

THE DATE OF THE PASSOVER AND THE
PRESENTATION OF THE WAVE SHEAF

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Dear Brother:

Your letter of the 4th inst. has been handed me by Professor _____ to answer. I am indeed interested in your questions; and inasmuch as they all center on the problem of the ancient Jewish passover date, with reference to the roasting and eating of the paschal lamb, we shall make this the main subject of our answer to your interesting letter.

There are altogether at least fourteen specific passovers recorded in the Bible--seven in the NT and seven in the OT. Those in the NT are based upon the authority of the OT, to which Jesus Himself bore witness (John 5:47). The passovers in the OT only are given a Jewish date, and this fact must guide us in ascribing Jewish dates to the passover festivals in the gospel period. The Spirit of prophecy is a consistent lead, as is also Josephus in his description of the ancient feasts. On the contrary, the modern Jewish almanac bases its authority upon the Mishna and Talmud in dating the passover on 15 Nisan.

As you must know, each OT passover is dated on 14 Nisan, with the accompanying statement that the passover was either "kept" or "killed" on this date. The question at once arises whether the roasted lamb was also eaten on 14 Nisan. Both OT and NT answer this question, as do also astronomy and the Spirit of prophecy. All these authorities are in agreement. The apparently only disagreement that has come into the problem dates from Talmudic decisions which influenced the Jews to change both the ancient passover date and season. This, however, did not happen without a long calendrical controversy among various Jewish sects. In the ninth century the Karaites challenged the Rabbanites that they had

"introduced the calculation of the calendar, and changed the divine festivals from their due season."--Philip Birnbaum, The Arabic Commentary of Yefet ben 'Ali the Karaite on the Book of Hosea, p. xxviii. Philadelphia, 1942.

There are, however, ancient pentateuchal texts that command (1) that the paschal lamb be slain about dusk in the entering evening of the fourteenth; (2) that it be roasted and eaten in the same night; and (3) that it be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Let us consider these commands in the order given:

1. Hour of Slaying the Passover. The command in Ex. 12:6 that the lamb was to be killed "between the two evenings" is translated "at dusk" in the modern Jewish translation of the OT. The interpretation is Talmudic that the "going down of the sun" in Deut. 16:8 refers to early afternoon when the sun has crossed the meridian. Even in early Christian times, before the Talmud in either Jerusalem or Babylon had been

completed, Ambrose of Milan argued with reference to the Easter passover, that

"since the lamb had to be slain at evening, we can begin at the last hour before evening."--Aegidii Bucherii, De Doctrina Temporum, p. 479, Antverpiae, 1634.

But in the year of the crucifixion, the lamb sacrifice seems actually to have been conducted near the time of sunset, for in Luke 22:7 we read,

"Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed."

This assertion by Luke implies that the day of unleavened bread was just beginning, and that it was indeed the very day on which the lamb had to be killed, namely, the OT fourteenth. Hence the hour signified was obviously the sunset beginning of the fourteenth, in harmony with OT practice. Without doubt Peter and John carried the slain lamb with them when sent by Jesus into the city to prepare the feast. Matthew and Mark make statements similar to Luke's. All the gospel writers refer to this passover, describing it in detail, but varying in the episodes introduced into their narratives.

2. Lamb Roasted and Eaten in the Night of Fourteenth. The words of Luke just cited introduce the crucifixion day, for his narrative continues right on to the arrest, trial, and death of Jesus. His description plainly identifies the crucifixion day as the fourteenth of Nisan. But there are also OT commands with reference to the date of the lamb supper as the same day. One is found in connection with the second month passover for the unclean. It reads as follows:

"The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. . . according to all the ordinances of the passover they shall keep it."--Num. 9:11,12.

Then again a similar command occurs in Ex. 12:18:

"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."

And, as further explained in Ex. 12:8, the eating of unleavened bread on the fourteenth must have been in connection with the supper of the roasted lamb:

"They shall eat the flesh in that night [literally, in the same night, as in verse 6], roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it."

Hence the conclusion is obvious that unleavened bread was eaten with the roasted lamb, and that both must have been eaten on the fourteenth day. But this coincidence necessarily occurred at the entering

evening of the fourteenth, for otherwise this eating of unleavened bread would have coincided with the feast of unleavened bread on the fifteenth. And such was not the divine command!

3. The Unleavened Bread. The discussion of the foregoing texts has anticipated a little your question with reference to Matt. 26:17. In addition it can be stated that the gospel writers were in their right in calling the crucifixion day the "day of unleavened bread," although it was not the "feast of unleavened bread," which came on the fifteenth. It is very clear from the OT commands that unleavened bread was eaten with the lamb supper, and that from this circumstance the passover day eventually came to be called the day of unleavened bread. But the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the first month were quite different. Even their memorials were different, the fourteenth being an observance of the passing over of the blood-stained door (Ex. 12:14), and the fifteenth being a commemoration of the actual leaving of Egypt (Ex. 12:12). The one day--the fourteenth--was a working day, and it was not a ceremonial sabbath. On Friday of the crucifixion, Simon of Cyrene came in from the field, where apparently he had been at work. But the fifteenth day was known as "the feast" (Num. 28:17), upon which no servile work was to be done (Lev. 23:7). It was a holy convocation, and was therefore called "the sabbath" (Lev. 23:11). Hence you are correct in your interpretation of John's "high day" in ch. 19:31, as being the coincidence between a convocation sabbath and the seventh-day Sabbath.

Now the Spirit of prophecy also represents the day of the crucifixion as the fourteenth day of the first month, and the statement in "Great Controversy," p. 399, is in full agreement with your citations. These are the words:

"On the fourteenth day of the first Jewish month, the very day and month on which, for fifteen long centuries, the Passover lamb had been slain, Christ, having eaten the Passover with His disciples, instituted that feast which was to commemorate His own death as 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'"

This long sentence tells me that the paschal lamb was slain and eaten, and the communion feast instituted, on the fourteenth day of the first Jewish month. And in harmony with this dating, "Desire of Ages" adds that Christ arose "on the very day when the wave-sheaf was to be presented before the Lord" (page 785), stating earlier (page 77),

"The Passover was followed by the seven days' feast of unleavened bread. On the second day of the feast, the first fruits of the year's harvest, a sheaf of barley, was presented before the Lord."

Josephus makes a similar assertion:

"The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the passover, and falls on the fifteenth day of the month, and continues seven days. . . . But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that day they do not touch them."--Josephus, Antt. III. X.5.

Besides the OT and NT arguments, and the Spirit of prophecy chronology, there is of course the prophetic proof, and also the astronomical proof of the crucifixion calendar. The Spirit of prophecy chronology you know. All of the E. G. White calendar statements are marvelous indeed. And the more they are studied, the more our faith will increase. I shall not have room in this letter to outline the historical proof of the crucifixion date--the sixth. There are doubtless many others, but these that we know are in perfect harmony. I shall now proceed to demonstrate this fact from astronomy and calendar science.

The following table represents the period of Daniel's seventieth week prophecy. The brace indicates the actual years belonging to this prophetic week--autumn of 27 A. D. to the autumn of 34 A. D. We know that the years run from fall to fall, because the Messiah died in the spring of the year, which point of time Daniel denominates the "midst of the week," and hence the middle of the year.

The astronomical proof of the crucifixion year consists in first identifying for the years under consideration the Jewish date of each passover--whether fourteen or fifteen Nisan; and second, in discovering a year with the approved Friday-passover date coinciding with Daniel's prophetic "midst." The Table and argument follow:

DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH WEEK
 (Passover Moons)

A.D.	New Moon* (Adar)	Full Moon (Nisan)	Jewish Day of Week	Day after Full Moon (Passover on 14th)	Jewish Day of Week	
	← Waxing	Period →	ss to ss		ss to ss	
1	2	3	4	5	6	
27	Mar 26.83	Apr 9.76	Th	Apr 11	F**	
28*	Apr 13.68	Apr 27.62	Tu	Apr 28	W	
29	Apr 2.82	Apr 17.21	Su	Apr 18	M	
30	Mar 22.84	Apr 6.93	F	Apr 8	S	
31	Apr 10.58	Apr 25.94	Th	Apr 27	1 Friday	} Midst of the Week
32	Mar 29.95	Apr 14.47	M	Apr 15	Tu	
33	Apr 17.90	May 3.29	Su	May 4	M	
34	Apr 7.58	Apr 22.40	Th	Apr 23	2 Friday	
35*	Mar 28.27	Apr 11.43	M	Apr 12	Tu	
36*	Apr 15.21	Apr 29.19	Su	Apr 30	M	
37*	Apr 4.56	Apr 18.59	Th	Apr 19	F	

*Moon dates are taken from Ginzel's Chronologie. In the ancient lunar month, the new moon always occurs toward the end of the month, and the full moon toward the middle.

**This spring Friday does not come into the seventieth week because the years run from fall to fall.

Demonstration. On account of the fact that the ancient Jewish month always began with the appearance of the new moon crescent on the western horizon at sunset, or soon after, there are only two positions available for the ancient passover date--either on the full moon, or the day

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after. In the foregoing table, the passover date--either fourteen or fifteen Nisan--cannot be made to coincide with the full moon date, because in many years, like 28, 35, 36, and 37, the first day of the month with its new moon crescent would then come either before, on, or soon after the very day of conjunction (column 2), and therefore so near to the sun that the new moon could not possibly be seen.

For the same reason, neither can the passover on fifteen Nisan be consistently made to coincide with the Jewish day after full moon (column 5). For example, in the year 28, the difference in time between new moon (April 13.68) and the day after full moon (April 28), is 14.32 days. How could 15 whole days be thrust into a period only a little over 14 days long? Thus the calendar would many times in each century face disagreement with the new moon.

Hence the rule is imperative that in every year with a short waxing period in Nisan, there must always be less than 15 calendar days between new moon and the day after full moon. And this fact governs all the other years in placing the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, on the day after full moon.

This calendar regulation of placing the passover date on fourteen Nisan on the day after full moon is the only rule that works in harmony with the actual position of the new moon. Hence, obviously, the ancient Jews, who observed the moon, and conducted an astronomical court in Jerusalem, must have dated their passover likewise.

On the basis of the foregoing argument, only two 14-Nisan Fridays occur in the period of Daniel's seventieth week--in the years 31 A.D. and 34 A.D. Prophecy chooses the year 31 A.D. in stating that the Messiah would die in the "midst of the week." And with this prophecy astronomy and the calendar are in full agreement, and so is also the reckoning of the Spirit of prophecy.

I am sure that Professor _____ will be glad to hear from you if you decide to write again. I also shall be glad to know how you all come out who are studying this problem. If you have any more questions, or do not understand my line of reasoning, please let me know.

Yours very sincerely,

Grace Amadon

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