

Working Through the Unleavened Bread Issues—Part Two

The legitimacy of the spring holy day season as Christian doctrine cannot be overlooked or discarded. Certainly, the observances of Christ's memorial and the related days of the festival of unleavened bread are credibly within the practices and personal teachings of the apostles and Jesus.

The Apostle Paul admonished the churches to “keep the feast,” while reminding them that they were “unleavened,” and that Jesus is “our Passover.”

Such statements to the congregations doubtless reveal Paul’s unreserved support for the observance of these festivals and related days of eating unleavened bread. And the same would be true of Mark who highlighted a significant issue and moment in the life of Jesus when he referred to these same festivals and days of unleavened bread.

In writing about the two spring festivals that took place in the final days of Jesus’ ministry, Mark states that: “after two days was the feast of the Passover, and of unleavened bread” (Mk. 14:1). Then Mark recorded an important historical observation related to the day of the Passover sacrifice, and he stated that on the first day of unleavened bread “they killed [sacrificed] the Passover” (Mk. 14:12). (The “Passover” was strictly speaking an event that occurred on the 14th of Nissan, and the day was generalized as a festival because of the slaying of the lamb and the eating of a meal.)

This of course was a striking claim to make by saying that the “first day of unleavened bread” occurred on the same day as the Passover sacrifice, which meant that Mark was not generalizing the Passover festival in the context of the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

Now Luke also wrote an account of Jesus’ life, and he verified his account by the eye-witnesses to Jesus’ miracles, which testified of Jesus being the son of God. These witnesses also confirmed the message of the gospel of the kingdom of God and the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:22, 32-36). This made Luke a biographer of Jesus’ life, and he also wrote about the final Passover that was kept by Jesus and his disciples, and Luke wrote that “the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is [called the Passover](#)” (Lk. 22:1).

This is a thought-provoking statement made by Luke.

Luke is careful to make the point that the Festival of Unleavened Bread and related days of unleavened bread had come to be called the “Passover” in cultural usage and practice, which was founded in later traditions that had developed around the Passover. (The historian Josephus also recorded that the Feast of Matzot (Unleavened Bread) was “called Passover,” which shows how tradition had at least by that time begun to significantly cloud the issue of two distinct observances.)

Typically, this would not be an issue for debate from a biblical perspective, but there are those who use the statements made by

Mark and Luke as verification that the Passover sacrifice occurred in the afternoon on the 14th day of the month Nissan, with the “pass over” and Exodus falling on the 15th of Nissan. (One must be careful about relying on evolving interpretations created by tradition and historical guesswork that attempt to minimize the spring festivals and their origins.)

However, Luke adds something in support of Mark’s historical observation regarding the first day of unleavened bread when he said: “then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed” (Lk. 22:7).

This was not a statement about Jewish tradition, but rather a factual statement regarding a day of unleavened bread, which occurred on the same day the Passover was sacrificed. And we can conclude that both Mark and Luke were writing in an historical context describing specific events in Jesus’ life, which coincides with Paul’s verification that Jesus on “the same night in which he [Jesus] was betrayed took bread” (I Cor. 11:23).

Therefore, the day in which Jesus was betrayed was also an actual day of unleavened bread, and it is the same day that Jesus’ memorialized when he introduced the symbols of the bread and wine, which he required his followers to observe year by year until his return.

(Even though Christians do not slay a lamb on this day, as Jesus is “our Passover,” the memorialization of the day by the eating of unleavened bread was still sanctioned by the Apostle Paul, and it remained an observable reference for his ministry and the church (Jn. 1:29; Acts 12:3, 20:6; I Cor. 5:6-8; 11:18-34). Thus, the church does not observe the

“Passover” (sacrifice), but rather the church observes the memorial to Jesus our Passover with the partaking of the bread and wine, in the context of also being a day of unleavened bread as observed by both Moses and Jesus (Ex. 12:1-28; Mt. 26:26-29; Jn. 6:47-60.)

Now, some have concluded that Mark’s reference to a “day of unleavened bread” only holds true in respect to the Passover meal or service and not to the day in which the lambs were slain, but Mark and Luke were not making a cultural interpretation, as they were referring to what the day was in respect to the Passover sacrifice—a day of unleavened bread.

Therefore, Jesus observed the Passover on a day of unleavened bread.

Consequently, then, this would seem to give support to the belief that the days of unleavened bread began on the Passover, and therefore also on the 14th day of the month Nissan. However, by the same argument the claim could be made that the Passover meal fell on the same day as the Festival of Unleavened bread, which was on the 15th day of the month Nissan.

Which view is correct?

Let’s first examine how the Jews customarily observe these spring festivals?

When we review the Jewish calendar we see that during the month of Nissan (March/April) there are nine consecutive dates in which the Festival of Passover is observed (called Pesach). This means the Eve of Pesach begins with the daylight portion of the 14th day of Nissan, making it a half-day observance when the Passover was slain (between the two evenings respective to

Jewish tradition). Then the 15th day of the month is the First Day of Pesach (Passover) and it continues for seven more days until the 22nd day of Nissan, which is the Eighth Day of Pesach—also observed as a half-day. This means there are eight complete days in which Pesach is observed and reckoned to nine calendar dates, with all eight days being observed as days of unleavened bread. (In Israel it is observed seven days.)

(Given that Jewish tradition places the Passover sacrifice in the afternoon on the 14th day of Nissan, it is interesting to note that in the *Torah* the phrase “between the two evenings” is translated as “twilight,” and the *Tanakh* translates “between the two evenings” as “dusk,” meaning when the sun sets over the horizon, making for quite a contrast between some traditions and what the *Torah* and *Tanakh* actually state in regard to the Passover sacrifice.)

Now what makes the Jewish religious practice of interest to those Christians who also observe these festivals in principle, and as memorials, is that they believe the Passover sacrifice begins on the 14th day of Nissan, which they also observe as a day of unleavened bread.

Which brings us to a question that is often asked about whether or not Jesus observed the required Passover sacrifice and meal on the night in which he was betrayed.

According to the Apostle John, Jesus and his disciples did observe the prescribed Passover sacrifice and meal, although they did not observe the meal referred to as the ‘*Seder*,’ which is a postbiblical festive meal observed in Jewish practice as a liturgical banquet (Mt. 26:17-20).

However, it is sometimes concluded that Jesus followed either Samaritan or Karaite traditions, or the traditions of the Pharisees or Sadducees in respect to the Passover observance. Such a conclusion is not relevant because in Scripture we read that Jesus told Peter and John what to do in preparing for the Passover. They were instructed to enter the city and look for a certain person, “and they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the Passover” (Lk. 22:13). (Scripture also notes that the disciples found the room furnished and prepared.) [Author’s emphasis throughout.]

So, regardless of the traditions that people try to impose on Jesus’ final Passover, they actually have little bearing on the discussion. The Passover Jesus observed with his disciples was in accordance with God’s instructions, and as he changed the dimensions of the Passover observance—by introducing symbolic meanings to the bread and the wine—the church would no longer observe the Passover of ancient Israel, but rather the memorial to Christ our Passover (Lk. 22:19; I Cor. 11:24-25). (It is interesting to consider that the institution and acceptance of such changes to the Passover ritual reflects to some degree the disciples’ willingness to accept Jesus’ authority and to believe Jesus was the Messiah.)

So how then do some people conclude that the days of unleavened bread begin on the 15th day of Nissan?

For the most part it is an uncomplicated method that most people use to account for the supposed seven days of unleavened bread. People simply match the last day of unleavened bread with the 21st day on the calendar, or they match the Festival of

Unleavened Bread with the first of the seven days of unleavened bread. This of course leaves the 14th day of Nissan to account for the Passover festival, which is not generally considered to be a day of unleavened bread.

But does this work?

Even though this is a reasonable approach to figuring the days of unleavened bread, it still doesn't resolve the conflicting historical observation raised by Mark and Luke.

So let's examine this further.

Customarily, the Jews generally figure the Sabbaths and festivals from evening to evening—as do Sabbatarians—which is reckoned from the sunset beginning a day to the sunset beginning the next day.

However, in regard to the festivals and days of unleavened bread we find in Scripture and within Jewish tradition that sunset may also be reckoned from the end of the day. (Keep in mind that the sunset marking the beginning of a day is the exact same sunset marking the ending of a day. The significance in stating it two different ways is revealed when we attempt to reckon a day to any particular calendar date.)

Here is how this works.

To review, the length of a day is reckoned from the time the sun sets over the horizon, to the time the sun sets again the next day, and there is a part of the day that is called night, and a part of the day that is called day(light), each respectively dividing the day (Gen. 1:5).

With this in mind, we can see how the Sabbath of Atonement is reckoned “from even unto even” using the sunset at the end of

the day. And so we read that: “It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your Sabbath” (Lev. 23:32).

In this example, the “ninth day of the month at even” implies the sunset ending the 9th day because Atonement actually starts with the sunset beginning the 10th day of the month.

So instead of reckoning the length of the Sabbath from the sunset beginning the 10th day, it is understood as the sunset ending the 9th day, and then it figures from sunset to sunset for the length of the Sabbath/holy day in regard to the Day of Atonement. (The phrase “from even unto even” qualifies the understanding of the phrase “ninth day of the month at even,” in respect to the 10th day of the month.)

Plainly, then, there are two ways of referring to the same sunset in relationship to a stated calendar date, as can be applied to the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which could be said to begin on the 14th day at even, or at the end of the 14th of Nissan. Or the same festival can be assigned to a calendar date, as the Festival of Unleavened Bread is said to be on the 15th of Nissan, and the evening to evening reckoning of the day is understood for the length of the day, but not the count of the date on the calendar.

Which is important.

The reason is because a calendar date is a fixed time that represents one complete day (night/day(light)), and each complete day begins and ends at sunset. So if an event is said to occur at the sun's set, then it requires a way to determine which one we are talking about because a sunset beginning the 14th day

reckons to the 13th and 14th dates on a calendar, and likewise, a sunset ending the 14th day reckons to the 14th and 15th dates on a calendar—a difference of one complete day. And depending on how we reckon the day to a calendar can influence the way we interpret the days of eating unleavened bread.

Now, the *Jewish Study Bible* contains, of course, the *Torah* and a corresponding commentary, and we find in the commentary there is an interpretation regarding Leviticus 23:5, and the corresponding Passover sacrifice on the 14th day of Nissan: “*On the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight: The date of the evening is that of the preceding day* (see v. 32; Exodus 12:18); only in postbiblical tradition was the method reversed and evening given the date of the following day.” (This reads somewhat abstract and ambiguous.)

So here then is the qualified implication of this particular interpretation.

If the Day of Atonement is dated to the 10th day of the month, then its beginning evening is dated to the preceding day, which is the 9th day. The support used for this is the statement, “the ninth day of the month at even,” which is understood to be the ending evening of that day (afternoon in some Rabbinic interpretations).

However the dating of the beginning evening of a day to the previous day is qualified for the Day of Atonement only, but the implication is that the method of dating an evening to the previous day can be applied to the period called “between the two evenings,” as it is found in Leviticus 23:5, which says, “in the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord’s Passover.”

Therefore by using this traditional method of interpretation the ending evening of the 14th day of Nissan becomes the eve or beginning of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and so the ending evening of the 14th of Nissan is assigned as the date beginning the evening of the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

And this presents a problem.

If one slays the lamb on the 14th at even according to the method just discussed, then the 15th day has already begun when the Passover was sacrificed.


So to compensate for this erroneous interpretation, the traditional interpretation allows the sunset to be moved back several hours into the previous day, and in that way the lamb could be slain in the afternoon of the 14th of Nissan, and still be slain between sunset and nightfall beginning on the 15th of Nissan.

Simply, this interpretation allows the evening beginning a day to be dated to a single date on the previous day, keeping in mind the phrase “at even” is the Hebrew transliteration *beyn ha’ arbayim*, which means “between the two evenings”—the time of the Passover sacrifice.

Consequently this moves the Passover sacrifice one complete day from the beginning evening of the 14th of Nissan to the ending evening of the 14th of Nissan, making Passover fall on the evening beginning the 15th of Nissan—but starting in the early afternoon.

Taking this traditional conclusion one step further, Mark and Luke would then be confirming that Jesus observed the Passover on the 15th of Nissan.

However, Mark and Luke never said the Passover fell on the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

So we need to examine this further, because this traditional interpretation is notably altering the calendar respective to the Passover.  **(Continued in part-three of this series.)**