

16. "And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the **passover [lamb]** of the LORD." (Num 28:16)

It doesn't say "at even" it says "in the fourteenth day" so it sounds like the Passover happens during the hours of the fourteenth. However, when this verse is examined in context, it is apparent that Numbers chapters 28 and 29 contain a list of the sacrifices that were to be offered on various days. The introduction to this section states:

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, and my bread for my sacrifices made by

fire, for a sweet savour unto me, shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season." (Num 28:1-2)

The particular sacrifices are listed for all the significant days of the year:

Numbers	Specified Offerings
28:3-8	Continual burnt offerings - 2 lambs daily
28:9-10	Sabbaths - 2 lambs
28:11-15	New moons - 2 bullocks, 1 ram, 7 lambs, 1 goat
28:16	The fourteenth day - the Passover
28:17-25	Feast of Unleavened Bread (each day) - 2 bullocks, 1 ram, 7 lambs, 1 goat
28:26-31	First Fruits - 2 bullocks, 1 ram, 7 lambs, 1 goat
29:1-6	Feast of Trumpets - 1 bullock, 1 ram, 7 lambs, 1 goat
29:7-11	Day of Atonement - 1 bullock, 1 ram, 7 lambs, 1 goat
29:12-34	Feast of Tabernacles (each day) - 13 bullocks (number decreases by 1 each day of the feast), 2 rams, 14 lambs, 1 goat
29:35	Last great day - 1 bullock, 1 ram, 7 lambs, 1 goat

Then the whole list is summarized:

"These things ye shall do (margin: offer) unto the LORD in your set feasts, beside your vows, and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for your meat offerings, and for your drink offerings, and for your peace offerings." (Num 29:39)

Notice that it is a list of the animals that were to be offered on particular days. There is no logical reason to suppose that Num 28:16, speaking of Passover, is any different. It is not saying that it (the 14th) was a day to celebrate a feast separate from the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Rather, it is specifying the sacrifice to be made on Nisan 14 - the Passover lamb. If it was really meaning that "in the fourteenth day ... is the passover **feast** ..." it would be the only one in the list that did not specify what was to be offered. Also, it would not make sense in light of the summary statement (Num 29:39) which talks about offering various offerings.

17. "And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the **passover** [of the Lord - the Lord passing over] the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians." (Num 33:3)

"Passover," in this verse, is talking about the big event of that time, the passing over of the Israelites as the first-born of the Egyptians were perishing.

[This website](#) explains that **the word "after" in verses like the one above does not belong there** - it is not in the original text. That factor has caused a lot of misunderstanding in regards to timing issues. Here is a more correct, literal version:

"And they journey from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month, on the morrow **of the passover** have the sons of Israel gone out with a high hand, before the eyes of all the Egyptians" (Num 33:3, Young's Literal Translation)

18. "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the **passover** [feast] unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night." (Deut 16:1)

The reason for keeping Passover, in this verse, is "for" (or, because) of their leaving Egypt. It seems that to keep the Passover is here referring to the whole observance as it all relates to their rescue from Egypt. The slaying of the lambs was done in preparation for that.

19. "Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the **passover** [lamb] unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there." (Deut 16:2)

20. "Thou mayest not sacrifice the **passover** [lamb] within any of thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee:" (Deut 16:5)

21. But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the **passover [lamb]** at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt." (Deut 16:6)

Verses 2, 5 and 6 obviously refer to the sacrifice not the day. The sun is going down from noon to sunset. That is why Exodus 12:6 is understood to be between the evenings at approximately 3pm - between when the sun starts to go down at noon and when it is completely down at sunset.

22. "And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the **passover [meal]** on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho." (Josh 5:10)

They didn't keep the Passover "day" (the whole day) at even on the fourteenth. That point in the day (even) marked the close of the fourteenth and the start of their observance of the Passover on the 15th.

23. And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the **passover [meal, observance]**, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day." (Josh 5:11)

Again, as in Num 33:3 (#17 in the list above), the word "after" should not be there. A better translation would be:

"and they eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow of the passover, unleavened things and roasted corn, in this self-same day;" (Josh 5:11, Young's Literal Translation)

Passover was at night, the actual time being about midnight (Exo 11:4). This "eating of the old corn" was a reference to the morning that followed. It did follow the Passover but the word "after" is not needed to give that meaning. It was the morrow of the Passover (as opposed to the evening) and they ate of the old corn the same day ("the selfsame day") as they ate of the Passover meal since,

with the day beginning at sunset, there was no change of day between the two events.

There are other similar uses of "selfsame day" that connect two events happening on the same day.

In Leviticus it says that on the same day the Israelites brought the offering they could eat bread.

"And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings." (Lev 23:14)

In Exodus they were told to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread because on the same day of its first occurrence they were brought out of Egypt.

"And ye shall observe [the feast of] unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever." (Exo 12:17)

They were to observe the feast (in the evening hours before midnight on the 15th) for (or because) in the selfsame day (in the morning, still on the 15th) did they escape from Egypt.

24. "And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the **passover [feast]** unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant." (2 Kings 23:21)

25. Surely there was not holden such a **passover [feast]** from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah;" (2 Kings 23:22)

26. But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this **passover [feast]** was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem." (2 Kings 23:23)

Note that the command in verse 21 was to all the people. Not all the people killed a lamb, it was one lamb per household (Exo 12:4). "Passover," in these verses, is not referring just to the killing of the lamb on the 14th. It is referring to everything that is involved in proper observance of the feast.

27. "And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the **passover [feast]** unto the LORD God of Israel." (2 Chron 30:1)

28. "For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the **passover [feast]** in the second month." (2 Chron 30:2)

29. "So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the **passover [feast]** unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written." (2 Chron 30:5)

The three verses above refer to keeping the feast which would include selecting and killing the lamb, preparing and partaking of the meal and disposing of any remains before the following morning. Also, of course, the proper recognition of the significance of the whole service. If a person only killed the lamb on Nisan 14 and did nothing else, they would not have kept the feast. Passover does not simply equal Nisan 14.

30. "Then they killed the **passover [lamb]** on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the LORD." (2 Chron 30:15)

31. "For there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the **passovers [sacrificial animals]** for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto the LORD." (2 Chron 30:17)

32. "For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the **passover [meal]** otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one" (2 Chron 30:18)

33. "Moreover Josiah kept a **passover [feast]** unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the **passover [lamb]** on the fourteenth day of the first month." (2 Chron 35:1)

34. "So kill the **passover [lamb]**, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do **[observe the Passover]** according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses." (2 Chron 35:6)

35. And Josiah gave to the people, of the flock, lambs and kids, all for the **passover offerings**, for all that were present, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bullocks: these were of the king's substance." (2 Chron 35:7)

36. "And his princes gave willingly unto the people, to the priests, and to the Levites: Hilkiah and Zechariah and Jehiel, rulers of the house of God, gave unto the priests for the **passover offerings** two thousand and six hundred small cattle, and three hundred oxen." (2 Chron 35:8)

37. "Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethaneel, his brethren, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, chief of the Levites, gave unto the Levites for **passover offerings** five thousand small cattle, and five hundred oxen." (2 Chron 35:9)

The last three verses above already specify that "passover" is referring to the offerings involved in the Passover observance so it is not necessary to add a word to clarify what Passover is referring to. In all other uses of "Passover" what Passover is referring to needs to be understood from the context.

38. "And they killed the **passover [lambs]**, and the priests sprinkled the blood from their hands, and the Levites flayed them." (2 Chron 35:11)

39. "And they roasted the **passover [lambs]** with fire according to the ordinance: but the other holy offerings sod they in pots, and in caldrons, and in pans, and divided them speedily among all the people." (2 Chron 35:13)

Here is a verse that helps to show that while the preparation of the Passover was on one day (Nisan 14), the actual observance of Passover happened on the next day, after sunset (Nisan 15).

"And afterward they made ready for themselves, and for the priests: because the priests the sons of Aaron were busied in offering of burnt offerings and the fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared for themselves, and for the priests the sons of Aaron." (2 Chron 35:14)

Note that they prepared for the Passover until night. The preparation for something to happen once it was prepared continued until night. So the event was obviously at night, after the preparation was completed.

40. "So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the **passover [meal, observance]**, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah." (2 Chron 35:16)

Note: the preparation happened all on one day, the day of the preparation of the Passover, (the 14th) which comes the day before the day on which the Passover observance happens (the 15th) which was the day when the actual Passover happened in Egypt.

41. "And the children of Israel that were present kept the **passover [meal, observance]** at that time, **and** the feast of unleavened bread seven days." (2 Chron 35:17)

It isn't "they kept the Passover on the 14th and then the feast of unleavened bread for the next seven days." The observance of the Passover happened on the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, the day the actual Passover happened

which is the reason for keeping Passover in the first place. So, "at that time" they both kept the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread. That is why unleavened bread is included in the ordinance of the Passover observance.

42. "And there was no **passover** [observance] like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a **passover** [observance, meal] as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem." (2 Chron 35:18)

43. "In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this **passover** [observance] kept." (2 Chron 35:19)

44. "And the children of the captivity kept the **passover** [sacrifice] upon the fourteenth day of the first month." (Ezra 6:19)

45. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the **passover** [lambs] for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves." (Ezra 6:20)

See the note about the word "kept" (same original word as in this verse) with Exodus 12:48. Ezra 6:20 helps to clarify what was done. They kept the passover sacrifice "for" or because the priests and Levites killed the passover lambs, the sacrificial animals. The context is the slaughter of the animals. Ezra 6: 17 has just listed the great number of animals involved in the dedication of the house of God. Then verse 19 says they kept the Passover but the word "kept" should be "do" or "make" (as it is translated in Young's Literal Translation) and it was done "for" (or because) the priests and the Levites slaughtered the Passover animals.

46. "In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, ye shall have the **passover** [feast], a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten." (Eze 45:21)

Note: The words "ye shall have" are not in the original. It is not saying that the Passover feast was to happen in or on the 14th. This verse is equating the Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread showing that they are two names for the same thing which is also shown in the New Testament - see Mark 14:1 and Luke 22:1.

The Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread was to start on the 14th. Eze 45:21 does not specify when on the 14th it starts but this is given elsewhere as "at even" or at the end of the 14th which marks the beginning of the 15th day. Obviously, a feast of seven days cannot happen just on the fourteenth.

New Testament Verses Referring to the Passover

Here are the 27 verses in the New Testament that include 29 occurrences of the word "Pascha."

1. "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the **passover** (used here interchangeably with the Feast of Unleavened Bread), and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified." (Matt 26:2)

The day of Nisan 14 itself was not designated as a feast according to Leviticus 23. Passover is sometimes referred to as a feast but only because the word "Passover" was used interchangeably with the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Luke 22:1). The actual feast was the seven days inclusive from Nisan 15-21. Nisan 14 was the day of preparation for the feast. That it was used interchangeably is shown by this quotation from the Jewish historian Josephus:

"Whence it is that, in memory of the want we were then in, we keep a feast for eight days, which is called the feast of unleavened bread." (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 2, Chapter 15)

2. "Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the **passover** [meal]?" (Matt 26:17)

This verse provides further evidence of what was stated regarding the previous verse. If they are preparing for the Passover, which was to be done on Nisan 14, then they are including it as part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which seems to have been the common practice by Jesus' time. Strictly speaking, the Feast of Unleavened Bread included only the seven days from Nisan 15 - 21.

3. "And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the **passover** **[meal]** at thy house with my disciples." (Matt 26:18)

Jesus said He would keep the Passover at the man's house. This would be a reference to the meal as the lambs were slain at the temple.

4. "And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the **passover** **[meal]**." (Matt 26:19)

5. "After two days was the feast of the **passover**, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death." (Mark 14:1)

Note: It was two days until both Passover and Unleavened Bread as they were two names for the same feast. If, in their understanding, Passover was a separate day or a separate feast it would have been more like "after one (or two) days was the feast of the passover and after two (or three) days was the feast of unleavened bread."

6. "And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the **passover** **[lamb]**, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the **passover** **[meal]**?" (Mark 14:12)

7. "And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the **passover** **[meal]** with my disciples?" (Mark 14:14)

8. "And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the **passover** [meal]." (Mark 14:16)

9. "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the **passover** [the whole feast including unleavened bread]." (Luke 2:41)

It says they went every year at the feast of Passover yet the requirement was to go three times a year at:

- the feast of unleavened bread
- the feast of weeks
- the feast of tabernacles

Here are the verses giving that direction:

"Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year." (Exo 23:14)

"Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD." (Exo 23:17)

"Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty:" (Deut 16:16)

"Even after a certain rate every day, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles." (2 Chron 8:13)

Note that they do not mention Passover separately. Jesus and His parents were going to Jerusalem yearly because of the direction to attend the Feast of Unleavened Bread, not for just the day of Nisan 14.

10. "Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the **Passover [feast]**." (Luke 22:1)

Note: this is an important verse which is saying that Unleavened Bread is called the Passover and this would be because it was during the original Feast of Unleavened Bread that the Passover (the passing over the homes of the Israelites) occurred.

11. "Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the **passover [lamb]** must be killed." (Luke 22:7)

This supports what was said in Luke 22:1. The day of unleavened bread (as the term had come to be used to include all eight days) on which the lamb was to be killed was Nisan 14 according to the direction of Exodus 12:6.

12. "And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the **passover [meal]**, that we may eat." (Luke 22:8)

13. "And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the **passover [meal]** with my disciples?" (Luke 22:11)

14. "And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the **passover [meal]**." (Luke 22:13)

15. "And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this **passover [meal]** with you before I suffer:" (Luke 22:15)

Note that Jesus Himself referred to that meal, eaten the evening before His death, as the Passover meal. As was His custom, He, of course, was obedient to the command and observed the feast at the correct time.

16. "And the Jews' **passover [feast]** was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem," (John 2:13)

17. "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the **passover [feast]**, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did." (John 2:23)

This was said to be "in the feast day" so it had to be on a day that was so designated such as Nisan 15. Nisan 14 is never said to be a feast day. He was at Passover/Unleavened Bread but it would not have been on Nisan 14.

18. "And the **passover [feast]**, a feast of the Jews, was nigh." (John 6:4)

19. "And the Jews' **passover [feast]** was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the **passover, [feast]** to purify themselves." (John 11:55)

20. "Then Jesus six days before the **passover [feast]** came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead." (John 12:1)

For this to indicate a particular earlier day, it must be referring to a single day within the span of the feast not the whole duration of the feast. (See the diagram on page 14. The actual feast day would be Nisan 15. The timing for the day Jesus arrived in Bethany and the following day (the day of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem) only works out when Passover referred to in this verse is reckoned to be Nisan 15, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread rather than Nisan 14.

21. "Now before the feast of the **passover** [feast], when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." (John 13:1)

This is an interesting verse. It says the time is before the Passover yet it is connected with the Last Supper and after the preparations for the Passover by the disciples. If it was before the day of Passover, before Nisan 14, that would put it on Nisan 13 and the lamb would have been slain on the wrong day. So "Passover," in this verse, cannot be referring to the day of Passover as in Nisan 14.

The phrase in verse 2: "supper being ended" might be better translated "there being a supper made." After washing the disciples' feet "he sat down again" (v12) and there is much more to transpire at the last supper setting. Verse 1 could be referring to just before Jesus' and the disciples' observance of the Passover meal itself. This reference might be to just before the end of Nisan 14 as the Feast of Unleavened Bread was from Nisan 15-21 inclusive.

It could also be that John is referring to a time before the observance of the feast by the Jews which happened a day later. See the next verse, below.

22. "Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the **passover** [meal]." (John 18:28)

This verse indicates that, while Jesus and His disciples had already observed Passover the evening before His crucifixion, at least some of the Jews had not. One source describes one of four possible assumptions regarding the timing of Passover in this way:

"That in the time of Christ sectarian differences with respect to calendrical reckoning ... had led, in actual practice, to a celebration of the Passover on two successive days, that is, a double celebration. According to this

assumption one religious faction (the Pharisees and other conservatives) would have considered that Nisan 14 fell on Thursday in the crucifixion year, and the other (the Boethusian Sadducees and other liberals), that it fell on Friday. Christ and the disciples thus, presumably, celebrated the Passover with the first group - the "passover" of the Synoptics - and the Jewish leaders celebrated it the following night - the "Passover of John." (SDA Bible Commentary 5:534)

23. "But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the **passover [feast]**: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:39)

24. "And it was the preparation of the **passover [feast]**, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!" (John 19:14)

This verse specifies that it (the day of the crucifixion) was "**the preparation of the passover**" which contradicts other verses (Matt 26:17,19; Mark 14:12,16; Luke 22:8,13) which clearly say that the day before the crucifixion was the day on which Passover preparations were made. There are two ways to reconcile this contradiction.

#1. John was writing from the perspective of those Jews who held to a different understanding of the timing. For them, the correct time to partake of the Passover meal was a day later than for others (including Jesus). This is supported by John 18:28 which indicates that they had not yet eaten the Passover meal.

#2. A less likely understanding is that the preparation referred to was the preparation day for the seventh-day Sabbath that fell within the feast of Unleavened Bread.

One might object that John would not make reference to the day of the crucifixion as preparation of the Passover if it was not. However, he may have

been writing from the perspective of the Jews. This explanation is supported by the fact that he also, in the same verse, used the Roman system of keeping time - he referred to the time of the trial before Pilate as "the sixth hour." Matthew, Mark and Luke referred to the sixth hour as noon when Jesus was on the cross. The context of this verse is a discussion between the Jews and Pilate so if John was going to refer to their systems of keeping time this was an obvious place to do it.

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour." (Matt 27:45)

"And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." (Mark 15:33)

"And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour." (Luke 23:44)

Obviously, in this one instance, John used a different way of reckoning the time than the other gospel writers, and may have also reckoned Passover differently.

25. "And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after **Easter** [the Passover feast] to bring him forth to the people." (Acts 12:4)

The original word for Easter is "pesach" meaning Passover. This inappropriate translation should be understood consistently with other uses of the original word. The reference is to the Passover feast not the later substitute celebration.

26. "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our **passover** [sacrifice/lamb] is sacrificed for us:" (1 Cor 5:7)

27. "Through faith he kept the **passover [feast]**, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them." (Heb 11:28)

There are a few cases where one might argue that "passover day" was legitimate but the evidence is very weak. The weight of evidence clearly shows that the Passover observance itself, the meal, happened on the 15th commemorating, in the experience in Egypt, the partaking of the meal in preparation for the time of the actual passing over. The 14th was really the preparation of the Passover which was the day before the Passover similar to the preparation of the seventh-day Sabbath being the day before the Sabbath.

Another Way to Understand the Fourteenth of Nisan

This may be a helpful way of distinguishing the day that is being referred to. All verses (with one exception) that refer to the fourteenth day in connection with Passover fall into one of two categories:

1. When referring to **killing the Passover sacrifice**, which happened in the mid-afternoon, it says "**the fourteenth day**" without saying "at even."

"And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening." (Exo 12:6)

"And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover [sacrifice - this verse occurs in the listing of all festal sacrifices] of the LORD." (Num 28:16)

"Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the LORD." (2 Chron 30:15)

"Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month." (2 Chron 35:1)

"And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves." (Ezra 6:19-20)

2. When referring to **keeping the Passover**, as in partaking of the meal, it says "the fourteenth day ... at even" which was a way of saying at the end of the day. This marks the start of the next day and thus the observance, the actual partaking of the meal, would have happened on the fifteenth.

"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even." (Exo 12:18)

"In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S passover." (Lev 23:5)

"In the fourteenth day of this month, at even, ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it." (Num 9:3)

"And they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel." (Num 9:5)

"The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs." (Num 9:11)

"And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho." (Josh 5:10)

The one exception is the following verse in which Passover is being used synonymously with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. So it is not a reference to killing the Passover sacrifice or to the observance of the meal.

"In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, ye shall have the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten." (Eze 45:21)

It is showing (as Luke 22:1 does) that the terms were used interchangeably. Ezekiel does not specify exactly when the Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread was to begin. The weight of evidence indicates that it was at sunset of the fourteenth day as the fifteenth was beginning.

Summary of Uses of "Passover"

It can be seen then, by examining every use of the word Passover, and from an abundance of scriptural evidence, that the term "Passover" does not refer to "Passover day" or "the day of Passover" and certainly not to the date Nisan 14. In almost every case, a word needs to be added or at least understood to clearly understand what is being referred to by uses of the word "Passover." Basically, the Bible (in the vast majority of cases) uses "Passover" as an adjective with the noun it is modifying having to be determined from the context. And so the meaning of various uses of "Passover" must be understood, from the context, to be "Passover feast" (understood to be equivalent to the Feast of Unleavened Bread) or "Passover lamb" or "Passover meal" or "Passover observance" or "Passover sacrifice." Ultimately, when one goes back to the original account of the first Passover, Passover is referring to the act of the Lord passing over the houses of those who have declared their faith and not allowing the destroyer (Satan) to harm them (Exo 12:23).

Implications

It is clear from scripture as shown in the above material that:

- Nisan 14 is the day of preparation for the observance of Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- The disciples prepared for their observance of passover on Nisan 14 as specified in Exodus 12:6
- Jesus and His disciples observed Passover/Unleavened Bread the evening before His death in the early hours of Nisan 15 as specified by Leviticus 23:6, 34 etc.
- Jesus died on Nisan 15, a day late, also in the wrong place and by the wrong means of execution.

There are implications of these facts for the beliefs of some who insist that Jesus must have died on Nisan 14.

People think the Passover meal must have been eaten on the fourteenth because it was the "Passover" meal and should have been eaten on the same day that the Passover sacrifice was made. A number of understandings have developed in an attempt to reconcile the Bible record and still have His death on the 14th. Such thinking, I believe, is incorrect.

The Passover sacrifice was made on the day of the preparation of the passover and prepared to be eaten on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread just before the Passover happened (at about midnight in Egypt). As shown earlier, there is no "Feast of Passover" as a feast distinct and separate from the Feast of Unleavened Bread. "Passover," when used to designate a feast day, was another term used to refer to the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

"Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover." (Luke 22:1)

Understanding that Nisan 14, the day on which the Passover sacrifice was slain, was a day of preparation for the observance of the Passover on Nisan 15 helps to sort this out.

"And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?" (Mark 14:12)

"Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed." (Luke 22:7)

The two verses above are obviously a reference to Nisan 14 as that is the day the Passover was to be killed:

"And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening." (Exo 12:6)

John uses the term "preparation of the passover:"

"And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!" (John 19:14)

The point that needs to be understood here is that John is referring to Passover as a day later than Matthew, Mark and Luke [as explained earlier](#).

There are a great many variations of understanding of the timing of the events of crucifixion week in relation to Passover/Unleavened Bread. Let's take a brief look at some of the other ways of understanding the timing to compare them with what is proposed in this study.

Meal Observed Early on Nisan 14

Some see the timing in the year of the crucifixion like this:

Nisan 13		Nisan14, Passover	
	disciples prepare	Jesus eats	Jesus' death

This theory moves the slaying of the lamb and preparation for the meal to the 13th in order to have Jesus' observance of Passover and His death both on the 14th.

Problems with this theory:

- The Lamb is not slain according to the time specified by Exodus 12:6.
- It has the meal with unleavened bread happening on the 14th before the Feast of Unleavened Bread specified to start on the 15th.
- It has the timing of the slaying of the typical lamb a day before the antitypical sacrifice (Jesus' death).

The Biblical Scenario

Nisan 14, Preparation of the Passover		Nisan 15, Passover/Unleavened Bread	
	passover slain, disciples prepare	Jesus eats	Jesus' death

The only apparent problem with this is that Jesus' death is then on the 15th, rather than the 14th when, in most minds and according to Exodus, it should have been. That discrepancy is resolved by recognizing that, as explained earlier in this study, the failure was on the part of the people and especially their leaders; it was not on God's part.

That He died on the 14th is the assumption that throws all the various scenarios off. Should He have died on the 14th? According to scripture, yes. But that would have happened only if He had been accepted as the Lamb of God which He clearly was not.

This is further referred to and explained in my book [*In the Heart of the Earth: The Secret Code That Reveals What Is In the Heart of God.*](#) His death and specifically His time in the heart of the earth (properly understood - it was not the grave) was to be a unique ("no sign ...but") sign to the people of that "evil and adulterous generation" and for us to understand as well. It was a sign of something that very much related to the character of God (which was the context of the discussion in Matthew 12) not to the fact that He was the Messiah as many mistakenly believe (there were many signs of that).

An obvious question then for anyone who observes the Biblical feasts is: in light of this understanding, should observance of Passover/Unleavened Bread be changed? I would say no. Scripture specifies Nisan 14 as the day of preparation for the Passover and on the fifteenth (the first day of the feast) is the time to observe and remember both the Exodus from Egypt in the past, the sacrifice made for our salvation and the Passover that is yet ahead of us as our sins are passed over and as we are rescued from this sinful world (our Egypt).

Questions and Answers

Q. How could Jesus have eaten the Passover meal on Nisan 15 when, as The Passover Lamb, He should have died on the afternoon of Nisan 14 in accordance with Exodus 12:6?

A. People have the idea that because God specified in Exodus that the lamb be slain on the 14th that Jesus had to die then. That could be answered in various ways.

1. When God, because He so loved the world, gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16) He really did give Him. It was not a loan; it was not on condition; not with strings attached. He was given as "our Passover" (1 Cor 5:7). When God gave the directive, through Moses, to sacrifice the Passover on the afternoon on Nisan 14, He was telling His people when to observe the Passover. It was for us to obey, not Him. God gave His Son freely to us but we rejected Him as the Son of God and then look at what "we" (referring to humanity in general) did to Him - He was shamefully crucified. Yes, it was on the wrong day but that was our doing, not God's. Note that He was also sacrificed in the wrong place - outside the walls of Jerusalem where criminals were executed rather than on the altar of sacrifice inside the temple where Passover lambs were supposed to be sacrificed, the place God had chosen:

"Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there." (Deut 16:2)

In addition, He was sacrificed in the wrong way. What sacrificial passover lamb was ever crucified? Don't think for a moment that God was responsible for that.

2. God specified that the meal be observed on the evening of the 15th and Jesus was obedient to that.

We mortals should be more careful in saying that God, the Sovereign of the universe, has to do things according to our understanding. See more in answer to this question on [page 18](#).

Q. When Jesus said "with desire I have desired to eat this Passover" (Luke 22:15) some take this to mean He desired or hoped to eat it but never did. Did He partake of the Passover?

A. From the context, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover" was clearly a reference to the meal he was about to eat that Thursday evening:

"... they made ready the passover [meal]. And when the hour was come, he sat down [to eat the meal that had just been prepared], and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover [meal] with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:13-15)

Matthew, Mark and Luke all lay out the order of events very clearly showing that it was a Passover meal:

"Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover [meal]? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover [meal, observance] at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover [meal]. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. " (Matt 26:17-20)

"And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover [lamb in preparation for the meal], his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover [meal]? And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover [meal] with my disciples? And he will shew you a large upper room furnished [and] prepared: there make ready for us. And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover [meal]. And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. And as they sat and did eat [the Passover that they had just prepared] ..." (Mark 14:12-18)

"Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover [lamb] must be killed. [in preparation for the meal]. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover [meal], that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover [meal] with my disciples? And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover [meal]. And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover [meal] with you before I suffer:" (Luke 22:7-15)

Review of the Order of Events

The day came when the Passover lambs were to be killed. That day, according to Exodus 12:1,6, is the fourteenth day of the first month. On that day the disciples, knowing what day it was, asked Jesus about making preparations for keeping the Passover. He told them what to do, they made the necessary preparations and when evening came He sat down with them and ate the Passover meal they had prepared. Luke even adds that the meal was ended:

"Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." (Luke 22:20)

The weight of evidence of these verses and others that fit into the timing clearly indicates that it was an actual observance of the Passover meal. Jesus, of course, would have eaten it at the correct time and the disciples also seemed to take it for granted they were to prepare when they did.

If it was only a rehearsal meal why refer to it so many times as the Passover meal? As each of the gospel accounts goes on, clearly the crucifixion occurred the following day and that day could only have been Nisan 15.

Was the Last Supper a Passover Observance?

Look at the verses below referring to the Passover, follow the series of events and see how this had to be a real Passover observance.

On the day for killing the Passover:

"... the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover ..." (Mark 14:12)
 "Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed." (Luke 22:7)
 (Exo 12:6 specifies that the day was Nisan 14)

the disciples asked about preparing for Passover:

"... Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?" (Matt 26:17)
 "... Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?" (Mark 14:12)

the directions for where to prepare the Passover were given:

"... he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover ..." (Luke 22:8)
 "... I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples." (Matt 26:18)
 "... Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?" (Mark 14:14)
 "... where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?" (Luke 22:11)

the disciples prepared for the Passover as directed:

"... they made ready the passover." (Matt 26:19)
 "... they made ready the passover." (Mark 14:16)
 "... they made ready the passover." (Luke 22:13)

and they ate the meal just prepared:

"... With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you ..." (Luke 22:15)

Q. Why does Mark 14:12 say that they killed the Passover on the first day of unleavened bread?

A. Nisan 14, the day on which the Passover lambs were killed, was really the day of preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread but came to be regarded as a part of it so that Unleavened Bread was regarded as an eight-day feast. Since the Passover actually occurred on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the terms came to be used interchangeably. See [more details](#) of this.

Q. Is it incorrect to use the term or refer to the Feast of Passover?

A. Not a problem, as long as that is understood to be another term for the Feast of Unleavened Bread and not a separate feast. It would be less confusing to not use the term. The annual feasts are listed in Leviticus 23. Again, note that the feasts are called holy convocations:

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts." (Lev 23:2)

So which days are listed as holy convocations? After mentioning the seventh-day Sabbath which is a weekly convocation, it goes on to describe the first of the seven annual convocations:

"These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. In the fourteenth day of the first month at even 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 ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein." (Lev 23:4-8)

While it says "fourteenth day of the first month" it also specifically says that day "at even" which marks the end of the day and the start of the next day

The fact that the fourteenth day is mentioned does not necessarily make it a feast day as the day on which the first fruits is offered is also mentioned (verses 10-11) and that is also not a feast day.

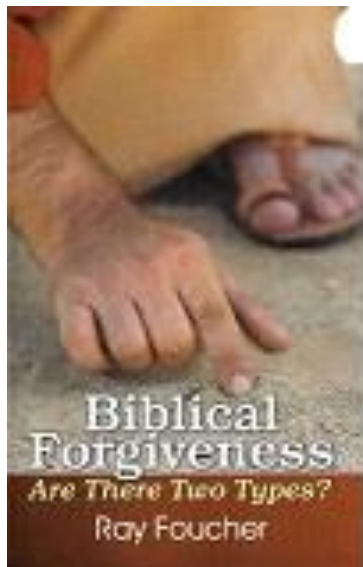
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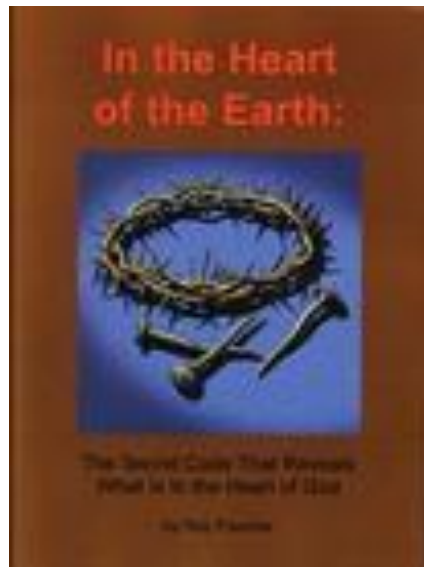
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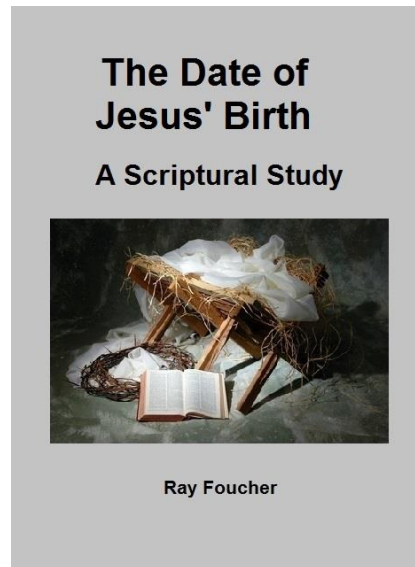
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