

PASSOVER OBSERVANCE Abib 15

Wil Berg, March 2021

For thousands of years, Jews (and more recently some Christians) have recognized the importance of Passover observance. But while Jews observe it on the night of Abib 15, most Churches of God observe it on the night of Abib 14.

Churches of God offer two different rationales for their early Abib 14 observance of Passover. First, Mr. Armstrong (WCG) taught that God directly revealed to him that the Jews were wrong, and that the correct observance of Passover, for both Jews and Christians, has always been on the beginning evening of Abib 14.

Second and more recently, some have begun teaching that although the Jews keep Passover on early Abib 15, Jesus, by His Father's direction, changed the Passover symbols and moved the date for Passover from early Abib 15 to early Abib 14.

In either case, the traditional early 14 COG Passover service is a lengthy, somber, ritualistic partaking of bread and wine for baptized members only, which is preceded by foot-washing. It is viewed as the most important service of the year, and is regarded even more highly than a Holy day.

The purpose of this paper is to present and explain my current understanding of Scriptures pertaining to Passover, which I feel support a Passover observance meal during the beginning of the 15th, in family and small group gatherings. Such an evening meal is consistent with the details explained in Exodus 12.

Jesus' Last Supper

"Now before the Feast of Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world" (John 13:1 - NKJ throughout except as indicated).

"Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover . . . Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover [lambs] must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat" (Luke 22:1, 7-8).

Jesus and the 12 knew this last supper during early Abib 14 was not the traditional Passover meal. All these men had observed Passover with their parents and families while growing up and knew its biblical date (Luke 2:41-42; John 2:13, 23). This supper was before the killing of the Passover lambs toward the end of the 14th, and before Jesus' death as "The lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

While recognition of Jesus' sacrifice is very important, a man-made "holy" convocation/commanded assembly, that is focused almost entirely on the Son and His suffering, diminishes the Father as the Most High and as the One who gave His Son for the sacrifice. Jesus would not have wanted such a primary emphasis on Himself, as it takes attention away from the love His Father has for mankind (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10).

Jesus' Last Supper Not a Passover Change

The Holy day feasts were instituted by the Lord (=YHWH=God the Father - Leviticus 23:2). Nevertheless, some teach Jesus' last supper indicated a change of Passover date made by the Father through His Son. However, claiming this happened, when there is

no biblical verification of it, does not make it true, irrefutable, or indisputable.

Because of its importance, if the Father made a change in the Passover date and instructed His Son to observe and teach it, He would have made that crystal clear (like He did in Hebrews 9-10 concerning animal sacrifices). **But there is no record anywhere in the Bible that God the Father through His Son ever changed the original Exodus 12 Passover date.**

Therefore, YHWH instructs and warns, **“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it** (Deuteronomy 4:2; see also Matthew 5:17-19, and Revelation 22:18-19),

Date of Passover in Scripture

To understand what the Father commanded regarding Passover, its date is determined by when the Passover lambs were killed. The following are some translations of when this occurred (Hebrew=*ben ha arbayim*): “at evening” (NKJ); “the evening of” (HCS), “dusk” (JPS), “between the setting-times” (Schocken), “between dusk and dark” (NEB), and “in the evening” (KJV; RSV).

The traditional COG explanation of “*ben ha arbayim*” is that it describes the beginning of the 14th. But the Bible does not support this conclusion/interpretation.

What is the date of Passover that Jesus, His parents, and other Jews observed? Exodus 12:15 begins answering this question by commanding, **“Seven days** you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses.” (See also Exodus 13:6-7).

“Then they shall eat the flesh on that night roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it (12:8).

“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month **at evening** (*ben ha arbayim*), you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening” (verse 18).

The problem is, if you interpret “at evening” as the beginning of the 14th, and count consecutively from that time, you end up eating unleavened bread for **8 days**, contrary to Exodus 12:15.

Some dismiss this problem by incorrectly concluding that Jesus (by His Father’s direction) changed the Passover date to a newly created Passover “holy night” of the 14th, which then necessitated eating unleavened bread for more than 7 days (before the Feast of UB starts).

Others in the COG have ignored this problem/inconsistency by eating unleavened bread on the beginning night of the 14th, eating leavened bread during the rest of that day, and eating unleavened bread again during the 7 days of the Feast of UB.

The only way one can harmonize the Father’s Exodus 12:15 command to eat unleavened bread for 7 days, with His Exodus 12:18 explanation that these 7 days are from the 15th through the 21st, is by acknowledging that **“at evening” is correctly understood as the END of Abib 14**, not the beginning of it, as many wrongly believe. (See also Leviticus 23:27, 32 which show that “evening” = the end of a day).

The lambs were killed toward the END of the 14th (Exodus 12:6), and eaten on the beginning evening of the 15th (verse 8).

Also, “At midnight [of the 15th] the Lord [YHWH=God the Father] struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:29). When He saw the lamb’s blood on the lintels and doorposts of the Israelite houses, He passed over them, instead of killing their firstborn.

Additional Important Explanations

Although Jesus desired otherwise, He was not able to eat His last meal with His disciples on the traditional early 15th Jewish Passover. After His early Abib 14 explanations to them, He prayed, was betrayed by Judas, repeatedly ridiculed, arrogantly interrogated, and then flogged. He was crucified at 9 AM (Mark 15:25), and died around 3PM (Matthew 27:45-46), toward the end of Abib 14.

Jesus' death was on the preparation day (Wednesday) for the first Day of Unleavened Bread (Thursday), which was a high (holy) day (John 19:31), before the weekly Saturday Sabbath. Scripture plainly shows His death was before the Jews had observed the Exodus 12-13 Passover (John 18:28).

Also, it is important to remember that Jesus' death as God's sacrificial Lamb (John 1:29) coincided with and fulfilled the Exodus 12:6 killing of the Passover lambs. Paul understood this when he wrote, "Christ is our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

And although Jesus explained the new symbolic meanings and instructions on Abib 14, the unleavened bread and blood were not new. Both unleavened bread and blood of lambs were part of the Exodus 12 Passover instructions. The Messiah added new meaning to these symbols - bread as His broken body and wine as His shed blood. He fulfilled and magnified the symbols (Matthew 5:17; Isaiah 42:21).

The Messiah did not teach removal of the original Exodus 12 meanings and instructions, and the phrases "New Testament Passover" and "New Covenant Passover" are not in Scripture. His purpose and intent was that these

new meanings and instructions were to be added and explained during the early Abib 15 Passover meal.

Also, there is no special lamb-killing ritual, service or assembly taught in Exodus 12-13, and no command is ever given to commemorate the lambs' suffering/death on the beginning night of the 14th. The main focus is on the Abib 15 eating of the Passover lamb and unleavened bread, which Jesus amplified further in John 6:48-58. And because it was before the DUB, the bread Jesus ate and used during His last supper meal on the beginning of the 14th was likely leavened.

Jesus' explanation of the added meanings of the symbols given on the 14th did not include a command to change the date of Passover observance. This is an interpretation based on non-Scriptural assumptions.

Also, the Bible nowhere teaches that God the Father ever made Abib 14 a Holy time/convocation or commanded assembly. God instituted the yearly Exodus 12 Passover on the first day of UB (Abib 15) as a Holy time, to be honored and remembered.

Israel's Time of Departure

With the understanding that "twilight" of Exodus 12:6 means the end of the 14th and start of the 15th, all the other Scripture details fall into place smoothly, logically, and without conflict.

This understanding shows that the death of Egypt's firstborn at midnight occurred on the night of the 15th (the first day of UB), and that Israel went out of Egypt the following morning "in the sight of all the Egyptians" (Numbers 33:3), in obedience to God's command to not go out of their houses until morning (Exodus

12:22). Israel's deliverance from Egypt began on the same day they observed the first day of the Feast of UB (Exodus 12:17).

Deuteronomy 16:1 ("God brought you out of Egypt by night") must therefore be understood as God making their exodus possible by killing Egypt's firstborn at midnight of the 15th. These firstborn deaths were what caused Pharaoh to order Israel out of Egypt the night of the 15th (Exodus 12:31-33). The Israelites ate the Passover meal "in haste", burned the remains, and were packed and ready to leave by early morning, (Exodus 12:10).

The Night to Remember

In Exodus 12 and 13, God the Father instructs His people to always remember the night of Passover (Abib 15), when He miraculously killed Egypt's firstborn and protected Israel, by the strength of His hand (12:42; 13:3).

It was only by Yehovah's power, intervention, and purpose that Israel was able to leave Egypt on the morning after they ate the Passover meal. God instructed Israel to remember all of this, and to teach it to their children (12:23-27, 42). The killing of Jesus as the Lamb of God has added significant meaning to this night.

The story of the Father's miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage is repeatedly told throughout the Bible. The Father's gift of His Son as the Lamb was foretold and fulfilled (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). Following the Exodus 12 example, the Passover meal should be observed today by families and small groups. It is a night of reverence, reflection and joy.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

The meaning and purpose of these verses is not very clear, and they have long been debated. Nevertheless, based on the

Scriptures discussed in this paper, the most plausible and convincing explanation to me is that these verses describe some in the congregation who were irreverent, self-indulging, inconsiderate and unloving, possibly during the days of unleavened bread.

From the Verse 18 translation of the Nelson Greek English Interlinear NT, “when you come together in church” (ekklesia), and verse 20, “When you assemble in one place it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper,” it seems the Corinthians were not coming together to observe Passover, but because of the symbol references in the following verses, were possibly assembling during the days of UB when it was still timely and appropriate to honor and discuss the symbolic meanings.

Verses 23-26 go on to describe the added symbol meanings Jesus gave on the night He was betrayed, which Paul reviewed with the Corinthians to help some better understand and appreciate the serious and important nature of the occasion. Verses 23-26 could describe what should be remembered and explained not only on the Passover night of the 15th, but also during the days of UB.

Verses 27-34 conclude by explaining the need for some to sincerely examine their improper carnal behavior, and repent to avoid God’s judgment and chastening (some were spiritually sick and dying).

Again, as in the Gospel accounts, there is no mention anywhere in these verses of any instruction to change the Passover date.

Passover in God’s Kingdom

In Matthew 26:29 Jesus said that He would not keep Passover again with His disciples until He observed it with them in His Father’s kingdom. Ezekiel 45 describes this in a millennial setting,

(which occurs after the great tribulation and creation of the new heavens and new earth).

“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month [at day’s end], you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten” (verse 21).

Ezekiel 45:21 is a reference to Exodus 12:18. Ezekiel 45:21 shows that Jesus will keep Passover/DUB in His Father’s kingdom on the beginning evening of Abib 15 for seven days, from the 15th through the 21st of Abib, (as previously explained on page 4).

Future Passover observances in the Kingdom will continue to commemorate and teach God the Father’s love for humanity, the gift of His Son as the sacrificial Lamb death-payment for human sin, the eating of the Passover meal on the beginning evening of the 15th, the Father’s killing of Egypt’s firstborn, and His deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

Exodus 12:11 summarizes all of this: **“It is the LORD’S [God the Father’s] Passover.”**

Exodus 12:14 concludes by declaring that God the Father has made Passover an everlasting ordinance, to be observed throughout all generations. Passover has already been observed for thousands of years, and will continue to be observed for all eternity in Yehovah’s everlasting kingdom.