

The Gospel of Luke & the Passover

In Luke 22:1, 7, 8, 11, and 13 we read of "the Passover," and in verse 15, "this Passover." What was Luke talking about in these verses? What is "the" Passover, and "this" Passover? Does the word "Passover" have several different meanings? Was this final meal Jesus ate with His disciples the traditional "Passover"? Was He instituting a "new" "*Christian* Passover"? What is the truth? Let's go back to the basics, and review this question step by step, like a thorough, painstakingly detective, gathering every piece of evidence, so we can solve this Biblical mystery!

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Obviously, there is great controversy over these verses, as to whether the dinner Jesus had that night was "the Passover," or a "modified Passover," or a "Passover-type" or "style" meal, or a "going away banquet" or even a "graduation banquet" which He gave for the disciples since they had finished a course of "instruction" with Him which lasted three years.

A key to Bible study is to always begin with the clear, obvious verses, and then to proceed to the unclear, nebulous ones. This rule helps prevent many mistakes in interpretation. Another important rule is to always be sure to get the "context" of the verses in question. Understand the over-all picture. A third valuable rule could be put this way: NEVER ASSUME. Always probe beneath the surface, and never be satisfied with superficial, shallow "opinions."

Just what is the scene pictured in the 22nd chapter of Luke? Let's look at this chapter, verse by verse, and match these verses up with other clear and easily understandable verses, so we can "prove" the truth, carefully, as we go along, taking nothing for granted.

The Different Uses of the Word "Passover"

Notice verse 1. Luke explains what he means by "the Passover" in *this verse*. He writes, "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, *which is called the Passover.*" Thus in Luke's terminology, the term "Passover" sometimes refers to the *entire feast of Unleavened Bread!*

Now notice verse 7: "Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the *Passover must be killed.*" In this verse the "Passover" which must be "killed" has to refer obviously to the "Passover lamb" which was killed. My margin in the NKJV Bible says, "sacrificed." You don't "kill" a day, or a meal, but you do kill an animal, in this case "the Passover lamb." The day the lamb was killed or sacrificed was Nisan 14, the day before the actual "FEAST" started, which was the 15th through the 21st (seven days). The 14th of Nisan was also called a "Day of Unleavened Bread," in this verse, because on that day *all leaven was destroyed or removed* -- it was the "Preparation Day" for the Festival.

Obviously, then, we have proved that the word "Passover" itself can have several different meanings. It clearly does *not always refer to the dinner itself* where the Passover lamb is eaten! That much we have proven already!

The word "Passover" itself is interesting and important to understand, then. Strong's Concordance points out, in its definition of the Greek word *pascha*, from which we get the English word "Passover" in the New Testament, that this word means or signifies: "the *Passover* (the *meal*, the *day*, the *festival*, or the *special sacrifices connected with it*)."

In the Old Testament, the word "Passover" is translated from the Hebrew word *pesach*, from *pasah*, a primitive root meaning "to hop, i.e. (fig.) *skip over* (or *spare*) . . ." *Pesach* itself means "a pretermission, i.e., *exemption*; used only tech. of the Jewish Passover (the *festival* or the *victim*)."

Thus, when the term "Passover" is used, it can refer to several different *aspects* of the Passover Feast -- the seven-day Festival itself, the Passover seder meal observed at the beginning of the 15th of Nisan, the Passover lamb sacrificed during the afternoon of Nisan 14, and the other sacrifices killed during the Festival. In effect, *anything connected with the Festival could be called "the Passover," as it would constitute PART of the Passover.* The season of the year is even called the "Passover season," meaning the Spring, the time of the year when the Passover is observed!

The "Preparation" of the Passover

Now let's look at verse 8: Jesus sent Peter and John telling them, "Go and prepare *the Passover* for us, that we may eat." In context, then, He is telling them to "*Prepare* for the coming Passover Feast" -- all the seven days of "Passover" (verse 1). They had to prepare -- that is, obtain "unleavened bread," and all the things necessary for observing the Passover for seven days. That is why this day was called a "Preparation Day." Jesus was telling His disciples to "PREPARE" for the up-coming Passover -- that is, to "GET READY" and "make preparations."

Actually, Nisan 14, when the Passover lambs are killed, in the afternoon, between 3 and 6 PM, is the final "preparation day" for the Passover Festival! The "preparation days" begin on Nisan 10, when the lambs are selected (Exodus 12:3). It was actually on the morning of Nisan 12 when Jesus told His disciples to "go and prepare the Passover." How do we know this?

The answer is simple: After this final supper, Jesus was seized by the Pharisees and

Sadducees, interrogated that night (start of Nisan 13), condemned by the Sanhedrin the following morning (Matt.27:1-2), and delivered to Pilate for judgment that same morning of Nisan 13 (verse 2). Pilate then sent Him to Herod (Luke 23:1-12). This had to be the daylight portion of Nisan 13. Herod then sent Jesus back to Pilate, and we read in the book of John:

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.

"And it was THE PREPARATION OF THE PASSOVER, and about the *sixth hour*: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!" (John 19:13-14).

Now when was the "sixth hour"? In his gospel, John always used JEWISH TIME reckoning (see John 4:1-6). The "sixth hour" meant TWELVE NOON, according to OUR time reckoning, today! Jesus said, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" (John 11:9). Daylight begins around 6 AM in the morning and ends around 6 PM in the evening. But in Jewish time reckoning, the first hour of daylight is hour "one," and therefore the "sixth hour" would be TWELVE NOON, our time -- the *middle of the day*! That is when Pilate finally condemned Christ to be crucified!

This had to be Nisan 13, the middle of the day. Then Jesus was whipped, scourged, and delivered to prison, and was led out to be crucified the next morning, and was nailed to the stake at the "third hour" of the day -- NINE A.M., in the morning, our modern time (see Mark 15:20, 23-25). This could not have been the same day Pilate condemned Christ to death, because that sentencing occurred at twelve noon, the middle of the day, and Jesus was nailed to the stake at 9:00 A.M., in the morning of the day He was crucified! Otherwise, we would have the strange anomaly of Christ being crucified three hours *before* He was judged and condemned!

The preparation period for the Passover, then, was from Nisan 10 through the 14th, when the lambs were killed in the afternoon -- at the very time Jesus Himself, our Passover Lamb, died on the cross (I Cor.5:7). Killing the lamb was just *the final part* of the preparation needed to properly observe the Passover Feast.

During the preparation period, all leaven had to be put out of the homes of the people, and gotten rid of, and preparations had to be made for the obtaining of unleavened bread, wine, groceries, rooms had to be cleaned and or rented, and other preparations for the Passover dinner on Nisan 15, and the rest of Passover week, had to be made.

Thus the period from Nisan 10 to the 14th of Nisan was a very busy, sometimes hectic, time of "preparation." Finally, on the afternoon of the 14th, the lambs, themselves, had to be taken to the Temple, and inspected by the priests to be sure they were "kosher," and had no blemishes, and then had to be killed during the afternoon of Nisan 14, between roughly 3 and 5 o'clock, as Josephus the Jewish historian states.

When the Lambs Were Killed

Josephus, a leading Pharisee and Jewish general of the first century, and the greatest

Jewish historian of ancient times, wrote concerning this subject. In his book *Wars of the Jews*, he declared: "So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the PASSOVER, WHEN THEY SLAY THEIR SACRIFICES FROM THE NINTH HOUR TO THE ELEVENTH . . ." (*Wars*, Bk.VI, ix, 3).

Edersheim describes the preparations of the Passover in his book *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* --

"The special preparations for the Passover commenced on the evening of the 13th of Nisan, with which, according to Jewish reckoning, the 14th began, the day being computed from evening to evening. Then the head of the house was to search with a lighted candle all places where leaven was usually kept, and to put what of it he found in the house in a safe place, whence no portion could be carried away by accident. Before doing this, he prayed: 'Blessed art thou, YHVH, our God, King of the Universe, who hast sanctified us by Thy commandments, and commanded us to remove the leaven.' And after it he said: 'All the leaven that is in my possession, that which I have seen and that which I have not seen, be it null, be it accounted as the dust of the earth.' The search itself was to be accomplished in perfect silence and with a lighted candle. To this search the apostle may have referred in the admonition to 'purge out the old leaven' (I Cor. 5:7)" (p.172).

Edersheim continues about events during the daylight portion of the "preparation day" of Nisan 14:

"Early on the forenoon of the 14th of Nisan the feast of the Passover may be said to have begun. In Galilee, no work was done all that day; in Judaea it was continued till mid-day; the rule, however, being that no new work was to be commenced, though that which was in hand might be carried on. . . . The strictest opinion fixes ten o'clock as the latest hour when leaven might be eaten, the more lax eleven. From that hour till twelve o'clock it was required to abstain from leaven, while at twelve it was to be solemnly destroyed, either by burning, immersing it in water, or scattering it to the winds.

Edersheim points out that the regular "evening sacrifice," of the Passover day, was slain an hour earlier than on other days -- at 1:30 in the afternoon. Customarily, on most days it was slain at 2:30 P.M. and offered at 3:30, but on the eve of Passover it was killed an hour earlier. (If Nisan 14 fell on a Friday, then it was killed two hours earlier, or at 12:30 in the afternoon, so as to prevent any breach of the Sabbath day, so that all Passover sacrifices would be accomplished before sunset and the beginning of the weekly Sabbath.)

The Passover lambs had to be slain also, as part of the "preparation" for the Passover. They had to be slain at the Temple or sanctified areas. Edersheim describes the scene thusly:

"It was done on this wise: -- The first of the three festive divisions, with their Paschal lambs, was admitted within the Court of the Priests. Each division must consist of not less than thirty persons (3 x 10, the symbolic number of the Divine and of completeness). Immediately the massive gates were closed behind them. The priest drew a threefold blast from their silver trumpets when the Passover was slain. Altogether the scene was most impressive. All along the Court up to the altar of burnt-offering priests stood in two rows, the one holding golden, the other silver bowls. In these the blood of the Paschal

lamb, which each Israelite slew for himself (as representative of his company at the Paschal Supper), was caught up by a priest, who handed it to his colleague, receiving back an empty bowl, and so the bowls with the blood were passed up to the priest at the altar, who jerked it in one jet at the base of the altar. While this was going on, a most solemn hymn of praise was raised, the Levites leading in song, and the offerers either repeating after them or merely responding . . ." (p.175).

"If the 'Hallel' had been finished before the service of one division was completed, it was repeated a second and, if needful, even a third time. . . . Next, the sacrifices were hung up on hooks along the Court, or laid on staves which rested on the shoulders of two men (on Sabbaths they were not laid on staves), then flayed, the entrails taken out and cleansed, and the inside fat separated, put in a dish, salted, and placed on the fire of the altar of burnt-offering. This completed the sacrifice. The first division of offerers being dismissed, the second entered, and finally the third, the service being in each case conducted in precisely the same manner. Then the whole service concluded by burning the incense and trimming the lamps for the night" (p.177).

Thus the Passover preparation day of the 14th of Nisan was filled with activity, as the people got ready for the Passover seder/dinner at the beginning of Nisan 15.

The Greek Word "Hemera" Means "TIME"

Now, let's go back to our story in Luke 22. According to the account, the "day" or "time" came when the Passover must be killed (verse 7). The word "day" here is the Greek word *hemera* and can mean "a period of opportunity for service," or "a period of undefined length marked by certain characteristics" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, part 2, page 146). It can be translated "period" or "time."

Thus the time came when the Passover must be celebrated, and Jesus at this time told His disciples to go into the city of Jerusalem, find a man bearing a pitcher of water, follow him into his house, and inquire about the guest-chamber where Christ and His disciples could "eat the passover" (verse 11) -- that is, celebrate the upcoming seven day Passover Feast!

Asking the Impossible?

IF this very evening was the time they were going to eat the Passover, and Jesus at this very late moment told them to "go and prepare," wasn't He asking them to do the well-nigh impossible? Would it not have been a little late to think about beginning preparations? What about the lamb? What about taking the lamb to the Temple, having it properly approved, then killed, and roasted? No way could this have occurred as the sun set at the start of Nisan 14!

Rather, Jesus gave these instructions to His disciples in the morning of Nisan 12 -- a Monday that year. They did so, and had a special dinner that night, still anticipating the upcoming Passover (see John 13:1), which had *not come yet!* Then, that evening, the Jews took Jesus into custody, and presented Him to the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, and then Pilate again, during the daylight portion of Nisan 13. After being condemned at twelve o'clock noon, Pilate had Jesus scourged and beaten, and then placed in a holding cell until the morning of Nisan 14. According to Jewish law, as shown in the Mishnah, a condemned "criminal" could not be

condemned the day before a Festival, nor could he be condemned and put to death on the same day. Therefore, Jesus had to be condemned at least two days prior to the Passover (Nisan 13), and put to death on Nisan 14, the day before the Passover (Nisan 15) Holy Day. Write for our special Prophecy Flash issue, "Jesus' Last Week," which explains all these things in great detail!

Now imagine for a moment. If Jesus was referring to "preparing the Passover," to eat it, including the lamb, *the evening (beginning) of Nisan 14, that very night*, then He was totally ignoring the original Passover commandment! He would have been celebrating the Passover at the WRONG TIME, the wrong evening, and He would have had to kill the Passover lamb on the 13th of Nisan -- something nowhere commanded in Scripture! Rather, God says the lambs were to be slain "in the evening" of the "*fourteenth day*" (Exodus 12:6) -- that is, the ENDING portion of the day! The EVENING of the 14th means the END of the 14th! Notice!

The Original Passover Commandment

God commands, "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month AT EVEN, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month AT EVEN" (Exodus 12:18). This describes the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The actual days of the Feast are Nisan 15 through Nisan 21.

"In the fourteenth day of the first month AT EVEN [evening, end of the 14th] is the LORD's passover.

"And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread" (Lev.23:5-6).

Now notice! God said we are to keep the Feast from the 14th at evening till the 21st at evening (Exo.12:18). *If evening means the FIRST PART OF THE DAY, then the Feast would be have to be the seven days from Nisan 14 to the end of Nisan 20! But here in Leviticus 23 God plainly says the Feast begins on the 15th and lasts through seven days. Therefore, counting seven days beginning with Nisan 15, makes the Feast last through Nisan 21, "at evening."* Obviously, the "evening" of Nisan 14 means the ENDING PORTION of the day, and the "evening" of Nisan 21, means the ENDING PART of that day!

Was Jesus Christ breaking this command, and telling His disciples -- at the very last minute, as it were -- to "prepare" to keep the Passover, which would be observed just a few hours later? In the first place, would He CHANGE the time and manner of observing the Passover? Secondly, wouldn't He have been putting a real burden on them, if He meant to keep the Passover that very night?

Notice! *If it was already the beginning of the 14th of Nisan, and the sun had already set, and NOW He tells them, "Prepare the Passover," which was to be kept that very night, WHAT A PREPOSTEROUS SITUATION!* The disciples would have been beside themselves -- utterly frustrated! How could they possibly prepare in such a SHORT TIME INTERVAL?

If the Passover was that very night, then surely He would have advised them *much sooner* to begin preparations for it! The common interpretation of this passage makes Jesus out to be a

disorganized, confused individual who asked His disciples to "prepare" for the Feast, but waited till the *very last minute* to do so! If we assume the traditional Passover was that very night, then they had to kill and roast the lamb, themselves, that very night, without taking it to the Temple for the priests to approve of it (the Temple was closed at night). This would have taken *hours*.

The whole idea is preposterous nonsense!

No, the fact is Jesus told His disciples to prepare DAYS in advance -- the actual day was Monday, Nisan 12. That night, the start of Nisan 13, He held the "last supper." Later that night, He was arrested, and arrayed before Pilate and Herod the next morning, and finally condemned by Pilate at 12 o'clock NOON on Nisan 13. And He was finally crucified at 9 o'clock in the morning, of Nisan 14 -- the very day the Jews killed their Passover lambs!

The "last supper" therefore has NOTHING WHATSOEVER to do with the Passover dinner itself! Those churches and ministers who confuse the two things are totally and sadly mistaken. They should know better!

Now if Jesus was indeed setting us an example to take the "Passover" that very night, then it should be obvious that He and the disciples did not eat until about 10-12 P.M.! The sun would have set around 6:00 P.M., then they would have gone into Jerusalem to find the man, and followed him to his house, then they had to make the room ready and prepare for the "Passover." The lamb had to be roasted (if this was a true "Passover"), and certainly all these preparations would have taken from 7:00 P.M. until about 11:00 P.M. or even later. If this is what modern churches believe to be the Passover, then WHY don't they keep it about 11:00 P.M.?

The whole idea reeks of folly and foolishness!

But even worse, this interpretation makes Jesus out to be a disobedient, lawless, impudent individual who flouted and changed the very Passover LAWS of GOD -- yet He plainly says He did not come to "change" the law, but to "fulfill" it -- that is, to observe and keep it and fill it to the brim and running over! (Matt.5:17).

"Eating the Passover"

Now notice verse 11: The disciples were to ask the man they encountered in the streets where the guest room was which Jesus would use to "eat the Passover with My disciples." What does Jesus mean here? Is He necessarily referring to the Passover dinner, which was held on the beginning of Nisan 15? That would be impossible, since He knows He will BE the "Passover lamb" of God, sacrificed the next day, at the time of the Passover sacrifice (I Cor.5:7-8). *He knew He would not be eating the traditional, normal Passover with them.* So what could He be referring to, here?

Let's remember the context, and the fact that "Passover" can have several different meanings! As Ezekiel the prophet says, "In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have *the passover, a feast of seven days*" (Ezek.45:21). They ate the Passover, then, feasting, and celebrating, for SEVEN DAYS! Therefore, when Jesus spoke of "eating" the

Passover, with His disciples, He meant celebrating the FEAST -- not eating the first seder/meal with them, when He knew He would be dead!

Again, as Luke 22:1 shows, the seven-day Feast itself is called the "Passover." The term "Passover" can refer to *any part or aspect of the Passover Feast*, or else the *ENTIRE SEVEN DAY FEAST*. Jesus had obviously arranged with this man to "rent" or obtain this room for the entire Festival, during which they would be feasting, eating unleavened bread, and rejoicing before God.

Jesus *did* "eat the Passover" with His disciples *after He arose from the dead*, for the remainder of the Feast. However, it should be obvious that He did not eat the "Passover lamb" with them that year, because *He was our Passover lamb, being sacrificed at the very time the Jews were sacrificing their lambs* (I Cor.5:7).

What The "Lord's Supper" Really Was!

But what, then, was this special meal, or dinner, they were to have that very night? Could it also have been classified or considered as "part of the Passover"? It was certainly a very special occasion. But it occurred BEFORE Passover Week! It occurred on one of the prior "preparation" days. It was a meal that concluded the final instructions Jesus had to give His disciples, before His impending death. It was certainly very special. But *it was not the "Passover"!*

Rather, as David Stern writes in a footnote of the *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, this was a kind of banquet celebrating the conclusion of a period of study and instruction, after completing a course of special education. They had been with Jesus three years. They had completed a course of religious instruction, to prepare them to become apostles. And, this was a final meal celebrating their accomplishment, and preparing them for the future, when He would no longer be literally among them on the earth.

Says David Stern:

"However, Joseph Shulam has suggested that it may have been not the *Seder* but a *se'udat-mitzvah* the 'celebratory banquet accompanying performance of a commandment' such as a wedding or *b'rit-milah*.

"Here is the background for his argument. When a rabbi and his students finish studying a tractate of the Talmud, they celebrate with a *se'udat-mitzvah* (also called a *se'udat-siyum*, 'banquet of completion,' i.e., graduation)" (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, page 77).

According to Joseph Shulam, "since Yeshua knew he was to die, he may have regarded it as appropriate to complete his disciples earthly 'course of study' with a banquet" (*ibid.*). Says David Stern, "This solution would also resolve the perceived conflict between Yochanan [the gospel of John] and the Synoptic Gospels over the timing of the Last Supper" (*ibid.*).

The "Last Supper" is certainly a most amazing story in itself. It is the subject of much controversy and heated argument. Some claim it was the Passover seder itself, but as we have

seen, it had to have occurred BEFORE the real Passover seder would have been celebrated (the night of Nisan 15).

"They Prepared the Passover"

Luke 22:13: ". . . they prepared the Passover." Of course! The disciples did as Jesus instructed, found the man, followed him to his house, and were led to the room, which they prepared for the coming Feast of Passover, stocking up with supplies, and their Festival needs. They also prepared a meal for that night, since none of them had yet had supper. This meal, this very evening, would constitute a sort of "kicking off meal" for the whole Passover celebration which would last the rest of that day and the following seven or eight days! It would also be a sort of "final banquet," finishing off the three-year course of study and discipleship of the disciples with Jesus.

But this "kick-off" meal or banquet could *not* have been the traditional "Passover" seder or banquet itself, as some insist! Remember, one of the keys to understanding the Bible is to put ALL the relevant Scriptures together, *before* you draw any conclusions! In this case, let's now turn to the book of John, and see what he says about this final "meal" itself. Does the apostle John say it was the "Passover"? Notice!

The Gospel of John

The apostle John records this event: "Now *before the Feast of the Passover*, when Jesus knew that HIS HOUR HAD COME that He should depart from this world, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And *supper being served* ["ended" is a poor translation; my Bible margin says, "*during supper*"], the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus . . . *rose from SUPPER . . .*" (John 13:1-4).

Notice! This was "*before the Feast of the Passover*"! Therefore it could not have been the traditional, normal *Passover*! Supper was still being served when Jesus arose to wash the disciples' feet. John nowhere calls this meal a "Passover." He simply calls it "supper."

At this "supper" they ate regular "bread," because the Feast had not yet begun (verse 1). The Greek word for 'bread' used for this evening's bread is *artos* and normally refers to leavened bread unless qualified otherwise with a modifier. The Greek word for *unleavened bread* is *AZUMOS*. The bread Jesus and the disciples ate this evening was the kind that one would "dip" into a gravy, as a "sop." Jesus told John, when he asked Him who would betray Him, "It is he to whom I shall give a *piece of bread* when I have *dipped* it" (John 13:26). "And having *dipped the bread*, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now *after the piece of bread*, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, What you do, do quickly" (verse 27).

The next verse explains that no one knew why Jesus said this to Judas. "For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, 'Buy those things *we need for the Feast*,' or that he should give something to the poor" (verses 28-29).

Now if this was the PASSOVER DINNER, doesn't it seem strange that the disciples thought Jesus was *sending Judas away from the Passover, right in the middle of it, to BUY GROCERIES FOR THE FEAST?*

That makes no sense at all!

If this was the Passover, then the markets would have most likely been closed, and certainly no shopping would be allowed to interrupt the very Passover dinner itself! The very fact that the disciples had such a thought in their minds indicates plainly that they knew this meal itself was not the Passover, but indeed was a very special meal eaten together as a "love banquet."

Now notice Luke 22:14: "And when the *hour had come*, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him." This compares with John 13:1: "Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew *His hour had come* that He should depart from this world to the Father . . ." In neither passage does it say that the "hour" of the Passover had come! Rather, it was the "hour of His betrayal" that had come. Jesus knew that this night would be His last with His disciples, until after His forthcoming death and resurrection.

"With Fervent Desire . . . THIS Passover"

Now we come to the most enigmatic, perplexing verse of all. This is the verse which is the most misunderstood verse in all the New Testament, I believe. Notice! We have been studying this subject in context, bringing together all the related Scriptures. Now we come to Luke 22, verses 15-16. Here Jesus said to the disciples:

"With *fervent desire* I have desired to eat *this Passover* with you before I suffer;
for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Let's take a spiritual microscope to this verse, and analyze it very carefully. Let's notice what it *does* say as well as what it *does not* say.

What, then, did Jesus mean when He said, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat *this Passover* with you before I suffer"? The word for "desire" in this verse is an unusual word, *epithumia* in the Greek, and means "a longing, especially for that which is *forbidden*" (see *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, #1939). The word for "desire" in this verse is very important to understanding the context of Jesus' words. Says *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, "desire, craving, longing," "specifically for what is *forbidden*." This is the "strongest expression of intense desire," whether good or bad, says the Jamieson, Fausset, Brown *Critical-Experimental Commentary*.

In other words, Jesus here very likely was saying He desired to eat the normal, traditional Passover with His disciples, which would be held on the *following evening*, but He knows that such a thing will be *impossible* -- that it is *forbidden* -- that for Him to fulfill God's PLAN He must be dead and in the grave that evening, and therefore it is *forbidden* and *impossible* for Him to eat that Passover seder meal with them, with all its special meanings and integral significance!

Suppose a man was talking to a friend in the world, and told him a few days before Christmas, "With desire I have desired to celebrate *this Christmas* with you before I leave, but unfortunately I have to take a long trip and won't be here for the holiday. But I won't be able to keep Christmas with you until many years from now." In other words, it is nothing more than *pure assumption* on the part of some to conclude that this verse proves Jesus was celebrating the Passover that very evening! This verse proves nothing of the kind -- in fact, it implies the very opposite, when we understand the context!

The *Critical-Experimental Commentary* points out:

*"The last meal one is to partake of with his family or friends before his departure even for a far distant land, in all probability never to see them again, is a solemn and fond one to any thoughtful and loving person. The last meal of a martyr, of Jesus with his friends in the truth, before being led forth to execution, is still more touching. But faint are these illustrations of the emotions with which Jesus now sat down supper with the Twelve. All the sweetness and all the sadness of His social intercourse with them, from the day that He first chose them to be with Him, were now to be **concentrated and heightened to their utmost intensity** during the brief hour or two of this their last meal together. But *this was no common meal, nor even common passover.*"*

Thus far we have shown much evidence that this final meal was certainly not the normal or typical "Passover," as there is no mention of lamb, it was held several nights before the customary "Passover" dinner of lamb, herbs, and unleavened bread, and Jesus and the disciples ate regular "bread" which they dipped at this meal. John specifically calls it a "supper," not the Passover. It was, in actuality, "the Lord's supper."

A Careful Comparison

Let us do a comparison of this final meal with the traditional Passover:

| <i>Traditional Passover</i> | <i>The Last Supper</i> |
|--|---|
| <i>(Differences)</i> | |
| 1. Held on Nisan 15, at night | 1. Held on Nisan 13, at night |
| 2. Sacrificed Passover lamb eaten | 2. No sacrificed lamb eaten, but Lamb of God present |
| 3. Only unleavened bread eaten | 3. <i>Artos</i> signifying "leavened bread" eaten |
| 4. Bitter herbs eaten | 4. No mention of bitter herbs |
| 5. Recital of history and meaning of Passover done | 5. No recital of history or meaning of Passover |
| 6. Washing of hands before dinner | 6. Washing of feet of disciples by Christ |
| 7. No special ceremony of bread and wine | 7. Christ introduces new meaning of the <i>Kiddush</i> or bread and wine ceremony |

These are very significant differences, distinguishing this final meal from the Passover celebration itself! First, it was clearly held on an evening two days before the traditional Passover.

Secondly, in none of the gospel accounts -- Matthew, Mark, Luke or John -- is there any hint or mention of lamb being eaten, as part of a traditional Passover -- a *requirement of the Passover*, if this was really a full-fledged "Passover."

Thirdly, there is no mention of bitter herbs, also a requirement.

Fourthly, at a normal "Passover," the command was for the story of the Passover to be explained and told in detail -- something not even alluded to at the "Last Supper"!

Also, I might mention, the Passover was a time of special joy and rejoicing, a celebration of deliverance and freedom. But at the Last Supper, there was a heavy feeling of sadness, remorse, as Jesus brought up the subject of His betrayal. Rather than being a celebration of great joy, there is a palpable sense of gloom and sadness, since He tells them He will be delivered to His enemies, and won't partake of the Passover with them again *until the Kingdom of God*.

On the other hand, there are certain respects in which this final meal was similar to the normal Passover. Notice:

| <i>Traditional Passover</i> | <i>The Last Supper</i> |
|---|---|
| <i>(Similarities)</i> | |
| 1. Reclined as they ate | 1. Reclined as they ate |
| 2. Intense feeling and emotion present | 2. Intense feelings and emotion present |
| 3. Instruction of meaning of Passover | 3. Christ instructs disciples and teaches them meaning of "bread and wine" |
| 4. Celebrated Israel leaving Egypt and slavery with a "high hand" | 4. Was a "going away" meal, Christ soon to depart, purchasing our freedom, delivering us from spiritual slavery |
| 5. Sang hymns at and after Passover | 5. Sang a hymn at close |

What do we see from these comparisons? Obviously, this final meal was in some respects similar to a traditional Passover -- in that it was very special, poignant, and a very important aspect of the ministry of Christ! It was a concluding drama introducing the "final act" of God's redemptive strategy -- the death and resurrection of the Messiah!

The Passover, however, was and is a commanded observance of God's Holy Day calendar. The "Last Supper" was just that -- a final supper, very meaningful, yet nowhere commanded to be observed or imitated by followers of Christ!

Obviously this final "meal" was similar to a traditional "Passover" dinner in several respects -- 1) it was a very close-knit, loving family-style dinner with tremendous significance and feeling, and strong emotional ties, 2) they "reclined" as they ate, as is traditional for the Passover, 3) and, as at the Passover, Christ used the occasion to "teach" His disciples. However, these similarities *do not of themselves make it the Passover!*

Although, *in some respects*, this final going-away meal was similar to the traditional

Passover -- yet it also had many striking differences! Regardless of how we look at it, however, it was not the normal, traditional "Passover"!

Regardless of the terminology we use, this final meal was *not a full-fledged and traditional Passover* -- too many elements of the traditional Passover were missing, and it was at the wrong time. Nevertheless, it was held during the Passover preparations, and was probably held in Bethany, a small town near Jerusalem (John 12:1; Mark 11:11; 14:3; Matt.21:17). Since the "Last Supper" was held just before the coming Festival, and was a special opportunity for final instruction, as a "going away" banquet for Jesus and a final "instructional time" for the disciples, it does have powerful meaning and significance. But we must never confuse it with the Passover celebration itself! They are two entirely different things!

Edersheim on the Passover

Alfred Edersheim in his excellent book *The Temple: Its Ministry and Service*, in his chapter on "The Paschal Feast and the Lord's Supper," makes an excellent comment showing why this final meal Jesus held with His disciples *could not possibly be the "Passover,"* if it were held a day or more prior to the actual Passover.

Alfred Edersheim was born in 1825 and died in 1889. He was born to Jewish parents in Vienna and was converted to Christianity as a young man. He studied theology in Edinburgh and Berlin and was one of the leading authorities of his time regarding the doctrines and practices of Judaism in the centuries preceding and during the time of Christ and the early Christian era.

Edersheim states in blunt and incontrovertible terms:

"At the outset we may dismiss, as unworthy of serious discussion, the theory, either that our Lord had observed the Paschal Supper at another than the regular time for it [Nisan 15], or that St. John meant to intimate that He had partaken of it on the 13th instead of the 14th of Nisan. **To such violent hypotheses, which are wholly uncalled for, there is this one conclusive answer, that, except on the evening [latter part] of the 14th of Nisan, NO PASCHAL LAMB COULD HAVE BEEN OFFERED IN THE TEMPLE, AND THEREFORE NO PASCHAL SUPPER CELEBRATED IN JERUSALEM"** (P.193).

This historic point, offered by Edersheim, proves that *if* this last supper were the "Passover," then it had to occur at the end of Nisan 14, beginning of Nisan 15. Since we have already proved that Jesus was slain at the time of the Passover lambs, prior to the Holy Day of Nisan 15, then plain and simply, this final meal *could not constitute the true historic Passover!*

Back to the Basics

All this being said, it must be understood that a few vague, or seeming difficult-to-be-understood verses in one part of the Bible do not undo or disprove all the other plain and clear verses in the Bible as to the true time and manner Passover should be observed!

History proves clearly that the Passover was celebrated at the ending of the 14th of Nisan, with the lambs killed in the afternoon, and then roasted, and eaten on the 15th. Those who dispute this fact create all kinds of contradictions in the Scriptures. They insert a whole day between the time God smote the firstborn of Egypt and the time the Israelites left Egypt! Yet the Scriptures say that when Pharaoh saw his firstborn killed, that very night, he was so upset that he screamed at Moses and Aaron, in effect, saying, "Get out! Leave, immediately!"

"And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, *Rise up and get you forth* from among my people, both you and the children of Israel . . . And the Egyptians were **urgent** upon the people, that they might *send them out in haste*; for they said, We be all dead men.

"And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneadingtroughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders . . . And they baked unleavened bread of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; *because they were **THRUST OUT OF EGYPT, AND COULD NOT TARRY***, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual" (Exo.12: 31-39).

If we listen to those who believe the ancient Israelites observed Passover at the beginning of Nisan 14, then they would have us believe all the Israelites slew their lambs after sunset, yet before dark, dressed them, and ate them -- and that night the firstborn of Egypt were slain. Then despite Pharaoh rising up early, and commanding the Israelites to leave Egypt, and despite the fact that all the Egyptians were "urgent" upon the people, urging them to leave, and despite the fact that the Israelites were "THRUST OUT" of Egypt, forcibly -- these people would have us believe that the Israelites dilly dallied, dawdled, and hung around Egypt all the following day, wasting time! That is the exact opposite of what these verses state! Rather, they were thrown out of Egypt so fast it would make your head spin, and their dough did not even have enough time to become leavened!

When people are confused about a subject, it is time to "get back to the basics." Review the underlying basic principles. Marshall all the facts, and material, and study deeply into the subject. Prepare a list of "pros" and "cons," and investigate the matter like a police investigator who is investigating a murder. Gather ALL the evidence. Don't ignore, cover-up, or destroy *any* evidence. Sometimes a whole case can hinge on one little scrap of evidence! One bloody glove can be a damning piece of evidence!

Even so it is with the false conclusions of those who insist on observing Passover on the wrong day. They ignore mountains of evidence, and then focus on one or two vague, unclear, or controversial verses. Is that the way we should study the Word of God? They focus on "twigs" and miss the mountains! They can't see the forest for the trees!

The Sin of Rebellion and Stubbornness

Back to the basics! Some ministers, when they have the facts and proof to support their belief, will quote you the facts and the proof. But when they don't, and you give them proof which they cannot or will not answer, rather than admit they are ignorant, they will remain silent, until you become embarrassed and change the subject. Or, others when they can't pound on the

facts to support their case might begin to pound on the table -- get angry -- and try to intimidate you by their loud and blustering tone and threats!

Ignorance of the truth is one thing. God can forgive ignorance (Acts 17:30). However, *stubbornness* is a different matter entirely! Those who stubbornly blind themselves, and refuse to face the evidence, or admit that they *just might, or could*, be wrong, will have "hell to pay" when it comes to the time of God's judgment. As Samuel the prophet said to king Saul:

"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, *TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE*, AND TO HEED than the fat of rams. For *rebellion* is as the sin of witchcraft, and *STUBBORNNESS is as iniquity and IDOLATRY*. Because you have *rejected the word of the LORD*, he also has rejected you from being king" (I Samuel 15: 22-23).

May God help us all to heed these words of warning and rebuke!

An "Everlasting Ordinance"

God said, "For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. . . Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will *pass over you*. . . so *this day* [the day they were "passed over", or the 15th of Nisan] shall be to you a *memorial*; and you shall *keep it a FEAST to the LORD throughout your generations*. You shall *keep it as a FEAST by an EVERLASTING ORDINANCE*" (Exodus 12:12-14).

God says, "The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are *MY FEASTS*. . . *THESE ARE THE FEASTS OF THE LORD, holy convocations which you shall PROCLAIM AT THEIR APPOINTED TIMES*" (Leviticus 23:2-4).

Those who say you don't need to observe God's Passover at the appointed time, at the beginning of Nisan 15, deny and reject the everlasting and immutable commandment of God!

I know there are many who refer to the last supper Jesus held with His disciples as the beginning of a "new" observance, which they refer to as "the Christian Passover." However, Jesus never institutionalized that final meal as a Passover -- He never commanded its observance "for ever," as He, as the YHVH of the Old Testament, did for the original Passover! Nowhere did He state, "You must observe this night forever as the *Christian or New Testament Passover*."

And interestingly, if He did want it to be observed, then these ministers who think so still are sadly, woefully mistaken -- because the "Last Supper" was on the 13th of Nisan, and not on the 14th! They are still celebrating the *wrong day!*

God never intended that one-time-only event of the "Last Supper" to supplant and to replace His annual Passover. Can you imagine? For 1,500 years God's people kept the Passover on Nisan 15. The lambs were slain in the waning hours of Nisan 14. Christ died at the precise time they were being killed. Once this historical pattern was fulfilled by the sacrifice of Christ, *do you think God would immediately CHANGE the day and time of observance of the Passover?*

That makes no sense at all! There is only one perpetual, ever-lasting, immutable Passover -- the one which God originally ordained!

The Mystery of the Passover

Jesus nowhere said He came to change the date or time or manner of observance of the Passover.

Jesus Christ declared that He had not come to abrogate, nullify, destroy or change *one iota* of God's Law! He declared, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, *one jot or one tittle will BY NO MEANS pass from the law till ALL is fulfilled*" (Matt.5:17-19).

Would God change the time and observance of His Passover? In Malachi we read: "For I am the LORD, *I do not change*" (Malachi 3:6). In Hebrews we also read of Christ: "Jesus Christ is the *same yesterday, today, and forever*" (Heb.13:8).

What occurred during that last evening did not do away with the traditional Passover celebration which must be observed, year after year, "at the appointed time" of Nisan 15. Jesus *nowhere at any time* said that He was "changing" the Passover to a different night, or "moving" it a night earlier for all the centuries and millennia to follow. If He had done such a thing, the Pharisees would have raised a howl of protest, and denounced Him on this matter vehemently. But their writings, and the Talmud and Mishnah, are *totally silent* as to any such conflict. If Jesus had changed the date to observe the Passover, we would read of tremendous arguments in the book of Acts about this heated controversy -- it would have lit up the night sky, like fireworks on the Fourth of July -- but there is nary a single word.

And notice! According to all the gospel accounts, all during Jesus' ministry *He never once criticized the Jews for supposedly observing the Passover "on the wrong day"* -- although He did criticize them for many "lesser" sins (Matt.23), so if they had been observing Passover on the wrong day, He most certainly would have rebuked them publicly for such a terrible mistake!

On the other hand, Jesus Himself observed the Passover at the same time as the Jews, throughout His life, *even as a child*. For we read in Luke, also, "His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover. And when He was twelve years old, *they went up to Jerusalem ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOM OF THE FEAST*" (Luke 2:41-42).

Jesus obeyed the laws of God perfectly. He came to fill full the laws of God, not to abrogate or rescind or change them. He did not come to "change times and laws" (Daniel 7:25). Rather, God warns us to beware of those who "intend to change times and laws" -- even if they are sincerely misled ministers! This includes the Law of the Passover.

The Passover and Beyond!

Undoubtedly, there is much we still have to learn about the Passover, and its deep symbolism and meaning. But if we get the basics right, then God will open to our understanding even greater doors and vistas. As we obey what we learn, and prove, of His commandments, He will reveal to us even greater delights and exciting wonders out of His beautiful Law! Our knowledge will grow and expand and rise up higher and higher.

As David wrote in the Psalms:

*"Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from
Your law" (Psalm 119:18).*

But if we reject the laws of God, including the Law of the Passover, then instead of doors and vistas opening before our eyes, doors will begin to slam shut, and our way will become beset with thorns and nettles, and we will stumble onward in increasing darkness! As Solomon wrote:

*"But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines
ever brighter unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked
is like darkness, they do not know what makes them
stumble" (Prov.4:18-19, NKJV).*

What about you? Are you celebrating the TRUE PASSOVER of God? Or have you been "blinded" by the false teachings of misleading ministers and churches who refuse to open their eyes to this wonderful truth -- who persist in teaching error and falsehood -- who lead many into greater and greater sin?

It's high time we WAKE UP! It's high time we FACE THE FACTS!

Don't let any man lead you astray, or convince you that there is no need to study into the subject of the Passover -- that it was "settled" twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. Who knows? They just may be "blind" -- like the Pharisees before them! And Jesus Christ warned: "Every plant that my Father in heaven has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Let them be. They are blind guides. When a blind man guides another blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Matt.15:13-14, *Jewish New Testament*).