

**Resolving  
the  
Passover  
Controversy**

by  
**Sanford Beattie**

## Table of Contents

Part 1 — Bible Teaching on the Passover.....	1
Between the Evenings.....	5
Evening.....	7
Between Which Evenings?.....	9
Morning.....	10
The Morrow after the Passover.....	14
What Was the Passover?.....	17
Rameses and the Preparation Time.....	19
Story Flow and Timing.....	22
Law of the Offerings.....	24
New Testament.....	29
Summary.....	34
Part 2 – Analysis of Fred Coulter’s <i>The Christian Passover</i> .....	36
Keeping the Passover.....	37
Time Expressions.....	40
The Temple-Centered Passover.....	46
Extra-Biblical Evidence.....	55
New Testament Considerations.....	60

Copyright © 1996, 2001 Sanford Beattie

Permission is granted for the unedited reproduction and free distribution of this paper in its entirety. All rights reserved.

## Part 1 — Bible Teaching on the Passover

It has been said by some church groups that the observance of the New Testament Passover is a continuation of the Old Testament Passover instituted in Egypt. Repeatedly, the statement has been made that Jesus merely changed the symbols of the roast lamb and bitter herbs into the symbols of the bread and wine. To bolster this concept, attempts have been made to prove that the original Passover was observed at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, that the Bible clearly indicates this to be true, and that the Jews mistakenly changed the time of its observance to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Nearly every year, sermons and articles have been presented which support this view, attempting to prove that the Passover was always intended to be kept at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. I have listened to these for thirty years, and while each individual has undoubtedly felt he was presenting an iron-clad case, there is very simple opposing evidence for every point presented. More than that, there are significant questions and problems with the early 14<sup>th</sup> view which are rarely addressed at all. Here is a summary of the major ones. Each item will be addressed in further detail in the succeeding pages:

- Much is made of the concept that “between the evenings” (*ben ha-arbayim*) is after sunset (during twilight). Most of the support for this idea comes from commentaries or various English renderings of some of the verses. But when other uses of this phrase in Scripture are examined, we do not find this to be the case. For example, the evening sacrifice, which was usually offered around 3 p.m. (but earlier in the afternoon on special occasions) is also described in the scriptures as being offered “between the evenings”.

## 2 Resolving the Passover Controversy

- Many early 14<sup>th</sup> arguments are based on the idea that the Passover is the entire 14<sup>th</sup> day of Abib. The Scriptures speak of the Passover occurring on the 14<sup>th</sup>, but never say the Passover is the 14<sup>th</sup>. Christ is our Passover. The Passover is a sacrifice, not a day.
- The Passover is not always defined as occurring “*ben ha-arbayim*”. In Deuteronomy 16:6 and Joshua 5:10, the Passover is described as occurring “*ba-erev*”, or “at even” (KJV) on the 14<sup>th</sup>. This is the same time expression used in Exodus 12:18 to define when the first day of Unleavened Bread begins. Thus it becomes clear that the Passover was kept around the time that the Feast of Unleavened Bread began, not one day earlier.
- Numbers 33 states that the Israelites began their journey from Rameses (the territory in which they lived, Gen. 47:11) on the 15<sup>th</sup>, not the 14<sup>th</sup>. The Israelites did not have to gather at the city of Raamses (note the difference in spelling, Ex. 1:11) located in the north before beginning their journey south as some in support of the early 14<sup>th</sup> view have claimed. The extra time involved in such an unnecessary detour and delay presents problems regarding lack of sleep and food, as well as requiring a very convoluted reading of Exodus 12-13.
- The idea of a “domestic Passover”, one kept entirely in the home, is often presented to make it easier to say Jesus observed a Passover apart from the temple and priesthood. Yet every Passover described in the Bible (except the original for obvious reasons) is centered around the tabernacle or temple. Numbers 9 instituted a second Passover partly for those who were on a journey and unable to make it to God’s chosen meeting place for the Passover in the first month. And Deuteronomy 16 strictly forbids a “domestic Passover”.

## Resolving the Passover Controversy

3

- The argument is sometimes made that “the place God chose to place His name” is the entire city of Jerusalem, and that the Passover could be killed anywhere in its environs. This concept, though, ignores the fact that the Passover was an offering, as clearly stated in Numbers 9 and elsewhere. Leviticus 17 and Deuteronomy 12 expressly prohibit the slaying of *any* sacrifice apart from “the place God chose to place His name” because the blood of all sacrifices had to be offered on God’s altar. These chapters make it plain that it was this atoning blood that made the Passover a sacrifice.
- While it has been stated as an article of faith that at some time the Jews changed the timing of the Passover, just when that would have been is extremely difficult to pin down. Some claim it must have happened after Ezra’s time, since Ezra certainly would have done it right, but the Passover in Josiah’s day was clearly at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>, not the beginning. There seem to be no historic records of such a change. It is remarkable that after many centuries of being scattered and separated, the same Jews who remained in complete agreement over which day is the Sabbath seem also to have remained in agreement over which night the Passover was eaten. If it is so clear in the Old Testament that the Passover was at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, it would seem that at least some separated groups of Jews would have been faithful to the original timing and that any divergence would have produced some historic evidence.
- Perhaps the main argument from the Old Testament for an early 14<sup>th</sup> Passover is the statement in Exodus 12:22 that no Israelite was to leave his house until morning. Yet it is common to speak of someone leaving a house at 2 or 3 in the morning while it is yet night. So the claim is made that although this is allowed in English, it is not allowed in the Hebrew language. There is,

#### 4                    **Resolving the Passover Controversy**

however, no Biblical proof for this alleged restriction. It is impossible to prove from Scriptural usage that *boqer* (morning) can *never* include time before dawn. Certainly there are instances where *boqer* is clearly after dawn, but many uses of the word imply, and some even require, that time before dawn is meant.

- The #1 argument for an early 14<sup>th</sup> Passover involves the last supper of Christ and His disciples. If it were not for a handful of verses in the synoptic gospels, there would probably be no argument over this issue. But was it even possible for Jesus to keep a domestic early 14<sup>th</sup> Passover that night? How long does it take to kill, flay and roast a whole, ungutted lamb large enough to feed at least 13 adult men? An oven-roasted 20-pound turkey can take 6½ hours to cook at 325°F. A leg of lamb alone takes 2-4 hours. When would dinner have been ready for Christ's last supper? If the disciples didn't slay the lamb until after sundown, could they have finished their preparations early enough to satisfy Matthew 26:20 that "when evening had come, He sat down with the twelve"? Could the lamb have been ready soon enough to allow time for the meal, instruction, journey to Gethsemane, prayer in the garden, and the remainder of the activities that night?

All of these issues, and many others, are addressed in much greater detail in the pages that follow. This paper was written to encourage the reader to study the Bible – to prove the truth on this matter from the Scriptures (rather than from commentaries and dictionaries, which often contradict each other, as well as the Bible). Look up the scriptures for yourself. Many bold claims are made here. Check them out for yourself in your own Bible and concordance. Don't reject them just because they don't match what you have always been taught or what you think the Bible says.

In writing this paper, I did not research articles or books presenting the idea that the Old Testament Passover occurred at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>. My support for this comes entirely from the Scriptures, using very little in the way of external sources. Every argument I have heard in defense of the early 14<sup>th</sup> has an adequate, and often compelling, counter-explanation in the Bible in support of the late 14<sup>th</sup>.

The usual reaction when someone suggests that the Old Testament Passover was sacrificed at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib is to assume that the individual is also suggesting that we should keep our New Testament observance on the 15<sup>th</sup>. This conclusion is generally made because of the long-standing assertion that the New Testament ceremony is merely a transformation of the Old Testament Passover. But remember, the Old Testament Passover *foreshadowed* the sacrifice of Jesus Christ – which occurred at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>. What Jesus instructed His disciples to do on the eve of the 14<sup>th</sup> was, by contrast, described by Him as something to be done in *remembrance* of Him. Many who support the late 14<sup>th</sup> view, including this writer, are in no way trying to change the date of the New Testament observance.

Some have asked: If this doesn't affect the timing and observance of our New Testament ceremony, why bother to study this further and make waves? If it is merely a technical point of history, why argue about it? The answer is that some continue to dogmatically publish and preach errors about this subject as though they were true. Does it make any difference whether what we are teaching and what we believe is the truth?

## **Between the Evenings**

One of the primary arguments for the early 14<sup>th</sup> reckoning is the expression used in Exodus 12:6 and other verses to describe the time of day the Passover lamb was to be killed: “Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the

## 6 Resolving the Passover Controversy

whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it **at twilight.**” (NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted.) “At twilight” is an English translation of an expression more literally translated “between the (two) evenings”. In English, “twilight” usually refers to a time after sunset before the light in the sky fades (except in situations such as “twilight golf”, which is played late in the afternoon, before sundown). If “at twilight” were an accurate translation, it would heavily support the early 14<sup>th</sup> view.

But the expression “between the evenings” (Hebrew *ben ha-arbayim*; Strong’s: *beyn ‘ereb*) is not unique to the Passover. It is also used as the time for the daily evening sacrifice in Exodus 29:39,41 and Numbers 28:4,8: “One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight [between the evenings]” (Ex. 29:39).

Ample historic evidence shows that the evening sacrifice was normally offered around 3 p.m. If the Jews changed the time of the Passover, then they must have changed the time of the evening sacrifice as well, because it was also to be offered “between the evenings”. But the scriptural evidence supports the concept that the evening sacrifice was offered in the afternoon.

In describing the morning and evening sacrifices, the evening sacrifice is listed and described second. The scriptures are quite consistent in this. In Exodus 29:38-42 and Numbers 28:3-8, the RSV, the NIV, and others, especially the various “literal” translations, often use the words “first lamb” to refer to the morning sacrifice, or “second lamb” to refer to the evening sacrifice. And this follows the wording of the original Hebrew. If the evening sacrifice were after sundown, it would not be the second of the two daily sacrifices, but the first.

In 1 Kings 18 is the account of Elijah’s challenge on Mt. Carmel against Baal worship.<sup>1</sup> Elijah allowed the prophets of

---

<sup>1</sup> [CHCoG - For an accurate and challenging translation of this event, read our Bible version, available free at

Baal to continue their futile efforts until after noon, “until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice” (v.29). While “evening” is not actually in the original Hebrew, the concept that this was the regular time of offering is. A number of events follow the actual sacrifice of the bull, including the killing of 450 false prophets at the brook Kishon, Ahab’s meal and an extended search for rain clouds from back up on the mountain. A cloud the size of a man’s hand could not have been recognized on the horizon quite a while after the evening sacrifice if the sacrifice had been after sundown. In verse 45 “the sky became black with clouds”. This is obviously still sometime during daylight, before the sky became black from want of sun, and while they could still see to hurry down the mountain ahead of the rain. Considering all of the things that happened after Elijah’s sacrifice, the “time of the offering of the evening sacrifice” had to have been in the afternoon.

If Exodus 12:6, and other similar verses, had been translated: “Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month; then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it **at the time of the evening sacrifice**”, instead of “at twilight”, few would question what was meant.

## Evening

Not all verses related to the Passover use the phrase “between the evenings”. In Deuteronomy 16:6 it says: “but at the place where Jehovah<sup>2</sup> your God 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.” And in Joshua 5:10

---

[https://chcpublications.net/Holy\\_Bible\\_CHCP.pdf](https://chcpublications.net/Holy_Bible_CHCP.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [CHCoG – The deliberate mistranslation, “The LORD” has been restored to Jehovah, here and in other places, as it is in the Hebrew. See [What is God’s Name](#) for details.]

## 8 Resolving the Passover Controversy

we read: “So the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho.” In these verses, the word “twilight” does not come from “between the evenings”, but simply ‘*erev* (translated “even” in the KJV). It is the same expression used elsewhere for the end of the day:

Leviticus 23:27 “Also the tenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to Jehovah.<sup>32</sup> ‘*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** [‘*erev*], from evening [the end of the ninth day] to evening [the end of the tenth day], you shall celebrate your sabbath.”

Exodus 12:18 “In the first *month*, **on the fourteenth day of the month at evening** [at ‘*erev* – at the end of the fourteenth], you shall eat unleavened bread, **until the twenty-first day of the month at evening** [the end of the twenty-first day].<sup>19</sup> For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* a stranger or a native of the land.”

Note that the phrases “on the fourteenth day of the month at evening” quoted in Exodus 12:18 and “on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight” in Joshua 5:10 are identical in the original Hebrew. Joshua 5, then, states that the children of Israel kept the Passover on the plains of Jericho toward the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> – around the time they were to begin eating unleavened bread for seven days.

Other verses show that the word for “evening” was also commonly used to refer to time before sunset:

Genesis 24:11 “And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw *water*.” [Women in that era would not have made a habit of doing chores outside the city after sundown. Even men were known to come in at sundown, and sometimes feared to do otherwise (cf. Psa.104:20-23). The women would have gone out to draw water for the family’s evening and early morning needs sometime during the afternoon, before the water was needed for preparations of the evening meal, washing up for dinner, etc. See 1 Samuel 9:11-14 for the account of a sacrifice being offered at this same time.]

Jeremiah 6:4 “Prepare war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe to us, for the day goes away, for the shadows of the evening are lengthening.” [It is the *afternoon* shadows that lengthen as the day draws to a close. There are no such shadows after the sun sets. The Hebrew language seems to be lacking a separate word for “afternoon”. Instead the term “evening” is used, not just here, but throughout the scriptures.]

## Between Which Evenings?

The expression “between the (two) evenings” implies that there were two different times that were each called “evening”. In 1 Samuel 20:5, David tells Jonathan that he is going into hiding “until the third day at **evening**”. In verse 19, Jonathan reiterates that on the third day David should return to a specific place so

that he would be there for Jonathan's signal. But in verse 35 it says: "And so it was, in the **morning**, that Jonathan went out into the field **at the time appointed** with David." Certainly it appears that their carefully arranged *evening* meeting time must have immediately followed morning. Scriptures quoted above show that at least a portion of the afternoon time was referred to as evening. This passage in 1 Samuel indicates that the word '*erev* was apparently used to refer to the *beginning* of this afternoon time period (i.e. noon). Other scriptures illustrate that the word '*erev* also applied to sundown (cf. Josh. 8:29; 2 Chr. 18:34). But while '*erev* can refer to time after sundown (cf. Judg. 19:14-17), it is never used to specifically denote the "end of twilight" as such. Scripturally, therefore, there is no support for the idea that the two evenings were sunset and dark, while there is support for the two evenings being noon and sunset.

## Morning

The Israelites were forbidden to leave their dwellings until the morning (*boqer*) (Ex. 12:22). This was imposed on them because, as God had told them in advance, the firstborn of Egypt were going to be killed at midnight (Ex. 11:4-5; Ex. 12:29). Once the firstborn had died, the plague was past, and at some time defined as "morning", it was safe for the Israelites to leave. The belief that the Israelites were required by this passage to remain in their homes until daylight is central to the early 14<sup>th</sup> argument. But the book of Ruth makes it plain that morning definitely included time before sunrise:

Ruth 3:13-14 "Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be *that* if he will perform the duty of a near kinsman for you; good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, *as* Jehovah lives! Lie down

until morning.”<sup>14</sup> So **she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose before one could recognize another** [well before sunrise]. Then he said, “Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.”

Certainly in the English language there would not be a problem with the concept of people leaving at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. Ancient Greek also seems to allow a morning before dawn: “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35). There are thirty instances in the Old Testament of people rising early in the morning (Hebrew, *shakam boqer*). While the precise hour at which they rose is not stated, it is totally unreasonable to assume that these people rising “early in the morning” never got up before dawn. This was in an era long before electric lights and late night television, back when people went to bed with the chickens and got up accordingly. People who had to work the land and milk their own animals could not always afford the luxury of sleeping in, and the examples of farmers even in the last few centuries bear this out.

If I may be permitted to quote one external source, the following is found in the article “Watch” in *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, page 1163:

“The Jews, like the Greeks and Romans, divided the night into military watches instead of hours, each watch representing the period for which sentinels or pickets remained on duty. Thus we read of ‘a watch in the night’ (Psa. 90:4). The proper Jewish reckoning recognized only three such watches, entitled the first or ‘beginning of the watches’ (Lam. 2:19), the middle watch (Judg. 7:19), and the morning watch (Ex. 14:24; 1 Sam. 11:11). These would last from sunset to

## Resolving the Passover Controversy

10 p.m.; from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.; and from 2 a.m. to sunrise. Subsequently to the establishment of the Roman supremacy, the number of watches was increased to four, which were described either according to their numerical order, as in the case of the ‘fourth watch’ (Matt. 14:25, Gr. *phulake*), or by the terms ‘even,’ ‘midnight,’ ‘cockcrowing,’ and ‘morning’ (Mark 13:35).”

Luke 12:38 “And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants.”

Matthew 14:25 “Now in the fourth watch [3-6 a.m.] of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.”

Mark 13:35 “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming; in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning;”

These were the names of the four night watches, as quoted above. Note that Christ used the generic term “morning” to refer to the time during the last night watch (3-6 a.m.). Could He also have done this when He spoke to Moses? In the Hebrew watches of the night, the last watch, as noted by Unger’s, appears to have been a bit longer (2-6 a.m.). At the time of the Exodus and beyond, this time period was clearly called “morning”:

Exodus 14:24 “Now it came to pass, in the morning (*boqer*) watch, that Jehovah looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians.”

1 Samuel 11:11 “So it was, on the next day, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning (*boqer*) watch, and killed Ammonites until the heat of the day...”

If the “morning watch” referred to a time as early as 2 a.m., it is not unreasonable to think that the Hebrew language could include these pre-dawn hours as part of the “morning”, just as other languages do.

In support of the early 14<sup>th</sup> view, morning has sometimes been equated with day and evening with night. Genesis 1 is the scriptural passage used to support this concept. While the King James translations can give the impression that the evening and morning constituted each day, the Revised Standard Version and other translations simply state that “there was evening and there was morning” each day. In common usage throughout the Bible, the word for “morning” in Hebrew (as in English and Greek) equates with the time period from predawn hours until noon, while “evening”, when used in reference to a period of time, extends from noon, or soon thereafter, until around bedtime. There is NO equation of morning with the twelve-hour day or evening with the twelve-hour night anywhere in the Bible. The King James Genesis 1 account has simply been misunderstood. If “evening” and “night” in Genesis 1 meant the same thing, there would have been no need to use different words.

Of course, the only reason morning is an issue at all is because Deuteronomy 16:1 says that God brought the Israelites out of Egypt by night. The assumption seems to be that night requires “total darkness”. Yet “night” (Hebrew *layil*) is the word normally used in scripture as the counterpart of “day” (Gen. 1:5). Jesus said there are twelve hours in a day (John 11:9-10), meaning there are also twelve hours in an average night. Comparing Matthew 12:40 with Jonah 1:17, we find that Hebrew and Greek usage are the same in this regard. If “day” is the

twelve hours when the sun is up, “night” would have to include the twilight periods after sunset and before sunrise. So even if the Israelites did leave in the morning after dawn, they would still have been leaving at “night”. But since this was the time of the full moon, they had ample light to leave Goshen well before dawn, during the morning watch; and there is nothing in the Bible or the Hebrew language to prohibit this.

## **The Morrow after the Passover**

The children of Israel left “on the morrow after the Passover” (Num. 33:3 KJV). What is meant by this phrase? The NKJV translates this “on the day after the Passover”. Did the Israelites leave the morning after the night they ate the Passover or does the term “morrow” or “day after” require that they left on a different calendrical day? What is the Biblical usage of “morrow” (*mochorath*)?

Genesis 19:32 [The elder daughter of Lot said,] “Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.”<sup>33</sup> So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.<sup>34</sup> It happened on the next day [on the morrow/*mochorath*] that the firstborn said to the younger, “Indeed I lay with my father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.” [Here the night and morrow are part of the same 24-hour day.]

Judges 6:37 ““look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and

it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.’<sup>38</sup> And it was so. When he rose early the next morning [on the morrow/*mochorath*] and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.”

Exodus 18:12 “Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God. And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God.<sup>13</sup> And so it was, on the next day [on the morrow/*mochorath*], that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening.”

Leviticus 7:15 “The flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day it is offered. He shall not leave any of it until morning [*boqer*].<sup>16</sup> But if the sacrifice of his offering is a vow or a voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he offers his sacrifice; but on the next day [morrow/*mochorath*] the remainder of it also may be eaten;” [Here the “morning” and “the next day” (morrow) are used to refer to overlapping periods of time. The peace offering could not be eaten on the morrow/morning after it was offered unless it was a vow or voluntary offering.]

1 Samuel 11:9 “And they said to the messengers who came, “Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh Gilead: ‘Tomorrow [Hebrew *machar*], by the time the sun is hot, you shall have help.’” Then the messengers came and reported *it* to the men of Jabesh, and they

## Resolving the Passover Controversy

were glad. <sup>10</sup> Therefore the men of Jabesh said, “Tomorrow [*machar*] we will come out to you, and you may do with us whatever seems good to you.” <sup>11</sup> So it was, on the next day [the morrow/*mochorath*], that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and killed Ammonites until the heat of the day. And it happened that those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.” [Here “the morrow” doesn’t even wait for sunup to arrive, but includes the time of the morning watch (2-6 a.m.).]

See also Leviticus 19:5-6 & 23:10-16; Numbers 11:32; 1 Samuel 5:2-4 & 30:17; Jonah 4:7.

In analyzing the 33 uses of the word *mochorath* in scripture, it appears that it essentially means the next normal period of wakefulness. Numbers 11:32 says: “And the people stayed up all that day, all that night, and all the next day [*mochorath*], and gathered the quail....” Clearly, “all the next day” follows the night, which would have been completely unnecessary if *mochorath* began with sunset as some have claimed.

Additionally there are five verses (Ex. 32:6; Judg.6:38 & 21:4; 1 Sam. 5:3 & 4) which describe people rising “early” during this time period called *mochorath*, and yet this is 8-10 hours or more after the Hebrew day begins (not terribly early if *mochorath* started at sunset). Numbers 33:3, then, shows that the Israelites left the morning after they ate the Passover, and proceeded on their journey during the daylight hours:

Numbers 33:3 “They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day [on the morrow/*mochorath*] after the Passover

the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians.”

Joshua 5:11-12 says:

“And they ate of the produce of the land on the day [morrow/*mochorath*] after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain on the very same day. <sup>12</sup> Now the manna ceased on the day [morrow/*mochorath*] after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.”

In conjunction with Leviticus 23:10-15, these verses indicate that the Israelites, upon entry into the Promised Land, ate the produce of the land during the daylight of the 15<sup>th</sup>. (For an explanation of this see the article about Pentecost at [cgsf.org](http://cgsf.org).) If the Passover lambs were slain at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, the eating of the produce would have been 36 or more hours later, and the expression “[*mochorath*] after the Passover” would not be appropriate. The way early 14<sup>th</sup> supporters try to get around this problem is to claim that “Passover” refers to the entire 24-hour day of the 14<sup>th</sup>. But this does not match the scriptural usage of the word “Passover”.

## What Was the Passover?

It is certainly possible to read some verses which refer to the “Passover” as applying to a day. But this is always an interpretation. There are no verses which require this meaning. In fact, the Hebrew word *pesach* (Passover) is never used to name the 24-hour day of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Many passages clearly use this word as the name of the lamb being slain and eaten (cf. Deut. 16:2, 2 Chr. 30:18). Others, as in the phrase “keep the Passover” (cf.

Num. 9:2-14, Deut. 16:1, Josh. 5:10), also have nothing to do with the day *per se*, but rather refer to that same sacrificial offering. In the phrase “keep/kept the Passover”, the word for “keep” is always the Hebrew *‘asah*. This is a different word than those normally used to describe “keeping” a Sabbath or holy day (*shamgar* meaning observe, and *chagag* meaning celebrate). The word *‘asah* deals with making and doing, and refers to the sacrifice, not the day. This would be similar to the Wave Sheaf, which, although it was offered at a specific period of time, was not a day-long event. In Numbers 9:7, for example, the focus of the Israelite’s concern in “keeping the Passover” was in being “kept from presenting the offering of Jehovah at its appointed time”, not observing a day. Verses such as Leviticus 23:5 and Numbers 28:16 say the Passover was to occur on the 14<sup>th</sup>, not that it was the 14<sup>th</sup>. Today, we also focus on “the Passover” as a ceremony, not a day.

Some feel that since the Passover sacrifice was named because the Lord “passed over” the Israelites, that these two events must have occurred on the same calendrical day. But nothing in the scriptures requires that the Lord “passed over” in the same calendrical day that the Passover lambs were slain, only that the destroyer passed over in the same night that the sacrifice was eaten.

Although by the time of the New Testament it is obvious that the term “Passover” had come to apply not only to the sacrifice, but to the entire seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, none of the Old Testament scriptures, with the exception of Ezekiel 45:21, require that the word *pesach* refer to any period of time, let alone the day of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Rather, the Hebrew *pesach* (defined in Exodus 12:8-11 as a lamb which is eaten) is used almost exclusively to describe the sacrifice with its accompanying rites and ceremonies (cf. Num. 9:3). This is not to deny the fact that the scriptures do speak about a day in association with the Passover. Exodus 12:17 & 13:3-4 and Deuteronomy 16:3 draw attention to one particular

day to be remembered as an everlasting ordinance. The day being spoken about, and the event being commemorated, is the day God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, the day clearly defined in Numbers 33:3-4 as the 15<sup>th</sup> of Abib. Some point to Exodus 12:14 as an indication that the day of the passing over (presumed to be the 14<sup>th</sup>) is a feast day as well. Yet at the same time, early 14<sup>th</sup> supporters generally argue quite vociferously that the 14<sup>th</sup> is not a holy day; and except for the ceremony observed at the beginning of the day, the day is not treated in any special manner. Exodus 12:14 does indeed speak about a day to be kept as a feast and memorial. But it does not specify which day of the month that is. It could be referring to the day of the passing over, as spoken of in verses 12-13, or it could mean the day of departure from Egypt described in verses 15-17. Or both. If the Passover sacrifice occurred at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> then the “passing over” actually occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and the feast day established in verse 14 would be the same one commanded in verse 17, namely the first day of Unleavened Bread. Exodus 12:14, therefore, cannot be used to define the day of the Passover sacrifice as a feast day. It merely defines the day of the passing over and/or the day of departure as a feast day without stating on which day of the month those things occurred.

## **Rameses and the Preparation Time**

Proponents of the early 14<sup>th</sup> Passover generally feel that time was required after the Passover meal for the Israelites to spoil the Egyptians, gather their belongings, journey to Rameses and still leave on the 15<sup>th</sup> (Num. 33:3). The assumption seems to be that Rameses was a specific place, probably the treasure city the Israelite slaves built (Ex. 1:11). But this treasure city is usually translated with a different spelling (Raamses in the KJV and NKJV) because the Hebrew vowel points are different. There are no scriptures that say the people journeyed *to* “Raamses”, but

rather that they journeyed *from* “Rameses”. (*Strong’s* lists both names under the same number but notes the differences in both spelling and pronunciation.) As defined in Genesis 47:11, Rameses (using the same vowel points as in Exodus 12:37) was another name for Goshen. Simply put, the children of Israel began their journey to Succoth not from the treasure city of Raamses, but from their homes in Rameses (Goshen) on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Abib (Num. 33:1-5).

If the original Passover had been killed at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, we would find the Israelites suffering from severe sleep deprivation. In the early 14<sup>th</sup> view, they would have gotten up on the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> and killed the lamb and eaten the Passover when the sun went down that night. The excitement, terror and commotion of their Egyptian neighbors would permit little or no sleep that night as they began their preparations to leave. The Egyptians’ urgings, and the Israelites’ (alleged) preparations and travels to the city of Raamses would have left no time for sleep during daylight of the 14<sup>th</sup>. And they could not sleep when they arrived at the city, but had to begin leaving for Succoth. We are looking here at 48 to 60 hours with little or no sleep for several million people with this scenario, as opposed to the 36 hours or less the late 14<sup>th</sup> sacrifice requires.

There are also food-related problems with the idea that the Israelites gathered at Raamses, the city. Exodus 12:37-39 says that they left without having time to prepare any food, and implies that they did not stop to bake their still unleavened dough until arriving at Succoth. If they went to Raamses first, they would have gone hungry because they took no leftovers and had no other food prepared. Also, if they carried dough all the way from their homes to the city of Raamses and then on down to Succoth before baking it, that dough would surely have had time to begin to naturally ferment and become leavened. Yet verse 39 clearly says it was not leavened for want of time. So not only do the scriptures indicate that they left from the land of Rameses,

rather than from the treasure city, but the logistics of going to this city make such a claim very problematic.

In Exodus 11, the plague of the firstborn is announced and described. In verse 1, God makes it plain that this would be the last plague, and that not only would Pharaoh let them go, but that they would be driven out. In preparation for this, the people were told to “borrow” jewelry, etc. (v.2-3, KJV). (Some have argued that the Egyptians would not be willing to give these things to the Israelites until after the distress of the death of their firstborn. But verse 3 clearly refutes that objection.) In verses 4-8, Moses gives his final warning to Pharaoh, relating many details of what was to follow. The time of the plague was stated to occur at midnight (v.4). And in verse 8, Moses angrily declares that although he and the Pharaoh would not see each other again (Ex. 10:27-29), Pharaoh’s servants would come to Moses after the firstborn died, begging the Israelites to leave.

All of these details about what would occur surrounding the death of the firstborn were well known. They had been communicated to the Israelites in advance according to God’s instructions as recorded in Exodus 12. Verse 11 says the people were told to keep their shoes on and be dressed and ready to go, even with their staff in hand, and to eat the lamb in haste. Verse 28 says the people followed these instructions. Jehovah passed over at midnight, as He promised (v.29), and the Egyptians rose up to discover the tragedy. Pharaoh sent his orders to Moses and Aaron that night, as Moses had predicted (v.31-32), and the Egyptians urged the people to leave in haste (v.33). They were not only grieved, but many of them were certainly angry. They were in no mood to listen to Israelite slave arguments that they weren’t coming out until the sun was up, that they had to gather their belongings, including all the stuff that belonged to the Egyptians, and that they would first have to journey to a city many maps place *north* of the land of Goshen, away from the wilderness they had stated all along they were heading to. Rather,

## Resolving the Passover Controversy

the Israelites grabbed their kneading bowls full of dough (v.34), and the clothing and jewelry they had already collected from the Egyptians (v.35-36), and hurriedly began their journey directly to Succoth along with their flocks and herds (v.37-38). Verse 39 reiterates that “they were driven [other translations read thrust or pushed] out of Egypt and could not wait [tarry].” The children of Israel were packed and ready to go immediately, as instructed, leaving early in the morning while it was still night. Exodus 12:42 contains the phrase, “night to be much observed”, which is routinely used in reference to the amazingly Passover-like observance some of us keep on the eve of the 15<sup>th</sup>. This phrase, however, is a King James English expression. Other translations render this as a “night of solemn observance” or a “night of vigil” or a “night of watching”. The concept of the Israelites keeping a vigil, or watching, does not describe a jubilant journey out of the land of Egypt. It is far more descriptive of what they were doing as they awaited the death of the firstborn and word that they were to leave.

## Story Flow and Timing

Those who wrote the Bible have been said to be a bit rambling in their presentation at times. However, this supposed inability to stick with one subject is an unjustified accusation. Exodus 12 is perhaps one such place. Those who take the early 14<sup>th</sup> view see the first 13 verses (and probably verse 14 as well) as applying to the Passover. Verses 15-20 describe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Then Moses goes back to the Passover in verses 21-36, then Unleavened Bread again in verses 37-42, then back to Passover for verses 43-50, finally ending with Unleavened Bread again in verse 51. But try reading this chapter viewing the Passover as a sacrifice (not a day) occurring at the very end of the 14<sup>th</sup> with the succeeding events and

commandments pertaining to the Feast day of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Suddenly this chapter takes on a cohesive, logical presentation.

The same is true of chapter 13. Why does Moses start out with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and then wander back to the significance of the firstborn in verses 11-13? Then in verse 14, when future generations ask about this significance, he makes reference first to coming out of Egypt, then goes back to killing the firstborn in verse 15, and back to coming out in verse 16. Those who insist on separating these two events by up to 24 hours would have to reply that that's just the way Moses wrote it. It does not present an insurmountable problem, perhaps, but when it is understood that the original Passover meal, the deaths of the Egyptian firstborn and the Israelites' flight from their homes in Goshen all occurred during the night portion of the 15<sup>th</sup>, it makes the scriptures far more logical, adds tremendously to the meaning of the Feast day itself, and spares Moses some unjustified criticism.

If we go back to Exodus 12:51 again, we see an interesting term: "the selfsame day" (KJV) or "that very same day" (NKJV). This has usually been used to refer back to verse 41 and the understanding that the Israelites came out of Egypt exactly 430 years after the circumcision covenant. But perhaps we have overlooked the obvious possibility that verse 51 gives additional information, saying plainly that the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt on the very same day that they ate the Passover and the firstborn were killed. Indeed the Hebrew phrase for "selfsame day" (*zeh- 'etsem yowm*) is often used in reference to events happening on one particular day (cf. Gen. 7:13-16; Lev. 23:10-14,16-21; Deut. 32:48).

Later Passovers raise interesting timing considerations as well. 2 Chronicles 35 contains the story of a Passover in Josiah's reign. After mentioning the slaughtering of the Passover in verse 11, verse 12 then speaks of burnt offerings as being dealt with afterward, concurrently with the roasting of the lambs and boiling

## Resolving the Passover Controversy

of other offerings in verse 13. Verse 14 says: “Then afterward they prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron, *were busy* in offering burnt offerings and fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron.”

The priests were busy with extra burnt and peace offerings. Because they were preoccupied with these things, the priests had no time before “night” to prepare their own Passover meals. The Levites did it for them. They did the same for the musicians and gatekeepers (v.15). If these 37,600 Passover lambs and 3,800 cattle had been killed, offered and prepared after sunset, this would have been a tremendous amount of activity to accomplish in the short 60-90 minutes of twilight. Clearly, in context, Josiah’s Passover occurred in the afternoon.

## Law of the Offerings

Some of those who support the early 14<sup>th</sup> time-frame for the Passover sacrifice feel that God commanded what has been referred to as a “domestic Passover” – one that was to be kept in homes without the involvement of the priests or temple. Certainly there was a “domestic” element in the first Passover. There was no tabernacle and no priesthood, and the circumstances surrounding it were unique. But even in Egypt there is evidence that the Passover may not have been a strictly private, in-home observance. The people may have assembled together for the slaying of the lambs:

“Your lamb shall be without blemish.... Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the **whole assembly** of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take *some* of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and

on the lintel of the houses where they eat it” (Ex. 12:5-7).

But what about succeeding Passover sacrifices, when there were both ordained priests and a tabernacle? A careful reading of Leviticus 1-7 will show that whenever any animal was offered in sacrifice, it was to be brought to the door of the tabernacle/temple. When it was an individual bringing the offering, he was to kill the animal *himself*, while the priests had the job of offering the blood of the sacrifice at the altar (cf. Lev. 1:2-9). The burnt offerings were not eaten by anyone. Some of the sin and trespass offerings were eaten by the priests. The only offerings which the common people ate were the peace offerings. Unless the peace offering was for a vow or a voluntary offering, it had to be consumed before morning, just like the Passover offering (Lev. 7:15-16).

Leviticus 17 describes the law regarding “domestic” sacrifices:

“<sup>3</sup> Whatever man of the house of Israel kills an ox or lamb or goat in the camp, or who kills it outside the camp, <sup>4</sup> and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer an offering to Jehovah before the tabernacle of Jehovah, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people, <sup>5</sup> to the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they offer in the open field, that they may bring them to Jehovah at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to the priest, and offer them as peace offerings to Jehovah.”

In short, “domestic” sacrifices were prohibited. Verse 11 explains why: “For the soul of the flesh *is* in the blood, and I have

given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul.” In Deuteronomy 12, Moses describes where offerings were to be made after entering the Promised Land (v.5-11). God was going to put His name on a particular place (eventually, Jerusalem), and all offerings were to be brought there. Prior to Jerusalem, sacrificing occurred at the bronze altar in such places as Gilgal, Shiloh and Gibeon (1 Sam. 1:24-25; 1 Chr. 16:39-40). Once again, the Instructions are the same. Some animals could be killed and consumed at home (vv.15,20-22), but not sacrifices. And again, the chief reason was that the blood of a sacrifice had to be poured out on the altar (v.27), unlike the blood of a locally-butchered non-sacrificial animal which was to be poured on the ground like water (vv. 16,23-24).

In Deuteronomy 16, Moses uses terminology similar to that of Deuteronomy 12 for the Passover:

“ <sup>2</sup> Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to Jehovah your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where Jehovah chooses to put His name....<sup>5</sup> You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which Jehovah your God gives you; <sup>6</sup> but at the place where Jehovah your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight [at even, KJV], at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt. <sup>7</sup> And you shall roast and eat *it* in the place which Jehovah your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents” (Deut.16:2-7).

The Passover, too, had to be brought to God’s altar. It could not be offered in a domestic setting.

The first Passover observance after leaving Egypt is described in Numbers 9. It immediately followed the dedication of the

tabernacle, and was kept with all of its rites and ceremonies (v.3), some of which are described in verses 11 and 12. In verse 13, it says: “But the man who *is* clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he did not bring the offering of Jehovah at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin.” If the Passover were strictly domestic, no offering would be brought anywhere, and being on a journey would not necessarily prevent anyone from keeping it.

In Exodus 23:14-17, the three feast seasons are described. Then verse 18 says: “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning.” The Passover sacrifice was the only offering for which we find no direct scriptural command that the fat of the offering be burned on the altar before the animal was cooked (cf. Lev. 3–4). Instead, any excess meat and fat from the Passover lambs was burned up after the meal. Exodus 34:22-24 is a parallel passage, again describing the three feast seasons, with verse 25 confirming: “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning.” Here the statement about the fat is replaced with a specific reference to the Passover. These verses clearly show that the term “My sacrifice” is referring to the Passover sacrifice, and state that, as with all other sacrifices, the blood of the Passover was to be offered before God. This is what made the sacrifice an offering.

Various Passovers are described in 2 Chronicles and Ezra, and they were all carried out at the temple, and according to the sacrificial laws described in the books of Moses: “They stood in their place according to their custom, according to the Law of Moses the man of God; the priests sprinkled the blood [of the Passover lambs] *which they received* from the hand of the Levites” (2 Chr. 30:16). Verse 17 goes on to explain an unusual occurrence at Hezekiah’s Passover – that the Levites killed the

lambs for the people who were not clean. Those who were unclean were not normally permitted to eat the Passover at all, as we saw in Numbers 9, but Hezekiah interceded with prayer on their behalf (v. 18-20), and the Levites killed the lambs for them. (This was already a “second Passover”, and there would be no further opportunity to keep the Passover that year, v.2.) Those who were clean were expected to kill their own lambs as usual, but they still had to do it at the temple. As explained above (cf. Lev. 17, Deut. 12), the law of Moses required that all sacrifices were to be brought to the temple, and that the blood had to be offered at the altar, no matter who killed the animal (v.16). The Passover in Josiah’s day in 2 Chronicles 35 is similarly described, with verse 11 stating: “and they slaughtered the *Passover offerings*; and the priests sprinkled *the blood* with their hands [sprinkled the blood handed to them (NIV)], while the Levites skinned *the animals*.”

Those who believe the Passover was a “domestic” sacrifice apparently feel that the blood of the Passover lamb was either of no consequence and could be poured onto the ground as with the blood of any hunted animal (Lev. 17:13), or perhaps that the blood could somehow be offered in their “domestic” setting. But the scriptures, as quoted above, clearly prohibit this, and every example in the Bible demonstrates that such was not done. The blood of every sacrifice was symbolic of Christ’s blood and was to be offered before God. There is no indication the Passover was an exception to this. On the contrary, the Passover sacrifice was the principal sacrifice representing Christ, and its blood was an integral part of the service. In the original Passover, the blood of the lambs was placed on the door frames to secure deliverance of the firstborn from death, and subsequently freedom from bondage for all the Israelites. In succeeding Passovers, the blood of the sacrifice (the Passover being the only universally required personal sacrifice) was offered on God’s altar. Similarly, for us to be spared from the wages of sin in spiritual Egypt, the blood of

our Passover sacrifice, that of the Lamb of God, had to be offered before the Father in the heavenly temple:

“[Christ] entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood [shed at Passover], thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12, RSV). (See also Heb. 9:11-28; Heb. 12:18-24; 1 Pet. 1:2,18-19; Col. 1:19-20).

## **New Testament**

The scriptures clearly show that Christ died at 3 p.m. near the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Those who understand that the Passover sacrifice was always killed on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> take Paul’s description of Christ as our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7) literally. In a similar manner, Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem may have occurred on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month, foreshadowed by the day of the selection of the Passover lambs in Egypt. Jesus is also seen as the fulfillment of the wave sheaf, which was cut immediately after sundown following the Sabbath, at the time when Christ was resurrected, and waved the following morning, at the time Christ made His brief ascension to the Father to be accepted as the first of the firstfruits.

But some feel it was more important that Christ eat the Passover meal than that He personally fulfill the symbolism of the Passover sacrifice. They acknowledge that He may coincidentally have been killed at the same time the Jews were erroneously keeping “their” Passover, and perhaps see some symbolism there, but are forced to dismiss the greater meaning of Christ as the *literal* Passover sacrifice, offered at the correct time. God did not establish the time of the Old Testament Passover just because some 1500 years later He would keep it at that time of day with His disciples. He established the time of the Passover to foreshadow the actual sacrifice of Christ – with the Passover

lambs in Egypt slain at the very same time of day that the blood of the Lamb of God was eventually shed for the sins of the world.

John's use of the term "the Jew's Passover" is sometimes pointed to as evidence that theirs was an unauthorized observance. Yet John's reference to the "Jew's Feast of Tabernacles" (Jn. 7:2) causes no such concern for those who keep God's feasts, even though some use these same scriptures and same argument to support their claim that all these feasts are "Jewish" and don't need to be kept. John was addressing a Roman world years after the temple was destroyed, and identifying these things as "Jewish" was not an indication that they were obsolete or un-Biblical.

Much is made of the idea that the Feast was properly called the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover was completely separate, so that references to the Feast as the Passover are viewed as further indications of the erroneous beliefs of the Jews. Yet in Ezekiel 45:18,21 we read: "Thus says the Lord Jehovah... 'In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten.'" When the Jews in the New Testament time period referred to the feast of unleavened bread as "the Passover", they were merely following the example set by God Himself hundreds of years earlier.

Although I am well aware of the arguments used to get around the many New Testament scriptures which refer to the Passover as being after the crucifixion and/or equivalent to the Days of Unleavened Bread (primarily that the gospel writers were writing in and about the confused world of their day), I would like to mention them here anyway. Luke 22:1 states rather matter-of-factly that the Days of Unleavened Bread were called the Passover. In Acts 12:3-4, Peter was imprisoned by Herod *during* the days of Unleavened Bread, with the intention of placing him on trial *after* Passover. In Matthew 26:2, Jesus referred to the Passover being two days later, and Mark 14:1 says both the

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread were two days later. Indications from the chronology are that this was on a Monday afternoon, which would have matched a Wednesday afternoon Passover. John 13:1 says the events in the upper room were before the feast of the Passover. The Jews “did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover” later (John 18:28). John 19:14 says that Christ’s crucifixion took place on the Preparation Day of the Passover. And in Luke 2:41-43, John 2:23 and John 6:4 the New Testament writers refer to the “feast of the Passover” in a manner quite different than our twentieth-century church tradition.

Did Jesus observe the Old Testament Passover on the eve of the fourteenth? No lamb is specifically mentioned. Since the blood of the sacrifice had to be offered at the temple, it may have been impossible, without the support of the priesthood, for the disciples to fulfill that requirement. And if a lamb had been slain after sundown, there would not have been enough time to roast and eat it, and still have time for all of the other things that are recorded as having taken place on the night Jesus was betrayed. (This is further discussed in Part 2 of this paper.) The normal Passover was a family event, yet there is no indication that the female disciples, wives, mothers or children, many of whom were specifically mentioned as being in Jerusalem, were present that night. Some have pointed out that there is no evidence of any controversy over Christ attempting to observe the Passover a day early. This is a good indication that He didn’t keep a Passover that night. (Similarly, there is no condemnation that the Jews were wrong in their observance, and apparently no historic controversy that newly converted Jews were being asked to begin observing one of the premier Jewish events on a different day, in conflict with unconverted family members. In Luke 2:42, Jesus Himself is said to have observed the Passover as a child according to custom, not in some way different than the rest of the Jews.)

Most of the New Testament passages concerning Passover do not support the concept of the Passover at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. The book of John points exclusively to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> when it mentions the Passover. And even most references in the other gospels, as cited earlier, point to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>. A few passages do seem to strongly favor the concept that Jesus observed the Passover at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. But is this concept as strong in the original Greek as it is in the English translations? Here are a few observations:

In Luke 22:15 Jesus is quoted as saying: “With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer”. The Greek words here for “desire” and “desired” (*epithumeo* and *epithumea*) are used in 51 other verses, and *in every case* carry with them the concept of a great longing for something that either should not or cannot always be attained. In most cases the words are translated as “lust” or “covet”, and imply a wrong desire. Here are a few other examples: “In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they **will desire** to die, and death will flee from them” (Rev. 9:6). “For I am hard pressed between the two having a **desire** to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Phi. 1:23). “And we **desire** that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end” (Heb. 6:11; history shows that the majority were not so diligent, and this desire remains unfulfilled). “This *is* a faithful saying: if a man desires the position of a bishop, he **desires** a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1; the verses that follow clearly show this desire is not available to all who want it). Jesus may have been telling the disciples that He longed to keep the Passover with them, but that this was not going to be possible, as verse 16 seems to be saying.

Six verses (Mt. 27:62; Mk. 15:42; Lk. 23:54; Jn. 19:14,31,42) call the 14<sup>th</sup> the “preparation” (Greek *paraskeue*), and this Greek word is used exclusively for the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib in Scripture. John 19:14 specifically calls it “the Preparation Day of the Passover”. The concept of “preparing” for the Passover was apparently quite

important. Many verses talk about the disciples “preparing” (Greek *hetoimazo*) for the Passover on this very “Preparation Day” (Mt. 26:17; Mk. 14:12; Lk. 22:7-8), but the Scriptures do not seem to indicate much, if any, thought was given to the task by the disciples before sundown at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup>. It seems strange that such a significant event was brought up by the disciples when it was almost too late to do anything about it, if indeed they were to eat the Passover at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Perhaps instead they were preparing for an event that they knew would not take place until the *end* of the 14<sup>th</sup>.

In Mark 14:14 (and Luke 22:11) Jesus is quoted as saying: “Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?” (KJV). The NKJV is less certain, saying “in which I **may eat** the Passover”; Goodspeed says “where I **can eat** the Passover”. The Greek verb *phago* (to eat) is in the subjunctive mood here, indicating that the future activity spoken about is not certain to occur.

Matthew 26:18 records Jesus as saying: “I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.” The Greek word *poieo*, translated here as “will keep”, is used 576 times in the New Testament, and is translated using the verb “to keep” only 4 times in the KJV. It’s primary meaning is “to make” or “do”, like the Hebrew word *‘asah*. And, like the Hebrew *‘asah*, Thayer’s lexicon indicates that the Greek *poieo* can also mean to “make ready” or “prepare”, as in Matthew 22:2, Mark 6:21, Luke 14:12,13,16 and John 12:2. The context of Matthew 26:18 indicates that preparation was the issue at hand, and it is evident that Jesus spent a considerable amount of time during the course of His last night preparing both Himself and His disciples for the traumatic Passover Sacrifice which was to follow.

## Summary

The issue of *when* Christ washed His disciples' feet, broke the bread which symbolized His body and passed around the cup which depicted His blood is not in question. That Christ did these things on the night He was betrayed, on the evening that began the fourteenth day of Abib, is clear in the scriptures.

The matter of controversy has primarily focused around the question, "When did the Israelites departing Egypt kill their Passover lambs?", or "When was the Old Testament Passover observed?", and, by extension, "Was Jesus' last supper a Passover sacrifice?"

It has been said, "Don't believe me; believe what you find in your own Bible." Despite the seemingly endless stream of words presented in the last decade in an attempt to prove that the Passover was originally slain at the beginning of the fourteenth day of Abib, the scriptural evidence simply does not support this view. Instead, what I find in my own Bible is that the Passover was sacrificed "on the fourteenth day at even." Letting the Bible interpret the Bible, and with careful examination of all the related scriptures, that means something quite different than "on the eve of the fourteenth".

Primary proof for the early 14<sup>th</sup> rests with the supposition that the Israelites (instructed to remain inside until morning) had to remain in their homes until the sun rose. But there is no support in scripture for the restrictive view that morning in Hebrew was limited to daytime. The Hebrew word for "morning" is definitely used to include time before sunrise, and there is sufficient evidence to show that it included time before dawn as well, just as in English and Greek. The Israelites departed Egypt during the early morning hours of the very same night in which they ate the Passover.

The expression for "between the evenings" may be interpreted by some translators to be "twilight", but the scriptural usage

shows otherwise. “Between the evenings” included the time of the evening sacrifice, normally offered around 3 p.m., and coinciding with the time of Jesus’ death. Finally, in the night Jesus was betrayed, there simply was not enough time to kill a lamb after sunset and roast and eat it before all of the other things that happened that night. And it was not possible for Jesus to keep a Passover sacrifice while simultaneously fulfilling the timing of the Passover by being that sacrifice. God Himself established the time of the Passover in Egypt. It was a “shadow” (Heb. 9:28–10:1) prophesying when the Lamb of God would be slain, and serves as additional proof that Jesus was the Messiah.

All of the arguments used to support the idea that the Old Testament Passover was at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> have more than adequate explanations that support the **end** of the 14<sup>th</sup>. When the terms for *morning*, *morrow*, *evening*, and *between the evenings* in the Passover accounts are understood according to the ways they are used elsewhere in the Bible, there can be little doubt about the timing of the Old Testament Passover sacrifice. It had to have occurred on the fourteenth day of Abib in the afternoon.

## Part 2 – Analysis of Fred Coulter’s *The Christian Passover*

Following initial completion of my first paper about the Passover controversy, I was asked to look at Fred Coulter’s book, *The Christian Passover* (published in 1993). While I do not intend to repeat here everything I have previously covered, this book raises several issues that I did not address and some fundamental errors that should not go unanswered.

Mr. Coulter’s book is nearly 300 pages (even longer in its second edition, 1999, available from the Christian Biblical Church of God, P.O. Box 1442, Hollister, California 95024-1442, 831-637-1875, [www.cbcbg.org](http://www.cbcbg.org)), and purports to prove during roughly the first third that the original Passover occurred at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib. In the second third, it attempts to show that over the years the Passover observance shifted from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup>. Coulter also tries to explain here how the Passover, which he feels was always meant to be observed at home, came to be observed at the temple. The final third of the book discusses the Passover in the New Testament.

There are many errors in this book, which can often be traced to the first chapter where 14 rules for Bible study are given (p.13, page numbers herein reference the first edition only). Most of these rules are good, although the author of the book does not always follow them very carefully, especially the one about looking at verses in context. But some of these rules are not very good, and can result in misleading studies, mostly because the rules are incomplete.

One very important guideline that is **not** included in this set of rules is that *we should study all of the verses on a given subject before drawing a conclusion*. This is where rule #1 (begin with Scriptures that are easy to understand) and rule #12 (base your study on Scriptural knowledge that you already understand) cause

so much trouble. Mr. Coulter picks out what he decides are the easy scriptures, draws a firm conclusion, and refuses to allow the possibility that other scriptures could indicate that the original conclusion was faulty. As a result, the book reminds me of the approach I heard used in 1993-4 in the Worldwide Church of God to prove that God is a Trinity. A relatively few verses are used to ‘prove’ the premise. Then the remainder of the presentation seeks to explain why all of the verses in the Bible that seem to contradict the original conclusion really do not. When there are just a few seemingly contradictory scriptures in the midst of many others that are very, very clear, this may be appropriate and necessary. But when these “difficult” scriptures involve many verses, even large sections of Scripture, perhaps it would be more appropriate to re-examine those few original “easy” verses to see if something has been misunderstood.

## **Keeping the Passover**

Fred Coulter’s first point of discussion is over the meaning of the name “Passover” (p.15). The arguments presented are fine, but the conclusion contains a fundamental, unproven concept: that the term “Passover” was originally the name of a 24-hour *day* in which he feels the lambs were slain, the meal was eaten and the destroyer passed over. The book then refers frequently to this “Passover day”, and builds many doctrinal “proofs” based on this concept. In fact, the scriptures never speak of a “Passover day”. Rather, the Passover is a *sacrifice* to be offered at a particular time *on* a given day (cf. Ex. 12:11; 2 Chr. 35:1,6). The term “Passover” is also used in scripture to refer to the accompanying seven-day feast (Ezek. 45:21; Luke 22:1), but it is never actually called a “day” in the Bible.

Next is a discussion of what it means to “keep the Passover” (p.17). Mr. Coulter’s first conclusion here is that everything the Israelites did at the first Passover had to be repeated for all

succeeding Passovers – that the instructions for that first Passover were the statutes and ordinances for succeeding Passovers, to be kept unchanged. Nine rules for keeping the Passover are cited (p.18), derived from Exodus 12. But if **all** of the original Passover instructions were to be observed, several were left out of this list. For example, Exodus 12:11 states the Passover was to be eaten in haste, “*with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand.” Verse 22 says no one should leave the house where the Passover was eaten until morning (defined in the book as daylight). These rules were just as much a part of the original Passover, and if Coulter is correct that no ordinances were changed, there is no reason why these regulations should not have continued also. However, they would present a major problem to the book’s thesis if they had been included. Coulter is trying to demonstrate that Jesus and His disciples were keeping this very Passover with all of its unchanged rituals. Yet clearly their reclining eating style was not conducive to a hasty meal, they were certainly not wearing their sandals throughout, and they not only left the house before daylight, it appears they left long before midnight, before even the broadest meaning of the word “morning”.

Coulter then decides that it was not sufficient to just begin the process at the appointed time, but all of the elements of the first Passover had to be completed on the one day he has defined as being called the Passover. He finishes chapter two with a brief discussion of the Hebrew words for “keep”, “kill”, and “eat” (p.20-21), and concludes that to “keep” the Passover included not only killing the animal, but eating it as well. Therefore it is his contention that to “keep” the Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> required both killing and eating the Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The last sentence reads: “In the next chapter, we will undertake a detailed study of the Hebrew terms that God used to specify the exact time that the children of Israel were to observe—to kill and eat—the Passover” (p.21).

In chapter three, therefore, he proceeds to identify this exact time for the Passover as *ben ha-arbayim* (between the evenings). Then he quotes from Numbers 9:1-3 (p.23) showing that the Passover was to be “kept” during that time. Verses 3, 5 and 11 all say the Passover was to be “kept” during this “between the evenings” time frame. If “keep” means all of the attendant rituals, including eating the lamb, as he so dogmatically stated in chapter two, and “between the evenings” means twilight (as he claims), then the Israelites had a maximum of 90 minutes to slay, roast, eat and burn the remains of a whole lamb – clearly (as detailed later in his book) an impossible task.

The Hebrew word translated “keep” (*‘asah*) is one of the most common words in the Bible, used over 2600 times. Its primary meaning is “to do” or “to make” as in “Noah **did** according to all that Jehovah commanded him” (Gen. 7:5) and “God **made** the firmament” (Gen. 1:7). In addition to “observe, keep or accomplish” (the only meanings acknowledged by Mr. Coulter), *‘asah* can also have the meaning “prepare” as in Numbers 15:8: “And when you **prepare** a young bull as a burnt offering....” *‘Asah* is also the word used in Esther 5:4,5,12; & 6:14 to describe the banquet Esther “had prepared”. Obviously, she had not consumed the banquet before her guests arrived. It is apparent that the Passover offering was *prepared* “between the evenings”, but it could not have been eaten until several hours later, after the roasting was complete, and well beyond the “between the evenings” time frame, regardless of whether that was “twilight” or “afternoon”. The Passover was “kept” (*‘asah*, made or prepared) *ben ha-arbayim*, and eaten after that time had ended; the Passover lambs were **prepared on the 14<sup>th</sup>**, as instructed, but there is no scripture which says they were eaten on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

By this point in his book, Mr. Coulter has decided the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib should be called the “Passover day”, and he feels he has proven the Passover had to be observed “domestically” with all of the original accompanying ceremonies (or at least the ones he

picked out) entirely during the 14<sup>th</sup>. Although he has proven no such thing, he proceeds as though this was now an indisputable fact, interpreting other scriptures as necessary, and dismissing as obviously wrong any historic sources which oppose it.

## Time Expressions

In chapter three, the book begins a discussion of the differences between *ben ha-arbayim* (between the two evenings) and *ba-erev* (at evening). It is claimed that *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* does not list these concepts separately, and that "*Ba erev IS A TOTALLY DIFFERENT WORD, WITH A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MEANING!*" (p.22, emphasis his). This is a bit of an exaggeration. *Strong's* lists *arbayim* and *'erev* together because the words are not all that different. *Arbayim* is really just a plural (the duo-plural form) of *'erev* (or "*'ereb*" as *Strong's* prefers to transliterate it). The distinction between "at evening" and "between the evenings" is wanting in the KJV, but it can be found in *Strong's* by looking at the source of the word "at". In those verses where "at even" should have been translated "between the evenings", *Strong's* shows that the word "at" was translated from *beyn* or *ben* (#996, "between"). *Strong's* is admittedly not an easy reference for studying this topic, but it does illustrate that the expressions "at evening" and "between the evenings" are not necessarily as "totally different" as Fred Coulter would like them to be.

Coulter's book has a tendency to define words in a very restrictive manner, using only a few scriptural examples as proof, even though other scriptures do not support these limited definitions. Beginning on page 31, for example, Leviticus 23 is used to define "at evening" (*ba-erev*). Based on Leviticus 23:32 *alone*, the conclusion is made that "evening" is *always* used for the precise end of a day (the exact moment of sunset). It is interesting to note that Deuteronomy 16:6 and Joshua 5:10 use

this same term in describing the time of the Passover, which would therefore (using this definition) place it at the moment of sunset at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Faced with this problem, Coulter decides that these two passages cannot be referring to the Passover, but rather to the first day of Unleavened Bread, despite the fact that the Passover is what these verses claim to be speaking about.

Exodus 16 is what Mr. Coulter uses in chapter five to define “between the evenings” as being after sunset. Verse 13 says “quails came up at evening (‘*erev*)”. By using the definition of “at evening” as precisely sunset, he makes the argument that since verse 12 indicates they would eat the quail “between the evenings”, then *ben ha-arbayim* had to be after sunset. Other passages of scripture, however, show that the Hebrew word for “evening” (‘*erev*) can refer to a general period of time which includes time before sunset (cf. Gen. 24:11; Jer. 6:4). Hebrew lexicons agree. Therefore, when Exodus 16:13 says quails came “at evening” (“in the evening”—RSV), it does not necessarily pinpoint the exact minute of the day when this occurred. They could have come in the afternoon.

Mr. Coulter points out that the quails were brought right into the camp so that the Israelites could collect them easily. He assumes this was because it would have been getting dark and God didn’t want the people stumbling around in the wilderness. That didn’t stop the people in Numbers 11 when the quails were found up to a day’s journey away and they gathered them all night (v.31-32). And Exodus 16:1 specifically says this was the 15<sup>th</sup> of the second month, which means there would have been a full moon. It is just as plausible that the quail arrived in the afternoon and that God had them delivered directly to the people so they would not have to go outside the camp on the Sabbath day. There is no indication of any excess being provided at this time for the people to “gather”, only enough for their immediate needs.

Mr. Coulter states that God would not have sent the quails until after the Sabbath had ended because, as he reasons, “God was teaching the people to rest on the Sabbath. God did not want the people to transgress the Sabbath day by gathering the quail. Neither did He want them doing the work involved in killing, cleaning, and roasting the quail on the Sabbath. If God had sent the quail in the afternoon of the Sabbath day, BEFORE *ba erev*, or sunset, BEFORE the Sabbath had ended – and had allowed all of the people to gather, clean and roast the quail on the Sabbath day, why would He have condemned some of the people on the next Sabbath day when they went looking for manna?” (pp.42-43). While this may seem like a forceful argument, it is an argument based on his opinion, and is not required by Exodus 16. The people were obviously quite hungry, and unlike the next Sabbath, for which they were instructed *in advance* to gather and prepare their bread ahead of time, neither instruction nor food had yet been provided. We could assume through our preconceived ideas that God would not permit them to prepare and eat quail before sundown. But when the rest of the Bible is examined (cf. 1 Sam. 21:1-6; Mt. 12:1-8; Mk. 2:23-28), it shows that God, in his mercy, could indeed have provided the Israelites with quail in the afternoon of the very day He promised it (cf. Prov. 3:27-28). That day, being a weekly Sabbath, was meant to be a feast day (Lev. 23:2-3). And God provided for the people accordingly with meat at their tent doors (not outside the camp, like the manna) that was relatively quick and easy to prepare, since they could not have prepared ahead of time.

The example of the Passover itself shows that God sometimes *required* animals to be slaughtered on the Sabbath day by His people for their own food. In some years, the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first Hebrew month falls on a Sabbath day. And whether one chooses to believe that the Passover lambs were slain at the beginning or end of the day, there is no way to get around the fact that, in such years, a sacrifice on the 14<sup>th</sup> was a sacrifice on the Sabbath day.

And there was a lot more work involved in slaughtering and roasting the Passover lambs than there would have been in preparing the quick-cooking quail.

The Hebrew phrase *ben ha-aryaim* (between the evenings), in addition to defining the time of the Passover sacrifice and when the quails were eaten, also identifies the timing of two other activities. As discussed in Part 1, the evening sacrifice was offered between the evenings. And the lighting of the lamps in the Holy Place, along with the burning of incense on the altar, was also done sometime during this “between the evenings” time period (Ex. 30:7-8). By Coulter’s definition of “between the evenings”, the lamps would have to have been lit after sundown. But the Holy Place in the tabernacle was devoid of windows. Although the east-facing doorway could have collected ample light in the morning hours, the room would have been quite gloomy by the late afternoon, especially on a cloudy day. It makes more sense that the lamps were lit before sundown, while there was still enough daylight for the priest to see what he was doing. (It should be noted that the light of day does not wait for sundown to begin growing dark. Even in our house with its west-facing windows and a skylight, we usually find ourselves turning on the lights during the hour before sundown because the daylight by then has become too dim.)

Beginning on page 63 is a discussion of the words for “night” (*lailah* – spelled *layil* in *Strong’s*) and “morning” (*boqer*). The book claims that these two Hebrew words are mutually exclusive – that there is a moment in time when night ends and morning begins, and that there is no overlap. This goes along with his previous statements to define *ba-erev* as precisely sundown, followed by *ben ha-aryaim*, followed by *lailah*, then *boqer*, and presumably other words precisely defining the rest of the day, with no overlap of terms. Coulter states: “‘Night,’ translated from the Hebrew *lailah*, means the dark of night. It is the period of time extending from the end of *ben ha-aryaim* to *boqer*, or

morning” (p.66). But he also refers to “the spring of the year, when the days and nights are nearly equal in duration” (p.71). Obviously, he agrees with the commonly accepted idea that “night” includes the twilight hours, since during the spring it is sunrise and sunset which are roughly twelve hours apart, not the beginning of dawn and the end of dusk. Yet he would have us believe that when the Hebrews used *lailah*, they referred only to the “dark” part of night, since he claims *lailah* never overlaps with *boqer* (morning). Therefore when Scripture speaks of day and night, as in Genesis 1:5 or when Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights, the Hebrew must mean long periods of “day” and relatively short periods of “night”. This, of course, is absurd. While it may be nice to imagine a language where there are very precise meanings to such time expressions, English, Greek, and the very poetic Hebrew language are not that way.

The book asserts that *boqer* (morning) cannot refer to time before dawn by claiming that it is never used that way. But citing several examples where *boqer* is after dawn does not prove that it cannot also be used for time before dawn.

*Boqer* is frequently coupled with the word “light” (Hebrew ‘*owr*) to refer to the “morning light” (cf. 1 Sam. 14:36; 1 Sam. 25:36; 2 Kgs. 7:9). In some verses (cf. Gen. 44:3; Mic. 2:1), the KJV, and other literal translations, read “when the morning is light”. If morning *always* means light, why did the Hebrew authors use such redundant words, and especially a phrase which implies there could be a time when morning *isn't* light?

On pages 69-70, the book cites some examples of Moses rising early in the morning (Ex. 7:15 and Ex. 8:16, which should have been Ex. 8:20), and shows that the activities he was rising for were obviously after dawn. Certainly *boqer* includes time after dawn. But the phrase “early in the morning” (Hebrew *shakam boqer*) is a commonly used scriptural way of referring to early rising, used over 30 times, and it is difficult to believe that *boqer* absolutely **must**, in all of these cases, mean after dawn.

Two good examples are referred to by Coulter (1 Sam. 19:10, which should have been 1 Sam. 29:10, and 1 Kgs. 3:21), but they are dismissed by arguing “there is nothing in these verses to show that *morning*, or *boqer*, means any time close to *midnight*” (p.70). They do, however, show that early morning could have been before dawn, even if not “close to midnight”. The woman in Proverbs 31 clearly made a habit of burning the candle at both ends [of the night] (Prov. 31:15,18). With nights being quite long, particularly in the winter months, people who get up “early in the morning” obviously are up before dawn some of the time. The Hebrew language uses the phrase *shakam boqer* in much the same way as the English “early in the morning”, which is why it is consistently translated that way.

The Greek language isn't restrictive in its use of “morning” either. Coulter discusses, and attempts to dismiss, Mark 1:35 which refers to rising “in the morning... a great while before day”. He states this was a mistranslation, and should have read “very early while yet night” (using a translation by George Berry). He goes on to say that: “The correct translation of this verse in no way supports the claim that any part of the night was called ‘morning’” (p.71).

You do not have to be a Greek scholar to be able to look up words in a concordance and see how they are used in the New Testament. Mark 1:35 deals with two time expressions. One, *proi*, is translated “in the morning” or, in his preferred translation, “very early”; the other, *ennuxon*, as “before day” or “while yet night”. *Ennuxon* is only used once in Scripture, and it does appear to mean “in the night” as Mr. Coulter states. (The usual Greek word for “night” is *nux*, obviously related.) The word for “in the morning” (*proi*), is never mentioned by Coulter. It is quite apparent, though, that Coulter is arguing that Mark 1:35 was mistranslated because he does not want *proi* to mean “morning”. But *proi* (with its variations) is used 16 times in the New Testament. It is most often translated “morning”, and 12 of the

17 uses of “morning” in the KJV come from some form of the word *proi* (cf. Mt. 16:3; 20:1; Mk. 11:20; 16:2). Sometimes *proi* refers to time after sunrise, as in Mark 16:2: “**Very early in the morning**, on the first *day* of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.” However, in Mark 1:35 *proi* is being overlapped with the time-frame of “night”, a concept made even more clear by the Berry translation. Although Mr. Coulter wants to convince us that this “mistranslated” verse does not overlap night with morning, in correctly pointing out the use of “night” in the verse, he has clearly shown that night and morning **do** overlap. His scurrilous accusations against others who have taught the truth on this matter (questioning *their* scholarship and understanding of Greek, and claiming *they* were deliberately trying to mislead), may cloud the issue for those who accept his statements without verifying them, but they do not make the truth any less true. “Morning” in New Testament Greek, as shown in this verse, *can* and *does* overlap “night”.

I will not go further with a discussion on the timing of “between the evenings”, “evening” and “morning”. That was addressed in Part 1. Nor will I address here his discussion on the logistics of the Exodus for the same reason.

## **The Temple-Centered Passover**

Beginning in chapter nine, Mr. Coulter elaborates on his theory that the Passover was never to be offered at the temple. He points out that Numbers 28-29 is a comprehensive list of prescribed offerings which were to be made at the tabernacle, but he tries to claim that since the word “offering” is not found in Numbers 28:16 describing the Passover, it was an exception. He states, “Notice that *nowhere is the Passover sacrifice listed* in this enumeration of the sacrifices required to be offered at the tabernacle” (p.97, emphasis his).

Coulter acknowledges throughout his book that the Passover involved a sacrifice (cf. Ex. 12:27), and he freely admits the Passover is mentioned in verse 16, with no explanation as to what it is doing in this list if it's not to be offered at the tabernacle. But he tries to claim that since the word "offering" is not used in this verse, the Passover was not a tabernacle offering. He goes on for several paragraphs trying to knock translations which insert "sacrifice" or "offering" after the word Passover in Numbers 28:16. But in 2 Chronicles 35:6-9, some translators insert the word "offering" in describing the Passover, and there is absolutely no question they were correct in doing so. Perhaps it has never occurred to Mr. Coulter that the Hebrew word for "Passover" (*pesach*) implies "offering" in the same manner as the Hebrew words for "peace-offering" (which he cites as *zebah*, although the word for peace-offering is actually *shelem*) and "burnt-offering" (*'olah*), for which the Hebrew word for "offering" is also implied, but not used in Numbers 28-29.

On page 98, he states "The Hebrew word for 'offering' in general, *qarob*, used in verse 2 [of Numbers 28], is not found in verse 16." But *qarob*, or *qarab* as transliterated in *Strong's*, is not the Hebrew word for offering in general. *Qarab* is a verb, not a noun, although among other things it does mean to "bring" or "offer", and is used in the phrase to "bring [*qarab*] an offering", as in Leviticus 1:2. The word "offering" actually comes from the Hebrew word *qorban*, referred to by Jesus in Mark 7:11. *Qarab*, the verb, is used only nine times in Numbers 28-29. *Qorban*, the noun, is used only in verse 2, where it is used to introduce this list of offerings (with the Passover included in the list) to be offered to God "at their appointed time". It is true that neither *qarab* nor *qorban* appears in Numbers 28:16, but Numbers 9:7 and Numbers 9:13 use both words to describe the Passover, and condemn anyone who does not "bring [*qarab*] the offering [the *qorban* – specifically defined in this verse as the Passover] of Jehovah at its appointed time".

Mr. Coulter tries to use Numbers 9 to prove that the Passover remained a domestic observance. His conclusion is that since this first post-Egypt Passover was to be observed with “all its rites and ceremonies” (v.3, NKJV) or “ordinances and statutes” (JPSA), that this meant exactly as it had been done the first time – in their homes, and with blood on the doorposts and lintel. And, since this was an opportunity for God to instruct the Israelites on the fact that he wanted the sacrifice made at the just completed tabernacle, and since that instruction is not given in Numbers 9, Mr. Coulter feels this sacrifice wasn’t to be done there. He asks: “In the account of the second Passover in Numbers 9 do we find any indication that God added to, or took away from, or changed any of the original ordinances and statutes of the Passover? WE DO NOT FIND ANY CHANGE WHATSOEVER!” (p.95, emphasis his).

Even if this were true, the lack of specific instructions in Numbers 9 pertaining to changes in the Passover would prove nothing. God did give such instructions elsewhere in the Law. But in fact, there are changes stated or implied by the account in Numbers. The whole concept of not being able to keep the Passover because someone was defiled by a dead body (v.6-7) was new. But more importantly, verses 7 and 13 describe bringing the offering (the *qorban*), as explained above, which was not part of the original Passover observance, and raises the question as to where the Passover offering was being brought. The answer to this question is apparent in *Strong’s* definition of *qorban*: “something **brought near the altar**, i.e. a sacrificial present.” Even Exodus 12:48 gives the information that, when the Passover was kept in succeeding generations as a memorial it was to be kept “to Jehovah”, and only when one was circumcised would he be permitted to “**come near** [Hebrew *qarab*] and keep it”. As explained in Part 1, Leviticus 17 clearly defined that all sacrificial offerings were to be brought to the tabernacle so that their blood could be offered on God’s altar.

The Old Testament relates details of only **six Passover observances by name**. They are described in Exodus 12–13, Numbers 9, Joshua 5, 2 Chronicles 30, 2 Chronicles 35 (with a brief parallel account in 2 Kings 23), and Ezra 6. Remarkably, **all** of these Passovers present difficulties for the early 14<sup>th</sup> view of the Old Testament Passover. By contrast, even Mr. Coulter finds very few issues in these accounts which need to be addressed by those in support of the late 14<sup>th</sup> view. (These issues seem to be confined to Exodus 12 and Numbers 9, and have already been addressed.) There are also eight additional places in the Old Testament which refer directly to the Passover or Days of Unleavened Bread: Exodus 23, Exodus 34, Leviticus 23, Numbers 28, Numbers 33, Deuteronomy 16, 2 Chronicles 8 and Ezekiel 45. None of these present any particular problem for the late 14<sup>th</sup> view (although Coulter tries to invent some as in the case of Numbers 28). Several of these passages, especially Deuteronomy 16, do contain difficult verses for those who hold the early 14<sup>th</sup> view.

Chapters twelve and thirteen of Coulter's book discuss the Passovers in 2 Chronicles and the hows and whys of the author's thesis that the Passover was changed from a domestic, early 14<sup>th</sup> observance to a temple-centered, late 14<sup>th</sup> observance. He feels that these Passovers were exceptions to how Passovers were normally kept, and were commanded to be observed in this manner by Hezekiah and Josiah because of a state of national spiritual decline. Coulter believes that while the intentions of these kings may have been honorable, and God may have even supported them in making some temporary changes, they set some very unfortunate precedents.

In an effort to defend this thesis, the book makes some astounding assertions. Some are even true. For example, in describing the Passovers in 2 Chronicles, several statements similar to this one on page 132 are made: "In the history of Israel and Judah before the Babylonian Captivity, we find only two

occurrences in Scripture of a temple-killed, temple-centered Passover observance.” This is true, but misleading. What is not stated is the fact that these are the *only two* accounts in Scripture of **any** of the Passover observances that were held in the Promised Land from the time it was conquered until the Babylonian captivity. While Coulter’s statement was undoubtedly meant to demonstrate the lack of examples in scripture of temple-centered Passovers, the fact is that all Passovers described in the Bible (even the one in Ezra 6 after the return from captivity) are centered around the tabernacle or temple (except, of course, the Passover in Egypt). There simply are no occurrences where they are not.

Other assertions are not true, however. In discussing the purported role of Hezekiah in making changes to the Passover, Coulter contrasts Hezekiah’s actions with those who were before him. On page 127, we find this erroneous statement: “Although David composed many psalms, and helped Samuel institute the ordering of the priests, he never exerted authority over the priests or the tabernacle.” I am not sure just what was meant here by exerting authority. David commanded the priests to move the ark, giving instructions in how *he* wanted it done (first the wrong way and later the right way). He determined to replace the tabernacle completely, chose a new location for the altar and temple, and made all of the plans and arrangements for it. He thoroughly organized the priesthood, Levites, singers and gatekeepers. And he established regulations on how temple services were to be conducted (2 Chr. 8:14; 35:4). But any joint involvement by Samuel had to be restricted to David’s very early years, because Samuel had died during Saul’s reign, before David became king.

In several places Mr. Coulter argues that these two Second Chronicles Passovers were done “at the commandment of the king”, and not according to God’s word. While the Biblical context indicates this phrase is a commendation that the people were obeying the king in doing something right for a change,

these words are seized upon by Mr. Coulter to try to prove that what was done was not in conformity with God's instructions. Many verses in these chapters demonstrate that what the Israelites were doing *was in agreement* with God's Word. 2 Chronicles 30:12 says: "Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart **to do the commandment of the king** and the leaders, **at the word of Jehovah**" (NKJV), or as the RSV has it: "...to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of Jehovah." Verse 16 says that the priests and Levites (prodded by the king's orders, v.12) acted "according to the law of Moses." 2 Chronicles 35:6 quotes Josiah as saying: "So slaughter the Passover *offerings*, sanctify yourselves, and prepare *them* for your brethren, that *they* may do according to the word of Jehovah by the hand of Moses." And 2 Kings 23:21 says: "Then the king commanded all the people, saying, 'Keep the Passover to Jehovah your God, as *it is* written in this Book of the Covenant.'" Even with 2 Chronicles 30:18, which says "yet did they eat the Passover otherwise than it is written" and is cited by Mr. Coulter as an indication that they were doing things differently, the context clearly shows that this did not apply to everyone, but only to those who had not cleansed themselves, particularly those from the Northern Tribes. Hezekiah's prayer for forgiveness dealt exclusively with this purification issue as the *only* transgression. (This was already the second month; he had just started his reign, and this was the best they could do that year.)

Both of the Passovers in 2 Chronicles imply earlier observances. 2 Chronicles 30, verse 26 refers to nothing like this since the days of Solomon. 2 Chronicles 35:18 says, "there had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet". This indicates that in Samuel's day, Passovers were also elaborate centralized observances. In fact, 1 Samuel records that even before Samuel was born, his family went to "the house of Jehovah" at Shiloh (to God's tabernacle) every year "to offer to Jehovah the yearly sacrifice" (1 Sam. 1:7,21). This was

undoubtedly the Passover, since the Passover sacrifice was the *only annual sacrifice* required of individuals or families.

The claim is made that the Bible nowhere says how the Passover was to be observed after entering the Promised Land, and that the Israelites were therefore expected to observe it according to all the original instructions in Egypt. But the book of Deuteronomy was written chiefly to clarify how the laws of God should be observed in the new land. The changes in how Passovers were to be observed were written down in Deuteronomy 16. Since these instructions do not agree with Mr. Coulter's original conclusion, they must be re-interpreted. So we get a scenario created in chapters fourteen and fifteen of *The Christian Passover* which goes something like this: Ezra was faced with a mounting Samaritan threat in his day. To keep the Jews focused on God and His newly reconstructed temple, he changed the Passover to always be a temple-centered observance, wrote Chronicles (to include precedents for such temple-centered Passovers) and canonized the scriptures. Since they hadn't been canonized yet, he was free to make some editorial changes. Therefore, in Deuteronomy 16, Ezra must have changed whatever the original text said to read "Passover", which by Ezra's day had taken on the meaning of the entire Days of Unleavened Bread and wouldn't be confusing. There is, of course, no proof that Ezra did this, but since Deuteronomy 16 doesn't agree with Coulter's doctrinal position, he feels somebody must have changed it, and Ezra seems the most likely culprit.

Mr. Coulter theorizes at length on why Hezekiah, Josiah and Ezra would have changed the Passover into a temple ritual. He states: "Apparently Hezekiah made it mandatory to keep a temple-centered Passover because of the total paganization of the children of Israel and Judah. They had strayed so far from God in rejecting His commandments and laws, and were so steeped in Baal and Asherah worship, that it was not feasible to allow them to keep a Passover at home" (p.130). "As in the time of Hezekiah,

Josiah called for a mandatory Passover to be kept at the temple.... This Passover was to be sacrificed by the priests and the Levites at the temple of God to insure that the people did not revert back to their pagan sacrifices!” (p.136). “In order to combat the Jewish/Samaritan religion, Ezra forbade that *any sacrifices* to God be offered at any temple, except the temple in Jerusalem. Undoubtedly, he also restricted the killing of the domestic Passover lambs to the vicinity of Jerusalem” (p.171).

But did these men of God have the authority to add to what God had ordained in order to keep the people in line (Deut. 4:2)? Did they have to impose rules which, if God had had the foresight, He could have established Himself? God knew the problems that would result if the Israelites sacrificed away from a central location. For this very reason He gave Moses these instructions recorded in Deuteronomy 12:

“<sup>2</sup> You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. <sup>3</sup> And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. <sup>4</sup> You shall not worship Jehovah your God *with such things*. <sup>5</sup> But you shall seek the place where Jehovah your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His habitation; and there you shall go. <sup>6</sup> There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks.”

It is for this very same reason that Deuteronomy 16:2 says:

## Resolving the Passover Controversy

“Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to Jehovah your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where Jehovah chooses to put His name.”

Mr. Coulter’s conclusion regarding Deuteronomy 16 is that the first eight verses are not dealing with the Passover at all, but strictly with the Days of Unleavened Bread. He sees as proof several differences with the original Passover in Egypt, some references to the Days of Unleavened Bread, and mostly conflicts with his previous conclusions, which according to his Bible study rules require that he seek out some sort of explanation. I am personally uncomfortable with a doctrinal position that requires such an elaborate explanation of why the Bible does not mean what it says.

One of Mr. Coulter’s arguments against recognizing Deuteronomy 16 as instructions for the Passover involves the Hebrew word *bashal* in verse 7: “And you shall roast [*bashal*] and eat *it*...” He claims: “The Hebrew word translated ‘roast’ in Deuteronomy 16:7 actually should have been translated ‘boil’ or ‘seethe’! It is wholly incorrect to translate the Hebrew word used in the Hebrew text as ‘roast’” (p.150). He cites several verses where it is translated “boil”, and concludes that since the word is also translated “sodden” or “boiled” in Exodus 12:9 as something not to be done with the Passover, then the offering spoken of in Deuteronomy 16:7 could not possibly be the Passover. But that conclusion is drawn from yet another incomplete analysis of Biblical word definitions. The very same Hebrew word translated “roast” in Deuteronomy 16:7 is also used in 2 Samuel 13:8, where Tamar “took flour and kneaded *it*, made cakes in his sight, and baked [*bashal*] the cakes.” Normally people don’t knead flour and then boil it, so this translation is probably correct. The word *bashal* appears to be a fairly general term meaning “to cook” rather than specifying whether a given food is to be roasted, baked, or boiled. *Gesenius’* lexicon concurs. The NRSV

renders Deuteronomy 16:7 accordingly: “You shall cook it and eat it at the place that Jehovah your God will choose....” In 2 Chronicles 35:13, the Passover is specifically described: “Also they roasted [*bashal* /cooked] the Passover offerings with fire according to the ordinance; but the other holy offerings they boiled [*bashal* /cooked] in pots, in caldrons, and in pans....” Here the distinction is made between the roasting of the Passover and the preparation of the other offerings using pots, yet the same Hebrew word is used. The type of cooking is not apparently inherent in the word *bashal* itself, but in the words which modify it. In Exodus 12:9, therefore, the prohibition does not center on the word *bashal*, but rather that the Passover was not to be “boiled [*bashal* – cooked, JPS] at all **with water**”. There is no conflict between Deuteronomy 16:7 and Exodus 12:9, and no reason Deuteronomy 16:7 cannot apply to the Passover, as it says it does.

## Extra-Biblical Evidence

Although he cannot find much extra-Biblical support for his view, Mr. Coulter tries to make the most of what he can find, sometimes by conveniently leaving out words that might otherwise weaken his argument. On page 45, he cites a definition from *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon*: “BEN HAARBAYIM, between the two evenings... between sunset and dark.” Note the ellipsis (...), which would normally imply that words of no consequence were left out. Since these outside sources are not always easy to find, the reader can often do little more than trust that the author is portraying his sources accurately. I have not been able to verify all of Coulter’s outside sources. But in this case, I’m told the words left out are “i.e. probably”, indicating the authors of the Lexicon were not sure that this was the meaning of the Hebrew words. Perhaps since Mr. Coulter is sure of the meaning, he felt free to remove

this element of doubt and add their scholarly knowledge to his argument.

On page 100, and again on page 173, Coulter cites the Jewish philosopher and historian Philo (*The Works of Philo*, translated by C. D. Young [that should read, Yonge], 1992). One of the sentences in his quote is given as follows: “In this festival many myriads of victims are offered--*by the whole people*, old and young alike, raised for that particular day to the dignity of the priesthood.” This time, instead of an ellipsis, he chooses a double hyphen. The words he leaves out are reportedly “from noon till eventide”. (The 1995 version of this quote, which I have read, says, “*beginning at noonday and continuing till evening*”.) Since he is trying to use Philo to prove a domestic Passover, rather than the timing of the Passover, this omission may not seem critical. It does simplify his job, since he doesn’t need to comment on Philo’s contradiction to his belief, but it erroneously conveys the idea that Philo is on his side. And an unaltered quote would have raised the question as to why such a long period of time would have been required for a domestic sacrifice. But the omission also calls into question Coulter’s trustworthiness regarding such quotes. Are there more misquotes we could find if we had access to all of these scholarly works? Even worse, others trust his accuracy and perpetuate these errors. Both of these misquotes, with identical punctuation, were copied into a 1996 Global Church of God article about the Passover.

Does Philo support Coulter’s concept of a domestic Passover? The only thing Philo is pointing out in any of the quotes from him that Coulter uses is that the animals were killed by the people, not necessarily the priests. The sacrificial laws instructed the people to kill their own animals for private sacrifices (cf. Lev. 1:5), but gave responsibility to the priests to sprinkle the blood. This was true of the Passover lambs as well. 2 Chronicles 30:16-17 states that “the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the *Passover lambs for everyone who was not clean.*” Those who were clean

followed the normal procedure of killing their own animals, as described by Philo. But the Passover was still a sacrifice, its blood still had to be given to the priests to be offered at the altar (cf. 2 Chron. 35:11), and nothing in Philo states otherwise. In fact, the reason why these offerings were being made “from noon till eventide” involved the large numbers of animals whose blood had to be offered at the altar, as opposed to the rather quick domestic slaying where the blood was perpetually smeared onto the doorposts, as proposed by Coulter.

On page 174, Coulter quotes Joachim Jeremias (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 1969, 1989) to try to prove that the entire city of Jerusalem was considered to be part of the “greater festival area”, and therefore the lambs could be slain anywhere within that area. But the section quoted says nothing about where the lambs were slain. It only addresses the practice that the participants in the Passover meal remained in the vicinity of Jerusalem during the night in which they ate the Passover (cf. Deut. 16:7). Coulter knows that Jeremias believes the Passover was killed at the temple (p. 182). Another source confirms that Jeremias states on page 78 of his book, “It is a fact that in Jesus’ time the Passover victims were always slain in the Temple and not in private houses. This was because the Passover lamb was a sacrifice and its blood had to be used ceremonially.” Jeremias’ words, understood in their own context, do nothing to support Coulter’s view.

On page 35 of *The Christian Passover* there is a long quote from Alfred Edersheim regarding the cutting of the wave sheaf. Coulter claims, “Edersheim’s statements show conclusively that *ba erev* was fully understood by the Jews as the sunset that ended a specifically numbered day and began the next day.” Yet, although it is clear from the quote that Edersheim viewed sundown as a significant time marker for wave sheaf cutting, Edersheim’s words say absolutely nothing about the meaning of the Hebrew term *ba erev*. And elsewhere in the same book (*The*

*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*), Edersheim states his belief that it was the appearance of the first three stars that began a new day, not sunset (pp. 479, 490). Still other passages make it quite clear that Edersheim viewed the Passover as a sacrifice that was slain on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup>, defining “between the two evenings” as “the interval between the commencement of the sun’s decline and what was reckoned as the hour of his final disappearance (about 6 PM)” (p.490), with the lamb being eaten during the evening at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Josephus was born into a priestly family of Judea in 37 AD. Coulter does not like his statements about the Passover, but he still tries to elicit Josephus’ support as best he can. First, in an effort to discredit him, he challenges Josephus’ reliability. On page 53, he states, “He wholly ignores, as if they had never occurred, the entire fantastic life and ministry of Jesus Christ; the trial, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus....” This is not true, as a reading of *Antiquities* 18.3.3 would show. Josephus does not dwell on Jesus, but he calls Him the Christ, and he does mention His wonderful works, death on the cross and resurrection, and generally speaks very highly of Him. Coulter also states on page 53 that “Josephus supports the traditional Jewish belief in a Passover at Rameses”, and that Josephus “indicates that the children of Israel left their houses prior to the Passover.” Yet Josephus never mentions Rameses, or Raamses. And the only proof Coulter cites for this accusation is taken from *Antiquities* 2.14.6. Here Josephus says that Moses, “having sorted the people into tribes, he kept them together in one place”. Coulter assumes this is a description of Moses taking them to the city of Raamses, so when Josephus further says they “purified their houses with the blood”, Coulter makes a big issue of what he says is a “gross internal contradiction”. Coulter himself invents a scenario for Josephus, and then labels it “ridiculous”. It certainly is a “ridiculous scenario”, but Josephus neither wrote nor implied it. Why does stating that Moses kept the Israelites

together mean it had to be in some city apart from whatever central dwelling area there may have been in Goshen? The Scriptures themselves say that Moses was to “Speak to all the congregation of Israel” indicating that they were assembled for that purpose and that they were to take “a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household” (Ex. 12:3), showing that there was at least some sort of household, patriarchal organization with every family member accounted for and in attendance for the Passover.

On pages 182-183, Coulter quotes from Josephus’ account of the last Passover before the destruction of the temple (*Wars* 6.9.3). While the section quoted is indeed in the account of that final Passover, it is actually giving details about a previous Passover. By reading the quote in context, we find that Josephus was verifying how many Jews there would have been in Jerusalem at the Passover in 70 AD by describing a Passover that occurred a few years earlier in the days of Nero. The Romans had wanted a census taken, and they accomplished this by having the priests estimate the number present at the Feast. The priests did this by counting the number of Paschal lambs, and arrived at over one quarter million. Coulter says this number was too large for a temple sacrifice, so he concludes most lambs were being killed at home.

I do not know how all of these animals were sacrificed at the temple in one afternoon, any more than Coulter does. However, it is clear that the priests somehow knew how many lambs there were, and were so confident in that figure that they chose to count the sacrifices and estimate the people instead of counting the people. If thousands of these lambs never appeared in any way at the temple, not even as a basin of blood to be offered at the altar, how did the priests count them? Not only were these sacrifices apparently offered at the temple, but Josephus says they were offered during a two hour block of time, in the afternoon, not after sundown. The point is, Coulter doesn’t seem to believe the

story as related by Josephus. Yet he believes that his numbers are correct. If we can't believe Josephus' statements about when and where the sacrifices were slain, why use his words to prove anything? Josephus was an eyewitness of what went on in Jerusalem at that time. I suspect he knew what he was writing about. But Coulter reads into Josephus' words a lot of things that just aren't there.

If the Passover was, and continued to be, a domestic observance right up to the destruction of the second temple, as Coulter is trying to claim, then why did it stop being observed? If no temple were needed, there was no reason to ever cease keeping it.

## **New Testament Considerations**

On pages 58-60 of Coulter's book is a discussion of the length of time it would have taken the Israelites to kill, prepare, eat and clean up the Passover meal. Each part of the process is analyzed and broken down, with this summary: "The total time needed to have the meal ready is estimated to be from 4 and 1/2 hours at the earliest, to 5 and 3/4 hours at the latest, which includes 30-45 minutes to have the lamb ready and 4-5 hours to roast it" (p.59). This is based on a 20-30 pound animal. "To completely burn the skin, guts, fat and bones would take 2-3 hours, since bones in particular burn very slowly" (p.60). There is also eating time in here, which he says could have been as short as half an hour. And probably allowing for incidentals, he feels the whole process could be finished in 8-10 hours. Assuming as he does that the process began at 6 p.m., he says they could have been finished by 2-3 a.m. For some reason, though, he feels that this carefully laid out time frame shows "that it is impossible to fit the events of the Passover into the same night as the Exodus" (p.60). If the Israelites left at 2-3 a.m., they would certainly have been leaving at night, and also at a time commonly referred to as morning. And

if the lambs were killed even earlier, a few hours before sunset (as the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> reckoning would place it), there is ample time to fit the Passover meal into the same night as the Exodus.

In the New Testament, however, Coulter is faced with the opposite problem. Instead of trying to show how much needed to be accomplished, making it virtually impossible for the Israelites to leave before dawn, he must demonstrate that everything could have been accomplished in only a few short hours, so that there would still have been time for the arrest and trial, and the numerous other documented events of the night Jesus was betrayed. Without an itemization of how long each part of the lamb preparation would take, he concludes that: “Since the lamb was probably very small [not more than a few weeks old, he speculates], the Passover meal could have been ready as soon as 7:30 PM. The subsequent events of that night indicate that the Passover meal began early and ended early, perhaps 9-9:30 PM” (p.200). So now, instead of 8-10 hours to kill, roast and eat a lamb, including 2-3 hours to burn the remains, the entire process is completed in 3-3½ hours, and the lamb itself is killed, skinned and roasted in only 1½ hours. While a pre-dressed 3-lb. chicken could cook that fast, it is stretching it to suggest that a whole lamb could have been killed and prepared that quickly.

Assuming a lamb only a few weeks old was available at that time of year (contrary to nature if Coulter is correct on page 59 that lambing time was 2-3 months before Passover), the lamb still had to be big enough to feed at least thirteen men. Newborn lambs average nine pounds in weight, so a lamb only a few weeks old could have provided only a small amount of meat for such a group. But even if we went with this minimal size, it would be quite a feat to have such an animal (roasted *whole*) ready to eat by 7:30 p.m. if it were not killed until after 6 p.m. The Samaritans (whose sacrificing is done at Mount Gerizim, alluded to in John 4:20) continue to roast a whole lamb for their “Passover”, and modern eyewitness accounts claim it takes four or more hours

just for the roasting. Yet Matthew 26:20 confirms that “when evening had come, He sat down with the twelve”, which certainly does give the impression of a fairly early supper. And John 13:29-30 states that when Judas left “it was night” (which was an odd statement to make if it had been night all along). But it was still early enough (even after supper was over, v.2) for the disciples to think that Judas might have been leaving to buy some supplies.

Coulter’s book is based on the correct understanding that Jesus Christ’s last supper was at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, on the night He was betrayed. A few New Testament passages which relate this event seem to call it the Passover (although Paul, interestingly, does not use the word “Passover” in 1 Corinthians 11). It might be logical therefore to conclude, as Coulter and others have, that Jesus was observing the Old Testament Passover and merely changing the symbols for future observances. But as pointed out above, the time involved in preparing a whole lamb, if it were killed after sundown, demonstrates this was impossible. (For an analysis of the New Testament passages about Passover see Part 1 of this paper.) And when the Old Testament is carefully examined, it does not support the concept of the Passover at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Only by assigning a restrictive meaning to the word “morning” (*boqer*) and deciding that the expression “between the evenings” refers to a time between sunset and dark can any support be generated, and only in the original Passover account. The rest of the Old Testament passages are either neutral or support a late 14<sup>th</sup> Passover to the extent that complex arguments are often needed to explain them otherwise. Coulter’s book is not long because of the abundance of evidence supporting an early 14<sup>th</sup> Passover, but partly because of the elaborate theses and convoluted explanations used in an attempt to explain that the Scriptures don’t say what they really do say.

Since there has been so much discussion about the New Testament practice being a continuation of the Old Testament Passover, a conflict has arisen with those who clearly see that the

Bible, other historic sources, and traditional practice all point to the Passover sacrifice occurring at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>, followed by the Passover feast (the eating of the lamb) after sundown on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Some who have observed an annual memorial of Christ's death at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> now begin to feel they should do so at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>/beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Yet the entire observance traditionally kept on the eve of the 14<sup>th</sup> is based on what Jesus did, so why shouldn't that include the timing as well? It is remarkable to note that during a typical service at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, the only similarity with the Old Testament Passover seems to be the presence of unleavened bread. All of the discussion, readings, thoughts, ceremonies, symbols and time of night it is observed are entirely New Testament and focused on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The original Passover is seldom, if ever, mentioned. It is not at all difficult to conceive that Jesus did not merely give us a repackaged Passover ceremony, but an entirely new observance specifically for the New Testament Church. (Conversely, when our family gathers with others to keep a "night to be much observed" (Ex. 12:42, KJV) at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> the activity is almost entirely based on the Old Testament Passover, and even the concept of meeting in homes with several families, sometimes serving lamb, is very reminiscent of the original Passover meal.)

*The Christian Passover* does not present any conclusive arguments for the early 14<sup>th</sup> view. In fact, a thorough reexamination of the scriptures has further confirmed that the Old Testament Passover sacrifice was always killed and prepared for eating on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib in the afternoon, and eaten as a feast when the roasting was complete some time after sundown and before midnight on the 15<sup>th</sup>. With this understanding, it becomes apparent that *our* Passover sacrifice, the Lamb of God, was clearly slain at the proper time.

Comments or questions may be addressed to [sbeattie@cgsf.org](mailto:sbeattie@cgsf.org).

The original ShelterintheWord.com website no longer exists. The original PDF can be downloaded from the Church of God Study Forum at <http://www.cgsf.org/> while this PDF version plus html and epub formats are available at [chcpublications.net](http://chcpublications.net).