

Pesach

פסח

PASSOVER...WHEN DO WE CELEBRATE IT? AT THE BEGINNING OR THE END OF AVIV 14?

Ya'acov Natan Lawrence

Hoshana Rabbah Messianic Discipleship Resources

The exact timing of the Passover has sparked much controversy over the years among Believers. In the early Christian church it was known as the “Quartadeciman Controversy.” Concerning this debate, which continued into the fourth century A.D. and was finally settled at the famous Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, church historian Philip Schaff in noted multi-volumed *History of the Christian Church* states, “Respecting the time of the Christian Passover ... there was a difference of observance which created violent controversies in the ancient church [resulting in questioning] the genuineness of John's Gospel” (vol. 2, p. 210). The Quartadeciman Controversy, although slightly different in nature to the subject of this present work, only serves to underscore the volatility of issues of dogma. With this in mind, let us not forget what Yeshua referred to as the “weightier matters of the law”: judgment, mercy and faith (Matt. 23:23). Now let's begin our study of the timing of Passover.

First, there are some absolutes that Scripture gives regarding *Passover*:

- ☞ Scripture states that *Pesach/Passover* is on the fourteenth day of the first month (Lev. 23:5), and is called the month of *Aviv* (Exod. 12:2,5–14; 13:4) of Elohim's biblical calendar (*Hag HaMatzot/Feast of Unleavened Bread* starts on the fifteenth).
- ☞ For Messiah Yeshua to be the literal fulfillment of the Passover Lamb he had to die at the same moment in time that the Passover lamb was slain.

When Is Passover and When Was the Passover Lamb Sacrificed In the Temple?

Exodus 12:6 says,

“And you shall keep it [the lamb] until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight [marginal notes in KJV: between the two evenings].”

According to ancient rabbinical sources (See *Messiah: Vol. 2*, by Avi Ben Mordechai, pp. 43–47; *The Temple and Its Ministry and Service*, by Alfred Edersheim, p. 165) the term *between the evenings* or *twilight* does not correspond with the approximately 45-minute time period just before darkness that we in the west call *twilight*. Rather, it refers to the time period from noon onward when the sun begins to decline from its highest point in the sky and begins heading for the western horizon.

Since, according to Torah, the Passover lamb had to be offered “between the evenings,” that is, between 12 noon and approximately 6 P.M., it follows that Yeshua, to be the fulfillment of the Passover Lamb of Torah, had to die during this time period, as well. We know from rabbinic Jewish sources that the Levites offered up the normal evening sacrifice (Exod. 29:38–39) between 2:30 P.M. and 3:30 P.M. (*Messiah Vol. 2*, p. 44), so Yeshua had to die at this time.

When Did the Disciples Keep Their “Passover”/“Last Supper”?

Since Yeshua had to be hanging on the cross during the time that the Jews were offering the Passover lamb in the Temple, which was the same time that ancient Israel was killing their Passover lamb, it seems impossible that

Yeshua could keep Passover with his disciples at this exact time. Yet Scripture mandates that Passover be kept on the fourteenth day of the first month. How do we resolve this difficulty?

Let's look at some Scriptures relating to this subject:

✎ Matthew 26:17 reads; “Now the first of the unleavened bread the disciples came to Yeshua, saying unto him, Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?” (italicized supplied words not in the original Greek have been removed). Mark 14:12 reads the same.

✎ Luke's account says, “Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed” (22:7).

Scripture shows us that in the Gospel narrative the terms “Unleavened Bread” and “Passover” are synonymous and interchangeable (Luke 22:1). Furthermore, we see that the “Passover [lamb] was killed on the Day of Unleavened Bread” (Luke 22:7). In a strict letter-of-law Torah sense, this is impossible since Passover and Unleavened Bread were two separate appointed times falling on two separate days, though the days were adjoining each other. In the Gospel accounts, however, the writers use the colloquial term *Passover* to designate both appointed times—a common practice in the first century.

The Gospels further tell us that Yeshua commanded his disciples to go and prepare a place to keep Passover (Luke 22:8). The disciples asked Yeshua where to go to prepare for it (Luke 22:9). Yeshua reiterates that he will be eating the Passover meal with them (Luke 22:11). The disciples make the room ready for the Passover meal (Luke 11:13). And finally, Yeshua calls this meal *the Passover*. He tells his disciples in Luke 22:15, “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” (Mark and Matthew's accounts of these events corroborate this.) The word *Passover* (*pascha*, *Strong's G3957*) in the Greek can refer to the *Passover day*, *Passover meal* or the *Passover lamb*. The context in which the word is used has to determine which one of its several meanings is applicable here. It seems that the context here would point to a meal.

Again, When Did the Passover or “Last Supper” Occur?

John 13:1-2 adds another angle to this story and seems to contradict what Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:12 say: “**Now before the feast of the Passover**, [Matthew and Mark say: Now *the first of Unleavened Bread* the disciples came to Yeshua ...] when Yeshua 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.” Which account is correct? What's going on here? On which day were Yeshua and his disciples keeping the Passover? According to the *Hebrew Roots Version Scriptures* translated from Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts, the italicized term in the phrase “Now *the first day* of the unleavened bread ...” in Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:12 can also be rendered, *on the day before*. This is confirmed in a study of the Greek phrase *the first of* in Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:12, which is the Greek word *protos*. According to *Strong's Concordance* (G4413) and *Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words*, *protos* can mean *before*. This alternate rendering brings Matthew and Mark's accounts of the same event into agreement with John's account in John 13:1-2.

John 13:2-30 offers further proof that the Passover meal that Yeshua was doing was not at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth, which would have made it *erev* Shabbat, or the evening of the Sabbath—in this case, the High Sabbath or the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. When Judas left the supper (verse 27), the disciples figured that he was departing to purchase more supplies for the Passover meal, which was yet to come (verse 29). Furthermore, for them to think this means that they knew that the shops were open from which to buy supplies (and therefore it was not the Shabbat). This would not have been the case had the “Last Supper” been at the end of the Passover as it was approaching the beginning of the fifteenth, which was still 24 hours off.

Since Yeshua could not partake of the Passover meal on the afternoon of the fourteenth, and since the Gospels tells us that it was evening when he celebrated Passover with his disciples, and since we know it occurred on the fourteenth of the month of the *abiv*, when was the “Lord's Supper”? It had to have been at the end of the thirteenth and at the beginning of the fourteenth after sundown. They simply kept it earlier on the same day (at the beginning of the fourteenth rather than at the end). At the end of that same day, he was hanging on the cross as the Passover Lamb. After the “Lord's Supper” Yeshua and his disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane where he was arrested by the Jewish leaders later that night. During the evening and into the morning he was put on trial before the Jewish leaders and afterwards he stood before Pilate, after which he was nailed to the cross sometime between the third and sixth hour (according to the Gospel accounts). At 3 P.M. (Luke 23:44-46), he proclaimed the

famous words: “Eloi, Eloi ...” and shortly after that exclaimed, “Father receive my spirit ...” whereupon he died.

Passover Is to Be Celebrated At the End of the Fourteenth and Into the Fifteenth

Do we celebrate the Passover at the beginning of the fourteenth as Yeshua, by necessity, had to, or at the end of the Passover when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed and when all Israel was keeping it? The later choice is the obvious answer.

This choice (celebrating Passover at the end of the fourteenth going into the fifteenth) answers the puzzling question as to why the Jews merged Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread together so that the terms became synonymous and interchangeable. While, indeed, Torah refers to them as two separate appointed times on two separate days, their time periods briefly overlap.

Though Passover Overlaps Into the 15th, the Key Elements of Passover Still Occur on the 14th

Truly, the most important aspects of Passover occurred on the fourteenth: the sacrificing of the lamb and the smearing of the blood on the door posts. This occurred on the fourteenth and before the setting of the sun, which biblically marked the beginning of the fifteenth. The meal that occurred afterward was on the night (first part) of the fifteenth. How do we know this? The ancient Israelites, while still in Egypt, were commanded to kill the lamb and place the blood on their door posts before the setting of the sun marking the beginning of the fifteenth. If they had not followed that command the death angel would have struck their houses and the firstborn inside would have been killed. Now they could have killed the lamb and eaten the meal, but if there had been no blood on the door, the firstborn would have been killed. They, likewise, could have eaten a meal that evening, as they always did, but had they not killed the lamb and put the blood on the door the death angel would have struck them. Killing the Passover lamb, therefore, and putting its blood on the door was the act that protected them from the death angel. Likewise, the death of Messiah, our Passover Lamb and his blood applied to our lives spiritually is what atones for our sins and saves us from the wages of sin, which is death. This part of Passover occurred on the fourteenth, although the meal part occurred on the fifteenth at sundown. Furthermore, in Exodus we see that the Israelites ate the Passover meal with their sandals on and staffs in hand, and early the next morning (of the fifteenth) they fled Egypt, which is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Children of Israel Commanded to Eat the Passover and Be Ready to Leave Egypt

The fact that YHVH instructed the Children of Israel to eat the Passover meal with their sandals and their traveling clothes on and their staffs in their hands (Exod. 12:8-12) is evidence that Passover started on the fourteenth of *Abiv* and continued into the evening of the fifteenth. Such a command would have been pointless had Passover been at the beginning of the fourteenth and they were not actually to leave for another 24 hours.

A Sequence of Events Pointing to An End of the 14th Passover

Finally, let's look at John 12:1 and see a sequence of events unfolding here. Yeshua came to Bethany six days before Passover (verse 1). Then they had a formal dinner (verse 2, the word *supper* is *deipnon* meaning *a formal meal usually occurring in the evening*), which probably was the *erev* Shabbat meal (verse 2) on Friday night. So Yeshua came to Bethany on Friday, which was six days before Passover (or the ninth of *Abiv*). That evening at *erev* Shabbat was the beginning of the tenth day of *Abiv*, or five days before the Passover. It was here that Mary anointed Yeshua with the spikenard (verse 3). This is the fulfillment of the Passover lamb being separated, which occurred, according to Torah, on the tenth of *Abiv*. From Friday *erev* Shabbat forward five days brings us to the end of the day on Wednesday the fourteenth of *Abiv* which corresponds to when he was crucified and then laid in the grave before the setting of the sun (or the beginning of the fifteenth). The disciples quickly entombed him before the High Sabbath or first day of Unleavened Bread, which started at sundown on the fifteenth day of the first month, or *Abiv*.

Did Yeshua Celebrate An Actual Seder?

Did Yeshua celebrate an actual Passover service or was it simply a memorial dinner, or a fellowship meal often referred to as the “Lord’s Supper” or the “Last Supper”? There are valid arguments on each side of this issue. Perhaps it doesn’t really matter. For us now, the big question is how could Yeshua keep the Passover (as he said he did) with his disciples on the fourteenth of *Abiv* as Torah commands and still be hanging on the cross on the same day as the spiritual fulfillment of the Passover Lamb?

The Gospel accounts seem clear about the fact that Yeshua was keeping a “Passover” meal, for he says so, yet we have seen that it had to have been an early meal on the same day. It was not the main meal that was to be held later at the end of the fourteenth into the fifteenth of *Abiv*.

What was the precedence for such a meal? Does Torah make allowances for another Passover celebration at another time? We know that Torah says, “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 unto YHVH. 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). Here we see that Torah allowed for a Passover to be held 30 days after the first one for individuals who met the criteria. We could ask the question: what would happen to a woman who was in her monthly impurity at Passover and 30 days later during the second Passover she was again in her monthly impurity? Was she excluded from keeping Passover because she was not ritually clean in time? No doubt, some grace-allowance was made for such a case.

Torah gave the judicial authorities of Israel liberty to make rulings in these types of cases, which would be as binding as the written Torah itself (Deut. 17:8-13). We see recorded in Torah an example of this process in action regarding the daughters of Zelophehad (Num. 27:1-11; 36:2-13). What about a man who knew he was about to die just prior to Passover and wanted to partake of one last Seder? Such would have been the case with Yeshua. Was provision made for such a man? It is hard to say. The point is this: we must stay open in our understandings. Just because some things about Yeshua’s “Last Supper”/Passover meal seem unclear, even contradictory and a bit hard to “nail down” doesn’t mean that there isn’t a logical explanation for them were we provided with all of the historical facts. Sometimes it is difficult to piece together every detail of Scripture into a cohesive picture 2000 years after the fact!

We believe that Yeshua kept an actual Passover Seder or “Pascal Supper” as Alfred Edersheim calls it in his book, *The Temple—Its Ministry and Service* (p. 193), albeit, an early one. Consider the following:

This is a brief overview of the Passover Seder and which parts, if any, Scripture shows that Yeshua did with his disciples during his last supper with them (as taken from the Hoshana Rabbah Messianic Discipleship Resources Messianic Passover Haggadah).

1. ***Kiddush*** and the First Cup

During the *Kiddush*, the first of four cups of wine is blessed and drunk. This first cup is called the Cup of Sanctification. Before the wine is drunk, a blessing is recited: “Blessed are You, YHVH our Elohim, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.” Yeshua partook of this first cup in his Paschal Supper (Edersheim, p. 194).

2. ***Ur'chatz*** (the washing of hands)

Yeshua changed this custom and washed his disciples’ feet instead (John 13:1-14).

3. ***Karpas*** (the eating of the green vegetables)

This refers to the place in the Seder when the celebrants dip a green vegetable in salt water and eat it (John 13:26-27). The oldest will sit on the left side of the table and will dip the sop. From this, we can conclude that Judas was the oldest disciple. According to Alfred Edersheim, the sop and bitter herbs are synonymous (*The Temple and Its Service*, p. 194).

4. ***Yachatz*** (the breaking of the bread)

The middle piece of three pieces of bread, or matzot, is ceremonially broken in two. Matzoh (plural is matzot) is unleavened bread. The larger piece is wrapped in a napkin and set aside as the *afikomen*, the *matzoh* that is eaten at the end of the meal. This can be seen in Luke 22:19 when it is recorded, “he took the bread and gave thanks and broke it, and gave unto them saying, This is my body which is given for you ...”

5. **The Maggid** (the telling of the Passover story and the Exodus)

6. **The Third Cup** (the Cup of Deliverance from the wrath or judgments of Elohim)

The Maggid concludes with the second cup of wine, which is called the Cup of Deliverance. Yeshua partook of this second cup at the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42-44). In telling the story of the Exodus, each person is to see the Exodus as if Elohim personally redeemed them! This is based upon Exodus 13:8.

6. **Rachtzah** (the washing of hands with a blessing)
7. **Motzi Matzoh** (the eating of the unleavened bread)
Yeshua did this in Matthew 26:26
In John 13:23, we can see that the disciples were leaning or reclining. This practice is still a tradition in modern Passover Seders. This custom symbolizing freedom from the bondage of Egypt, a picture of sin. The Israelites in one day went from being slaves to being a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6). Only kings and those who live in ease recline while eating, and the Believers in Yeshua are kings and priests before Elohim (Rev. 1:6; 5:10).
8. **Maror** (bitter herbs are blessed and eaten)
Maror is bitter herbs. These bitter herbs are symbolized by romaine lettuce and horseradish. [According to Kasdan in *God's Appointed Customs*, p. 28 Yeshua fulfilled this in Matt. 26:23.]
9. **Korech** (the *matzah* and *maror* are eaten together)
10. **Shulchan Orech** (the festival meal)
Yeshua instructed the disciples to prepare for the Passover in Luke 22:8, which could have included purchasing a Passover lamb, which they would have eaten during the *Shulchan Orech* part of the Seder. The primary meaning of the Greek word *pascha* is *paschal sacrifice* or *lamb*. The meal or service itself is a secondary meaning.
11. **Tzafun** (the eating of the *afikomen*)
12. **Barech** (the blessing after the meal).
13. **The Third Cup** (the Cup of Redemption)
At the conclusion of *Barech*, the blessing for wine is recited over the third cup. Then the cup is drunk. This is the cup of redemption (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 10:16) and is a picture of communion (Edersheim, p. 195).
14. **Hallel** (psalm of praise)
In ancient times, Psalms 115-118 were chanted in special praise to Elohim. The fourth cup is now filled, and a door is opened for Elijah to enter and proclaim the coming of Messiah.
15. **Nirtzah** (conclusion of the seder)
A final song is sung and ends with the phrase, *Next Year in Jerusalem!* This can be seen in Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26.

It seems to this author that the Scriptural account of the “Last Supper” shows us that there were enough elements of the Passover Seder contained in it for this meal to qualify, for all intents and purposes, as a Passover Seder.

Unleavened Bread Versus Leavened Bread

At this point, many questions arise for the honest Bible student. Whatever Yeshua was doing with his disciples Passover-wise, it was *before* he was to suffer, as Luke 22:15 states. Was he eating an actual Passover lamb? Or just eating bread that was now to become an emblem of his body, a picture of the sacrificial lamb itself? If he was eating bread, and not lamb itself, then why is the term for the bread that he ate with his disciples that night a reference to generic bread (see Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:9; 24:30; 24:35; John 13:18), and not unleavened bread, which is a totally different word in the Greek language? Unleavened bread, not leavened bread, was eaten during the Passover meal in accordance with the Hebrew Scriptures (Num. 9:10-11; Josh. 5:11).

Could this reference to generic (leavened) bread, to which the Gospel writers make unanimous reference in all of their accounts, have been referring to Yeshua as “the bread of life?” Yeshua refers to himself as the “bread of life” (the same Greek word [*artos*, *Strong's G740*] for *generic, leavened bread* is used in Yeshua's “Last Supper” accounts as well as in his references to his being the *bread* of life) in several places in the Gospel of John (6:31,33,34, 35,41,48,50,51,58). If Yeshua was keeping an early Passover Meal with his disciples, that is, early on the fourteenth of *Abiv* instead of late on the fourteenth, which is when the Jews kept it and when the Passover lamb was sacrificed in the Temple, which corresponded to when Yeshua was hanging on the cross, then it would have been permissible to eat leavened bread. Torah commands that only *unleavened* bread be eaten during the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread between the fifteenth and the twenty-first days of the first month (Exod. 12:15; 13:6-7; 23:15;

34:18; Lev. 23:5-6; Num. 28:17; Deut. 16:3,8). Leavened bread is not prohibited from being eaten on the fourteenth (although the Hebrew Scriptures or Tanakh does forbid its being eaten during the actual Passover ceremony itself [Num. 9:10-11; Josh. 5:11], which would have started at the end of the fourteenth and overlapped into the fifteenth, which was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread), though it is safe to say, that most Israelite homes had already been de-leavened by then. The Jews kept Passover (and still do to this day) at the end of the fourteenth and ate their Passover meal actually at the beginning of the fifteenth, which is the beginning of the time when Torah forbids the eating of unleavened bread for seven days.

So Yeshua could have eaten leavened bread at the beginning of the Passover day as an object lesson to his disciples (and to us) that he was the bread of life, to which the Passover lamb pointed, and he would not have violated Torah.

That Yeshua ate leavened bread is one line of reasoning that some students of Scripture use to attempt to disprove that his last supper was a Passover Seder. However, to counter this point, some will refer to the Scripture passage in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, which is a reference to the last meal that Yeshua had with his disciples. There is no mention specifically here of a Passover Seder, but only a meal and the term for bread here is *artos*, the Greek word for generic, leavened bread. Does this passage therefore prove that what Yeshua did with his disciples was not a Seder, even though Yeshua himself referred to it as such? If so, why the usage of the word *artos* and not the Greek word *azumos* (*Strong's G106*) for unleavened bread? Furthermore, some find it unimaginable that Yeshua would be partaking of leavened bread and likening it to his body, when leavened bread contains yeast or sour dough, a type of sin, and we know that Yeshua had no sin in him. Others say that it was appropriate for him to eat leavened bread since he took our sins upon himself and that he went to the cross with leaven (a picture of our sins) in him. It might also be added that using the generic term for bread (in reference to the last supper) does not prove conclusively that it was indeed leavened bread. It could have been unleavened. Unleavened bread is still bread. It's simply a flat bread. But why doesn't Scripture say so then? If we believe that every detail of Scripture is divinely inspired, we have reason to be confused when certain things do not seem to add up.

We take the position that Yeshua *did not* eat leavened bread during his Paschal Meal, and for a very good reason. In the levitical sacrificial system, YHVH forbade the offering of leavened bread with the sacrifices on all occasions except on the Feast of Pentecost when two leavened loaves were lifted up representing Israel. Even the twelve loaves of bread on the Table of Showbread in the Tabernacle (representing Israel in a purified or sin-free state) were unleavened. Leaving is clearly a picture of sin. Yeshua, the perfect sacrificial Lamb of Elohim fulfilled the sacrificial system types perfectly. It seems unthinkable that the Lamb of Elohim, slain from the foundation of the world, who was sin-free, could have eaten leavened bread and had leavening, a picture of sin, in him when he went to the cross. For this reason, we believe Yeshua ate unleavened bread.

More Food For Thought:

Was the “Last Supper” Really a Discipleship “Graduation Banquet”?

According to Messianic Jewish Scholar David Stern, the translator of the *Complete Jewish Bible* and author of the *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, “The Last Supper is understood by most scholars to have been a Passover meal or Seder. Many Passover themes are deepened, reinforced and given new levels of meaning by the events in the life of Yeshua the Messiah and by his words on this night.” Stern goes on to say, however, that Messianic scholar, Joseph Shulam “has suggested that it may have been not the Seder but a *se'udat-mitzvah*, the celebratory banquet accompanying performance of a commandment such as a wedding or *b'rit milah*.” He then says that it was typical for a rabbi to have a sort of graduation dinner or banquet of completion with his students or *talmudim* upon the completion of their course of study (p. 77).

Whether what Yeshua did with his disciples prior to his being apprehended by the Jewish authorities was a Passover Seder, a fellowship-memorial meal or a graduation dinner will have to be a decision for you, the reader, to make. Of this we are certain, Yeshua calls it Passover, it happened early on the fourteenth day of the first month, while the main Passover happened at the end of the fourteenth going into the fifteenth. Whatever he did and whatever one may want to call it, this doesn't change when the Torah commanded Passover to be observed: at the end of the fourteenth going into the fifteenth which was the first day of *Hag HaMatzot* (Feast of Unleavened Bread).

Conclusion

Hopefully we have adequately demonstrated, without writing volumes on the subject, that Yeshua did keep a

Passover Seder commonly called “the Last Supper,” which he specifically refers to as *the Passover*, and that it was on the fourteenth of *Abiv*. Yet he still fulfilled the role of the Passover lamb by hanging on the cross at the exact time on the fourteenth that the priests were sacrificing the lamb in the Temple in Jerusalem. Yeshua could do all this by keeping an early Passover (at the beginning, rather than at the end, of the fourteenth). With this understanding in mind, many seemingly conflicting issues wonderfully resolve themselves such as:

- a) Was the “Last Supper” a Passover Seder, or simply a regular dinner, the last one Yeshua had with his disciples?
- b) How could Yeshua fulfill the commandment of keeping the Passover, which Torah commanded all to do, unless they wanted to be excommunicated from Israel, and yet still *be* the Passover Lamb all at the same time?
- c) Why this “confusion” among the Jews, and even in some of the gospel accounts themselves, about Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread being interchangeable terms?
- d) When are we to keep *Pesach*/Passover? At the beginning or at the end of the fourteenth?

The bottom line is this: Scripture commands Bible Believers to keep the Passover. Yeshua told his disciples that if they loved him they would keep his commandments (John 14:15). We likewise encourage you to obey YHVH's commandments and to love Yeshua, both of which are identifying marks of YHVH's end-time Saints (Rev. 12:17 and 14:12).

