

Passover Timing Study: 14th or 15th?

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This study examines the biblical timing of the Passover—specifically whether it should be kept on the **14th** or **15th** of Nisan—and addresses the belief held by some that Christ instituted a new covenant command to observe Passover on the 14th instead of the traditional 15th.

What Scripture Says About Passover Timing

Exodus 12:6 (KJV):

"And ye shall keep it up until the **fourteenth day** of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall **kill it in the evening**."

The phrase "in the evening" is from the Hebrew "בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים" — *ben ha'arbayim*, literally meaning "**between the evenings**."

What Does "Between the Evenings" Mean?

There are two main interpretations in historical and scriptural sources:

1. Samaritan/Karaite View:

- "Between the evenings" = from **sunset to full darkness** (early night).
- They slaughter the lamb **after sunset**, at the beginning of the 14th.

2. Mainstream (Temple-era Pharisaic) View — backed by Josephus and the broader biblical context:

- "Between the evenings" = from **mid-afternoon (around 3 PM) to sunset**.
- The lambs were slain during the **late afternoon of the 14th**, just before the 15th began.

Josephus (Antiquities 14.4.3):

"They slay the sacrifices from the ninth hour to the eleventh" — that is, from **3–5 PM**, Roman time.

This interpretation fits the biblical sequence:

- **Exodus 12:8–10** says the lamb was to be eaten "**that night**" with **nothing left until morning**.

- Thus, if slain during the **daylight of the 14th**, it was eaten after **sunset**—at the beginning of the **15th**.

Leviticus 23:5–6 supports this:

"In the **fourteenth day** of the first month at even is the LORD's Passover. And on the **fifteenth day** of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread..."

So:

- **14th late afternoon** = sacrifice.
 - **15th evening** = meal and beginning of the Feast.
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Did Christ Change the Passover Date?

Luke 22:15:

"With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

Christ observed what would be considered a **pre-Passover meal**, as He would not be alive for the official Passover meal the following night.

Some claim this was a "new covenant command" to keep Passover on the 14th. However, there is **no scriptural evidence** that Christ changed the **date** of the observance.

Instead, He:

- **Introduced new symbols** (bread and wine) during the meal,
 - **Fulfilled the Passover lamb sacrifice** by dying during the daylight of the 14th,
 - Did **not annul** the 15th as the appointed Feast day.
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14er Observance: The Key Distinction

Some groups—often called "14ers"—keep their Passover service on the **evening beginning the 14th** (what we would call the evening of the 13th by modern reckoning). Their belief includes:

- Holding the Passover **at the start of the 14th**, instead of the evening that begins the 15th.
- Claiming that Christ instituted a new observance, replacing the traditional timing.

However:

- The lambs were not yet slain when the 14er service occurs.
- Historically, the **meal was eaten on the 15th**, after the lamb was slain during the late 14th.
- There is **no command from Christ** stating that the 15th was replaced or done away.

Historical Debates and Early Church Practice

The question of Passover timing led to a significant early controversy in Church history known as the **Quartodeciman Controversy**:

- **Quartodecimans** (Latin for "Fourteenth-ers") kept Passover on the evening that began the 14th of Nisan, following the original pattern described in Exodus and what they believed was the practice of the Apostle John.
- The **Roman Church** preferred celebrating Easter on a **Sunday**, regardless of the date of the 14th.

Polycrates of Ephesus (late 2nd century), a bishop in Asia Minor, defended the Quartodeciman practice, citing the example of earlier figures:

"For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming... among these are Philip, one of the twelve apostles... John, who was both a witness and a teacher... Polycarp in Smyrna, both bishop and martyr... All these observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith." (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 5, Ch. 24)

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (late 2nd century), also acknowledged that the controversy had existed earlier, but emphasized the importance of unity. He wrote that Polycarp, a disciple of John, had kept the 14th but remained in communion with churches that did not.

At the **Council of Nicaea (325 AD)**, the Roman Church's Sunday observance was made standard, and Quartodeciman practice was discouraged, even though it aligned more closely with the biblical timing.

It is important to note that early Quartodecimans did not reject the Feast on the 15th but believed in commemorating Christ's death on the 14th specifically. This practice was not the same as modern "14er" groups who often discard the 15th entirely.

Thus, while history shows multiple views existed in the early centuries, none of them were based on a clear command from Christ to **abolish the 15th** as the Passover meal.

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Visual Timeline: Passover Events

Event	Biblical Timing	Scripture Reference
Lamb chosen	10th of Nisan	Exodus 12:3
Lamb slain	Late 14th (afternoon)	Exodus 12:6, Josephus Ant. 14.4.3
Passover meal eaten	Start of 15th (after sunset)	Exodus 12:8–10
Christ's Last Supper	Start of 14th	Luke 22:14–20
Christ crucified	Daylight of 14th	Mark 15:25, Matthew 27:45

Christ buried	End of 14th (before sunset)	Luke 23:54
Feast of Unleavened Bread begins	Evening of 15th	Leviticus 23:6
14er observance	Beginning of 14th (evening of 13th)	Common practice among 14ers

Conclusion

There is no scriptural basis to support the idea that Christ **changed** the appointed time of Passover from the 15th to the 14th. The Torah clearly states:

- The lamb is killed **on the 14th, between the evenings** (late afternoon),
- The meal is eaten **that night**, which is the **start of the 15th**,
- The **Feast of Unleavened Bread** begins on the **15th**.

Christ fulfilled the symbolism of the Passover Lamb by dying on the **14th**, but He never changed the **timing** or abolished the **appointed times**.

Therefore, the 15th remains the biblically ordained time for the Passover meal, and there is no scriptural justification for declaring it "done away."