

When Do We Observe the Passover?

Written by Todd D. Bennett

The Passover is a very special Appointed Time known as Pesach (פסח) in Hebrew. Most associate this meal with the exodus of the Children of Yisrael from Egypt in 1437 BCE.¹ To be certain, the exodus from Egypt was a dramatic event when each Hebrew household, or a collection of families, slaughtered a lamb or goat.² The blood of the animal was marked on the lintel and the two doorposts of the house with hyssop that had been dipped in the blood.³ The occupants of the house then partook of a meal consisting of the sacrifice along with other specified ingredients.⁴

By participating in this sacrificial covenant meal, those occupants were protected from the tenth and final plague rendered upon Egypt – the death of the firstborn. On the night of the Passover meal, no one was to go out of their home until morning lest they fall outside the covering of the blood.⁵ The Passover occurs at night and the flesh of the sacrifice is specifically commanded to be eaten on “that night” – the night of the 14th Day.⁶

The Passover in Egypt was unique, as the lambs or goats were slaughtered by the individuals at their homes. Thereafter, when people participated in the Passover, they were required to slaughter their sacrifices at a single place – the House of Elohim. *“⁵ You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which YHWH your Elohim gives you; ⁶ but at the place where YHWH your Elohim chooses to make His Name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt.”* Deuteronomy 16:5-6.

Notice the emphasis not only on the location, but also the specific information concerning the time. It is to occur at “twilight.” That time is referred to as “at the going down of the sun.” The Hebrew word referring to the movement of the sun is “bow” (בוא). It means: “go.” In other words, the sun is gone. It has passed the horizon. This would be the time of sunset, referred to as “evening.” It begins a new day.

We can see that even clearer in another passage: *“Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Yisrael shall kill it at twilight.”* Exodus 12:6. The people were to select a lamb on day 10 of Month 1 and keep it “until” the 14th day. The Hebrew word translated as “until” is “ad” (עד) and

¹ See www.torahcalendar.com

² Exodus 12:5

³ Exodus 12:22

⁴ See Exodus 12:8. The lamb is specifically to be roasted in fire. It is to be eaten with bitter herbs and unleavened bread.

⁵ Exodus 12:22

⁶ Exodus 12:8

means: “as far as.” So the people would keep the sacrifice up until the 14th day at which time they would slaughter the lamb. They would not wait until the 14th was almost over. If they did that, they would be not be observing the Passover on Day 14, but rather on Day 15. This would not be proper since the Torah specifically provides that the Passover is at evening on Day 14.⁷

In order to participate in this meal, all males needed to be circumcised.⁸ That is because it was directly connected to the Covenant made with Abraham. It is traditionally understood that Passover was when Yitshaq was born⁹ as well as the time when Abraham took Yitshaq to sacrifice him on the mountains of Moriah.¹⁰ Yitshaq was the promised son and the pattern for the Lamb of Elohim. He was the first seed of Abraham that passed through the cuttings of the Covenant of Circumcision that was etched into his body.

Of course, the connection with circumcision is profound in the timing as well. The circumcision of the males was to occur on the eighth day after birth.¹¹ The Passover was the first day in an eight-day process involving the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread.¹²

The Passover consisted all of Day 14, prior to the beginning of the Day 15 Feast. It was an observance that culminated with a Covenant meal and it is intended for those who are the “firstfruits” known as the “bikkuri” (בִּכּוּרֵי). They were the Priests of their families according to the Melchizedek line, and in the future, they will serve under Messiah.

The observance reminded those in the Covenant that YHWH would provide a Lamb to protect the firstborn sons, just as YHWH had provided the ram in the place of Abraham’s son Yitshaq.¹³ It revealed the door to the Covenant path and was the entrance point for all who would walk on that path.

There were some specific instructions concerning how the Passover was to begin at “twilight” on the 14th day by the slaughtering of an animal.¹⁴ The time often referred to as twilight is “ben ha’arbayim” (בֵּין הָאַרְבָּעִים) in the Hebrew text. It is also

⁷ Leviticus 23:5

⁸ Exodus 12:48

⁹ See Targums Neofiti I and Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis

¹⁰ Genesis 22:2

¹¹ Genesis 17:12

¹² Those who attempt to merge the Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread destroy this important prophetic pattern of eight days. When observed properly, the yearly cycle of the Appointed Times begins with eight days – Passover on Day 14 followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread from Day 15 to Day 21. The annual cycle ends in Month 7 with the seven day Feast of Sukkot followed by the Eighth Day, sometimes referred to as Shemini Atzeret. (see Leviticus 23:33-36) So there is a set of eight-day parentheses surrounding the entire Covenant cycle of that is marked by the shedding of blood on every male on the eighth day. These are deeply significant patterns.

¹³ Genesis 22:13

¹⁴ Exodus 12:6; Leviticus 23:5

translated as “between the evenings” which is really quite vague when we consider that the time between the two evenings is actually a full day.

This seemingly vague description of time in the English has caused some confusion concerning the exact time when the sacrifice is to be killed, and when the meal is to be eaten. Does it occur at the beginning of Day 14 right after sunset on Day 13, or does it occur at the end of Day 14 around sunset leading to Day 15?

In order to be clear on the timing, it must first be understood what constitutes a day. We know from Creation that a day begins at the evening. A day essentially involves two parts – the dark called night and the light called the day. These two periods are stitched together at two different points - the evening and the morning.

This was aptly described on Day 1 of Creation when night and day became “one,” which is “echad” in Hebrew.¹⁵ The Hebrew word “echad” (אחד) actually means: “unified.” So the opposing forces of dark and light became “one” (אחד) and the two points that united them were given specific descriptions – evening and morning. The Hebrew word for “evening” is “ereb” (ערב), and the Hebrew word for “morning” is “boker” (בקר).

Contrary to the Gregorian calendar that reckons a day beginning at midnight, the evening is the beginning of a day and it transitions from the previous day into “night.” Therefore a new day begins after sunset. The morning is the opposite of the evening and it marks the beginning of the time of light called “day.” These are the two points in a unified day that divide the day from the night. The evening is the time that separates one day from another. Therefore, a day begins at the evening and progresses through the night to morning and then through the light of day to sunset.

The evening and the morning are very significant and throughout the Scriptures we repeatedly read about important events occurring at these times. In fact, after Yisrael was delivered from Egypt, YHWH prescribed specific sacrifices to occur at these times. ³⁸ *Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually.* ³⁹ *One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight.* ⁴⁰ *With the one lamb shall be one-tenth of an ephah of flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering.* ⁴¹ *And the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; and you shall offer with it the grain offering and the drink offering, as in the morning, for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to YHWH.* ⁴² *This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before YHWH, where I will meet you to speak with you.* Exodus 29:38-42.

Notice that this “continual” offering involves a lamb, twice a day. With each lamb is a meal – unleavened bread and wine. This sacrifice is specifically associated with the “door” as was the Passover. Therefore, the association of this daily sacrifice with the Passover cannot be ignored, especially when examining the times of the sacrifice.

¹⁵ Genesis 1:5

Particular to this discussion is the timing of the daily evening sacrifice which occurs at “twilight.” Hebrew scholars agree that “ben ha’arbayim” is properly translated as “twilight” and it also means: “dusk.”¹⁶ It is the time that occurs after sunset when the light of the sun is diminishing. It begins at sunset and concludes with darkness. Now traditions of men changed this time by expanding it to prior to the sunset as the sun is descending in the sky.

This has caused even greater confusion for people, but the original intent of the Torah is clear. The two sacrifices were to occur at the two points that unified the day – immediately after sunrise and immediately after sunset. It was a reminder every day that the One represented by the Passover lamb, Who opened the door to the Covenant, was the same One Who brought order to the Universe through Creation.

With the time of the sacrifice established, it is now important to examine how the Passover is actually sacrificed in order to comply with the Torah. The Scriptures specifically provide that all of the ordinances of the Passover are to occur on Day 14. ² “*Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. ³ On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it.” Numbers 9:2-3.*

All of the rites and ceremonies of the Passover include the slaughtering to the disposal of the remains before morning. They were all to be carried out on Day 14 of Month 1. This passage alone should quell any dispute concerning this matter because there is no way to satisfy this Commandment if you slaughter the sacrifice on the afternoon of Day 14.

There is only one “twilight” each day and that occurs at the beginning of the day at evening followed by the night. The Passover involves not only the killing, but also the cooking, eating and disposal of the remains, and that all must occur on Day 14. *“On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is YHWH’S Passover.”* Leviticus 23:5.

All of the ordinances of the Passover must occur during the portion of Day 14 known as night. It must be slaughtered, eaten and then burned before the morning on Day 14. No one is to leave their homes before morning. So clearly the meal is to occur during the night of the 14th and continue until the morning.

Passover is actually considered to be a Watch Night when people stay up and keep vigil, just as the Messiah did the night before His death on Passover Day.¹⁷ This was the time when the firstborn in Egypt were either being killed, or they were being protected by the blood of the lamb that they had ingested during the Passover. The primary aspects of the Passover occur in the darkness. That is the message of the Passover, deliverance from death and darkness that leads to light and life.

¹⁶ See Ben Yehudah’s *English and Hebrew Dictionary* and *Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁷ For a detailed description of the Passover meal, often referred to as The Last Supper, as well as the timing of the death of the Messiah see the Walk in the Light series book entitled *The Messiah*.

At the Last Supper, which was clearly a Passover meal, the Messiah told His disciples that the bread symbolized His flesh and the wine represented His blood. He was telling people that His death would be the fulfillment of the Passover and He told them from that point onward when they celebrated future Passover meals to “do this in remembrance of Me.”¹⁸

So clearly, the “twilight” when the Passover is sacrificed must occur after sunset following Day 13. This is the evening beginning day 14. The meal will then be eaten in the night of the 14th and any uneaten lamb must be burned before the morning of Day 14.¹⁹ It was after the devastation of the night that all of Egypt and the Yisraelites exited their homes. While the Egyptians buried their dead, the Yisraelites plundered Egypt and marched out as a conquering army.²⁰

It was later, after sunset, on Day 15, that the Yisraelites began their trek out of Egypt under the light of the full moon. This was a High Sabbath known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Now this is very straightforward, but it has been confused in both Christian and Jewish circles. We can see from history that Christians, influenced by Rome moved their date through what is known as the Quartodeciman Controversy.²¹ The Jews also merged the 14th and the 15th together, by sacrificing the Passover at the end of Day 14 and holding the Passover on Day 15.²² Nevertheless, that tradition did not occur until after the death of the Messiah. In fact, there is no reason to believe that when Messiah died Yisrael was observing the Passover at any other time than Day 14 of Month 1. To do otherwise would be a clear violation of Torah, and no doubt Messiah would have commented on that.²³

The Passover should be kept at the correct time just as we keep all of the Appointed Times because the Torah says to observe the words. For it is not a futile thing for you, it is your life.²⁴ If the patterns of the Scriptures are lessons for future

¹⁸ Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22

¹⁹ See Deuteronomy 16:4

²⁰ Exodus 12:41

²¹ This comes from the Latin word for fourteen and revolves around the fact that the disciple John and his disciple Polycarp celebrated Passover on the fourteenth day while many had followed the tradition of celebrating Easter. Polycarp travelled to Rome and attempted to persuade Anicetus to observe the 14th Day, but neither could persuade the other. This subject is discussed in greater detail in the Walk in the Light series book entitled *Appointed Times*.

²² See *The Jewish Encyclopedia, Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Volume 13, *Hastings Bible Dictionary, The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* and other histories related to the merging of the Passover (Day 14 of Month 1) with the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Day 15 of Month 1).

²³ Besides the fact that Yahushua never commented on the calendar and was present in Jerusalem at the Feasts when others were observing them, in Luke 1:5-6 we read: “5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before Elohim, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of YHWH blameless.” If Zacharias was a priest “walking in all the Commandments” blameless, then the Yisraelites must have been on the correct calendar in order for him to function in his priestly duties.

²⁴ Deuteronomy 32:47

generations, it is possible a future Passover that might involve life or death. If the Yisraelites had ignored the instructions of Mosheh and followed the traditions later established by the Christians and the Rabbinic Jews, they would have observed the Passover one day late, and that would have resulted in the death of all the firstborn

The firstborn in Egypt were the ones who were the priests of their clans and tribes. They would have been the ones conducting the sacrifices, and therefore their lives were on the line if they failed to properly observe the commandment.

The Passover is all about the Messiah – the Lamb of Elohim. He died on Passover day after instituting the Renewed Covenant during the Passover meal. This all occurred on Passover Day – Day 14, not Day 15, which is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread – a High Sabbath.

There are those who try to impose tradition and ascribe the death of Yahushua at the same time as the “traditional” Passover sacrifice. This is not only inaccurate, it is impossible. For one, He needed to be alive during the Passover in order to renew the Covenant at the right time. He later died on Passover Day at 3:00 pm. He clearly did not die at twilight, when the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed.

Those who believe that the Messiah had to die at the exact time as the Passover sacrifice attempt to attribute the slaughter of those lambs precisely to the execution of Yahushua, but His death was clearly not the same as those lambs. He was crucified by the Romans, he was not slaughtered at the threshold of the house. His blood was not smeared on people’s doors, nor was His flesh eaten by the people. His body was not burned before sunrise. It was a pattern, not a precise fulfillment.

People who participate in these Scriptural acrobatics are ignoring the express Scriptures that indicate that Yahushua told them to prepare the Passover so that He could conduct the Passover with His disciples, which He did in fact do.²⁵ They are also missing the point of the meal.

Yahushua was the firstborn of Elohim. He was the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.²⁶ As such, He was not of the Levitic priesthood, nor was His sacrifice confined to the Temple. His death did not need to occur in the Temple, nor did it need to coincide with any particular sacrifice that a Levitic Priest may have been offering at 3:00 pm, especially since that was not even twilight. He was a different Priest in a different Priesthood operating in another Temple.

Nothing in the New Testament account of the Last Supper or the death of Messiah changed the clear commandments in the Torah concerning the Passover. It is typical for Christians to interpret the Scriptures backwards, through the lens of the New Testament, but that is not the proper way to interpret the Torah.

The bottom line is that the true Passover was and remains on Day 14. It begins after the sunset following Day 13 of Month 1 and continues through to the sunset,

²⁵ Matthew 26:17-21, Mark 14:12-20, Luke 22:7-8

²⁶ Hebrews 5,6 and 7

marking the end of Day 14 of Month 1. The duration of this important day is confirmed by another very important Appointed Time involving the shedding of blood for a covering, namely Yom Kippur. We know that Yom Kippur occurs on Day 10 of Month 7.²⁷ Here is the commandment concerning keeping this day. *“It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.”* Leviticus 23:32

From this passage we can clearly see that an Appointed Time that involves a day is reckoned from evening to evening. In other words, it is a full cycle that begins and ends at evening.

That brings out another issue concerning the “evening.” The word “erev” stems derives its meaning from “mix” and “weaving.” The word acknowledges that it is a time when day and night are woven together and that process involves the mixing of day and night.

Because this weaving and mixing is a process, the ancients developed the notion of three erevs to delineate the different aspects of the evening period. The first erev was at sunset, the second erev was during twilight and the third erev was when total darkness arrived. That is where the tradition of sighting three stars came from to distinguish twilight (second erev) from total darkness (third erev). It was the distinction of different “evenings” within the general time of evening between sunset and total darkness.

Now it doesn’t take a Biblical scholar to recognize these differences as the day transitions to night. We all observe these distinctions, especially when we are looking to sight the renewed moon each month. With this understanding, it is very easy to grasp the notion of “between the evenings”. It is referring to that second erev, known as twilight, that fell between the first and third erev.

So the day begins with the first erev – sunset, and the slaughtering of the Passover sacrifice would occur after the first erev and before complete darkness, the third erev. That is “between the evenings.”

If you wait until the end of Day 14 you will actually be celebrating the Passover on Day 15, which is the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, not the Passover. This is an irrefutable fact and anyone teaching that the Passover occurs at the end of Day 14 is teaching a lie based upon traditions of men. The Messiah specifically stated what would happen to these individuals.²⁸

If you observe the Passover at the end of Day 14 instead of the beginning of Day 14, then you are celebrating the Passover on the wrong day at the wrong time. It is a violation of the Torah and is therefore practicing lawlessness. If a person is found to be practicing lawlessness “in that day” as described in Matthew 7:21-23 the consequences will be eternal.

²⁷ Leviticus 23:27

²⁸ Matthew 5:19

*“²¹ Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me **in that day**, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your Name, cast out demons in Your Name, and done many wonders in Your Name?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”* Matthew 7:21.