

PASSOVER: ADDRESSING CONTROVERSIAL DETAILS

Passover Study Paper #4

Wil Berg, February 2023

Reflecting on the Passover study papers I and others have written in recent years, and because the subject affects the beliefs, practices, and relationships between brethren, further evaluation of related information may help resolve differences.

Please consider this fourth study which seeks to add clarity to five areas of Scripture and history that have contributed to ongoing disagreement: 1) Confusing Scriptures, 2) Different Promises of Old and New Covenants, 3) Purpose of Jesus' Last Supper, 4) Fourteenth Practices, and 5) 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

1) Confusing Scriptures

Contributing to different interpretations, the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke make statements connected with Jesus' Abib 14 death that can be confusing and misleading:

Matthew 26:17 - Now on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, where do you want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover? (NKJ except as noted).

Mark 14:12 - Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him. "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?"

Luke 22:1, 7 - Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover.... Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed.

Several of the above details need to be clarified. The disciples did not come to Jesus on Abib 15, the first day of Unleavened Bread. They would have had to come on **Abib 13**, the day before the Abib 14 evening supper began.

Further, the Passover lamb was not killed on the first day of Unleavened Bread (Abib 15). Exodus 12:6 instructs the lamb was to be killed on Abib 14 at twilight (= as the sun was declining; Hebrew = ben ha arbayim).

Abib 14 and 15 ambiguity: Notice in the above Gospel references that the killing of the Abib 14 lamb (and death of Jesus) is closely associated with the Abib 15 first day of Unleavened Bread. These and similar verses have led some to think that Passover should be observed on Abib 14.

These and other New Testament Scriptures mention Abib 14 as part of Passover, most likely because of its close relationship and preparatory purpose. This association of Abib 14 with Abib 15 is also found in the Old Testament. For example, references in the Book of Numbers can give the impression that the Passover meal was eaten on Abib 14:

Numbers 9:2-3 - "Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, (at even, KJV), you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it."

Numbers 9:5 - "And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai, according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did".

Numbers 28:16-17 - "On the fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover of the Lord. And on the fifteenth day of this month is the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days."

Numbers 33:3 - "They departed from Ramses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of the Egyptians."

How should we understand these and similar previously quoted Gospel references that imply Abib 14 is the date of Passover? To me they show statements such as "on the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Passover" are not fully explained and consequently are misleading.

Exodus 12:6 clearly shows the Passover lambs were killed during twilight of Abib 14 - (again, Hebrew "twilight" =ben ha arbayim=during the late afternoon of Abib 14). And **Roasting and eating these lambs was done on the night of Abib 15 = Passover** (Exodus 12:8-11), which is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

To many, killing the lambs on the afternoon of Abib 14, and roasting and eating them on the night of Abib 15, were viewed together as both being part of Passover, even though technically Passover does not begin until the night of Abib 15.

2) Different Promises of Old and New Covenants

Look next at the instructions Jesus gave on the night of His last supper:

Matthew 26:26-28 - "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is [symbolizes] My body. Then He took the cup [of wine], and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you. For this is [represents] My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Luke 22:19 adds, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

Because Jesus connected His blood (not old covenant animal blood) with the new covenant and the forgiveness of sins, it is helpful to review both the old and new covenants.

Old Covenant: This covenant between God the Father (Yehovah) and ancient Israel included God's laws, Passover, and His other Appointed Times (Exodus 19:5-6; Exodus 20-23). It promised physical blessings to the obedient, curses to the disobedient (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28); and was ratified by the blood of oxen (Exodus 24:5-8).

After initially agreeing to obey God, Israel became spiritually adulterous and unfaithful to this covenant- "This evil people who refuse to hear My words, who follow the dictates of their hearts" (Jeremiah 13:10).

God repeatedly implored Israel to repent and return to Him (Jeremiah 3:12-13). "I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you" (Ezekiel 16:8). But because Israel persisted in disobedience, God eventually gave them up to their own ways, which resulted in national disgrace and destruction (Ezekiel 16:35-43).

New Covenant: God the Father (Yehovah) inspired the prophet Jeremiah to describe a new covenant in which the Father would put His laws in people's inward parts and hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:8-10).

Another new covenant benefit was made possible by Jesus' resurrection to God's throne in heaven. **Jesus became the new covenant High Priest and "... Mediator of a better [new] covenant, which was established on better promises"** (Hebrews 8:1, 6).

"For there is one God [the Father], and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all...." (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

With the Son as Mediator for the ekklesia, **"if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate who pleads our case before the Father"** (1 John 2:1, NLT).

Note also that "the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear [cleanse, spiritually purify] the conscience [thoughts and actions] of the worshiper... The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are **outwardly** clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished [sinless] to God, cleanse our consciences [**inward** mind, thoughts] from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

"For this reason **Christ is the mediator of a new covenant**, that those who are called [the ekklesia] may receive the promised eternal inheritance [eternal life] – now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant" (Hebrews 9:9, 13-15, NIV).

"... [F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation [covering sacrifice] by His blood, through faith" (Romans 3:23-25). Although innocent, Jesus suffered the execution death of a condemned criminal (Deuteronomy 21:22), see also Mounce, page 567.

"He [Jesus] entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf... to remove sin by His own death as a sacrifice" (Hebrews 9:24, 26,

NLT). "... [W]ithout shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). The Messiah's shed blood reconciled repentant sinners with the Father (Romans 5:11; Isaiah 59:2).

3) Purpose of Jesus' Last Supper

While some Churches of God acknowledge Abib 15 as the Exodus 12 Passover date, they believe the Father purposed through His Son to change the Exodus 12 date of Passover to the night of Abib 14, despite the absence of New Testament verification. This interpretation makes the night of Jesus' last supper the focus of Abib 14. Instead, **the most important part of that day was His afternoon DEATH**. This is what is to be remembered.

Another misleading consequence of the above interpretive change is that the Exodus 12:42 "night of solemn observance" becomes a separate event instead of being part of Passover night.

Changing the Passover date to early Abib 14 would not have been why Jesus had His last supper on that night. Jesus and His disciples had observed Passover with their families for years on the night of Abib 15, knowing it was the biblical date (Exodus 12:8-11). They all knew this Abib 14 evening supper was not the Passover.

Notice also that John stated the Jews had not yet observed the Passover (John 18:28). And critically important, **Jesus was still alive on the night of Abib 14**. The required Passover lambs, and Jesus the Passover Lamb of God, had not yet been killed until later that day in the afternoon. **It would therefore be premature for Jesus to have observed Passover on the night of Abib 14 as a memorial of His death while He was still alive.**

So why would Jesus host His Abib 14 last supper knowing it was not Passover?

Jesus knew He was going to be killed late in the afternoon of Passover's preparation day as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Also, knowing "it was the preparation day of the Passover" (John 19:14), He would have used this special supper to further teach and prepare His disciples for Passover the following night.

This supper was His last opportunity before His death to give encouragement, comfort and warnings to His disciples; to explain His Father's added Passover symbolic meanings of the bread and the wine; and to teach them their roles as servants by washing their feet (John 13-17).

Other details connected with Jesus' death and Passover:

When Jesus was killed on Abib 14, He became the new covenant Passover Lamb, replacing the Exodus 12 old covenant Passover lambs. Paul wrote: "Christ our Passover [Lamb] was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Abib 15 begins Yehovah's Passover Appointed Time (Exodus 12:8-11). If Abib 14 was Passover it would add an 8th day of eating unleavened bread, contrary to Exodus 12:15 instruction: "seven days you shall eat unleavened bread."

"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, [=end of 14th, beginning of Abib 15], you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month [Abib 15-21] at evening" (Exodus 12:18).

This coincides with prophesied Passover observance in future years: "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month [end of 14th implied= the beginning of Abib 15], you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days [Abib 15-21] unleavened bread shall be eaten" (Ezekiel 45:21).

Also, "this day [Abib 15] shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord [YHWH] throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance" (Exodus 12:14). Abib 15 is the memorial day for partaking of the Passover meal and symbols.

4) Fourteenther Practices

References concerning Abib 14 practice after Jesus' death are found in historical accounts of the Fourteenthers. This group of early ekklesia leaders understood the great importance and significance of Jesus' death on Abib 14. They got their name "Quartodecimans" (fourteenthers) from remembering and honoring Jesus' death on the afternoon of Abib 14.

This group included the still living apostles John and Philip, John's disciple Polycarp (69-165 AD), and other Eastern (Asia Minor) church leaders, who strongly opposed the early Western Roman Catholic Church (RCC) teachings and their suppression of "all things Jewish."

The RCC teachings conflicted with the Fourteenthers' recognition of Abib 14 being the special day of Jesus' death, and their tradition of fasting until 3 PM of that day. (There is no biblical command to fast or not to fast on Abib 14. It is a voluntary personal choice).

Eastern theologian Irenaeus (120/140 – 200/203 AD) wrote that "Polycarp has always observed [the 14th] with John, the disciple of the Lord."

Eastern bishop Polycrates then wrote a letter of protest to Roman Catholic bishop Victor who was persecuting the Fourteenthers:

"We observe the genuine day [Abib 14] . . . For in Asia great lights have fallen asleep . . . Phillip, one of the twelve apostles . . . John, who rested on the bosom of the Lord . . . Polycarp of Smyrna, both bishop and martyr . . . [and many others] . . . all these observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the gospel" [showing again that Abib 14 preparations were often considered part of Passover].

Polycrates added, "my relatives always observed the day when the people of the Jews threw away the leaven" [on Abib 14].

These fourteenthers statements are from The Messianic Feast, T. Alex Tennant (2014), Table 1, pages 6 and 8.

5) 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

With the explanations of this paper in mind, I presently feel these hard to understand verses are likely describing the Corinthians coming together on the first holy day of Unleavened Bread (Abib 15 = Passover).

Verse 18 – "when you come together as a church" (implies on a holy day or commanded Sabbath assembly).

Verse 20 -“when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s supper.” The Lord’s supper was eaten on Abib 14; the Passover meal was eaten on Abib 15.

Some brethren were eating selfishly with no regard for others:

Verses 21-22 (NIV) – “For as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?”

Verses 24-25 – To emphasize the serious nature and meanings of the occasion, Paul reminded them of the important Father-inspired added symbolic meanings related to Jesus’ death, and Jesus’ instruction to “do this in remembrance of Me.” This seems particularly important to remember and mention in prayer during the Passover meal.

Verse 26 – “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” Again, notice the focus and emphasis on Jesus’ death.

In the remaining verses of chapter 11, Paul exhorted the Corinthians who were guilty to examine their behavior and correct themselves to avoid God’s judgment of their irreverent behavior.

Closing Thoughts

Re: Abib 14. How might we commemorate Jesus’ Abib 14 afternoon death today? There are no biblical instructions about how to do this, or command to come together at that time as an ekklesia group.

The Abib 14 practice of the apostles and other ekklesia leaders who lived after Jesus was crucified gives an example of how they chose to honor the time of His death by fasting.

When the Father’s children understand the great importance of Jesus’ death on the afternoon of Abib 14, they inevitably think about it as the date approaches. It is a time to meditate on Jesus’ sacrifice, and on what it

means for each of us and all humanity. It is also a time to give special thanks to Yehovah and His Son for all they have done for us.

Re: COG Traditions. While Churches of God don't observe Easter, and worship on Saturday instead of Sunday, they remain heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic liturgical, clergy-directed model in their Passover services.

On a related matter, many Churches of God practice foot washing before the bread and wine is dispensed by the elder. However, John 13:2 shows Jesus washing the disciples' feet after the Abib 14 supper, in response to a dispute they had been having over which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24). As host of the last supper, Jesus' response to their "who's greatest?" question, was to kneel and wash the feet of each of His disciples. By doing this He mentored these young leaders to understand their role was to serve God's people, rather than seek recognition and honor from them (John 13:14-15).

That foot washing is mentioned only in John's gospel, raises the question about whether it is required of brethren to wash each other's feet during Passover. In John 13:14-15 Jesus said, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet, [meaning to some they should serve others as Jesus did.] For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." Note that while Jesus' example was to wash *all* His disciples' feet, Scripture does not indicate the disciples washed *any* feet that night.

It should also be noted that Church of God tradition for the Abib 15 "night of solemn observance" (Exodus 12:42) has too often been a worldly party-like night of over-eating and drinking, similar to that described in 1 Corinthians 11:21-22. In contrast, the Abib 15 Passover meal should reflect deep meaning and be both a reverent and joyful time.

Brief overview of Passover teachings:

1. The Abib 15 Passover feast is a memorial ordinance that God commanded to be observed "throughout your generations" (Exodus

12:14). It commemorates God's miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery.

2. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is observed for 7 days, beginning on the first night (= Passover, Abib 15), which is "a night of solemn observance" for remembering how the Father brought Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 12:42) and enabling victory over sin through the sacrifice of His Son's life as the Lamb.
3. Those who continue to keep Passover/ULB, and the other Appointed Times of God described in Leviticus 23, do this because these days are part of the same legislation that includes the Father's 10 commandments and judgments (Exodus 20-23). Colossians 2:14 does not do away with these laws and Appointed Times as some believe. Jesus' death canceled our debt of sin by nailing these charges to the cross, not God's laws and His Appointed Times (see NLT). Scripture also shows Appointed Times being kept during the New Testament period, and that these Times will be kept eternally.

Ideas for the Passover Meal- The sample questions below are a few suggestions for questions to stimulate instructive and meaningful discussion during the supper. The host can facilitate the involvement of all guests.

- Why are we here tonight eating dinner? What makes this dinner and night different than all other nights?
- What does the bread remind us of and symbolize?
- What does the wine remind us of and symbolize?
- What purposes did the lambs killed and roasted in Egypt serve?
- Who is the Lamb of Yehovah who was slain, and what changes did this enable?
- What might your life be like as a slave today?
- What is a "slave to sin" in today's world?
- What is the difference between being a slave to sin and being a servant of Yehovah?
- Who delivered Israel from Egypt and why? Who delivers His people from sin today?
- What are some of the things we are thankful for this Passover? Who should we be thankful to?

Add other ideas. Relevant questions could vary from year to year.

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