

# Knowing God in the Word

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Philippians 3:10.

## Contradictions in Scripture: The Preparation of the Passover

It can be argued that the difficulty of working out the time elements surrounding the events of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is one of the hardest tasks a person who wishes to prove that there are no contradictions in Scripture has to undertake. Whether it is the details regarding the triumphal entry and the casting out of the moneychangers or the confusing records of the women's visit to the tomb, the events of these most important of days challenge us to find exactly how to piece them together to show one, continuous whole of events that happened exactly as the Scriptures record they happened and do not contradict. And perhaps there is no aspect of this task that is more difficult to work out, at least on the surface, than the exact timing of the Passover.

In order to understand this fully, we need to remember how the Israelites divided their days. We start our days in the exact middle of the night (when we are using standard time,) at the time we call "midnight." Halfway through the day is then when the sun is at its highest overhead in the sky, which we call "noon." Yet the Israelites did not divide their days this way. For them, they counted their days as beginning at sundown, or the very beginning of the night, approximately 6:00 PM by our reckoning. Then, they counted twelve hours of night from that point. Then, at sunrise, or about 6:00 AM by our reckoning, began the day, and that continued for twelve hours of daylight. At the evening, then, the next day would begin. So, what for us would be evening of the night before for them would actually be the start of the following day.

On the surface, then, it would seem that the Lord most definitely was crucified on the actual day of Passover. Since He and His disciples kept the Passover the evening before, and for them that was the same day as the day following, that means that, though He was not killed at evening like the Passover lamb (or kid, see Exodus 12:5,) was to be killed, He nevertheless did die on Passover day. So we could rightfully say that He fulfilled the Passover, the Passover lamb being a symbol of Christ in His death.

The passages that would lead us to believe that Christ actually died on Passover day are many. Let us examine in order from the gospels the passages that seem to point to the day having been Passover.

Matthew 26:2. *"You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."*

This is the Lord speaking to His disciples and predicting His death. He does not say so definitely, but seems to imply that it is on Passover day that He will be crucified.

Matthew 26:18-19. *And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, 'My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.''" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.*

Here, the Lord is instructing the disciples as to where to prepare the Passover for them to keep, and they prepare it. It clearly seems to indicate that He will keep this Passover before He dies, which can only be the event often called the "Last Supper."

Mark 14:14-16. *“Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, ‘Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’” Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us.” So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.*

This is a passage parallel with the one from Matthew above. Again, what they are preparing is clearly the Passover.

Luke 22:8-13. *And He sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.” So they said to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare?” And He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, ‘Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’” Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.” So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.*

Again, this is a parallel story to that told in Matthew and Mark. Again, it is abundantly clear here that what they were preparing to celebrate was nothing less than Israel’s yearly feast called the Passover.

Luke 22:15. *Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”*

This verse would seem to settle our difficulty all by itself. Some argue that, though they prepared the Passover, still it was not yet time to eat the Passover, and so the supper they were having was not the Passover supper. Yet here, the Lord Himself called it a Passover. How then can anyone argue differently?

John 13:1. *Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.*

Here, before the supper they were about to eat which we call the Last Supper, this verse in John calls it “before the Feast of the Passover.” Is there any doubt that this is a reference to the very meal they were about to eat?

John 18:39. *“But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?”*

Here, Pilate offers to release one prisoner to the Jews based on his custom of granting a prisoner to the people at the Passover. This seems to point to the idea that it was Passover the very day Pilate was doing this.

So there is plenty of evidence for the day Christ died on the cross being Passover. Yet there are arguments we can make from the Scriptures against this having been Passover Day as well.

Matthew 26:17. *Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?”*

Here, the day is called “the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.” Yet how could that be? For we read in Leviticus 23:5-6:

*5. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover. 6. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread.*

So the Feast of Unleavened Bread started on the day after Passover. Yet how then could the disciples be planning to prepare the lamb on that day, if Passover had already passed the day before? Moreover, we read in Leviticus 23:7-8:

*7. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. 8. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it."*

So, the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to be "Sabbath" days, and so they were not to do "customary work" on the first day of that feast. Yet preparing a lamb for sacrifice would certainly be considered work. So how could the disciples, good, law-abiding Jews, have prepared the Passover on that Sabbath day, regardless of the fact that it would have been too late anyway, the Passover already being past?

*Mark 14:1. After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death.*

Here, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are spoken of as if they were one entity. This is confusing, but could this fact help us in seeking to understand what was going on here?

*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?"*

This is called "the first day of Unleavened Bread." Yet it is also declared that it is the day "when they killed the Passover lamb." This has made some suggest that it must have been the day before Passover when this occurred, for they claim that all the Passover lambs for every family in Israel could not possibly have been killed all in one short evening. Thus, they imagine that the priests must have worked like mad all the day before, preparing the lambs in advance to be used on Passover day. Yet that is not the truth, for that is not what the record tells us. For Exodus 12:6 commands:

*6. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.*

How could all the Passover lambs in Egypt have been killed, if it was impossible to kill them all at twilight? If it was impossible during the yearly feasts, it would likewise have been impossible during the first Passover that they pointed to. But I do not believe that the Lord gave commands that could not be fulfilled. They were able to kill the Passover lambs at twilight when their new day began, and still be able to eat them for the Passover meal that evening. And how they did it can be clearly seen by reading of Josiah's Passover in II Chronicles 30:17.

*17. For there were many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves; therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover lambs for everyone who was not clean, to sanctify them to the LORD.*

Josiah had called all Judah and all who were left in the land of Israel after the Assyrian captivity to keep the LORD's Passover as they had not done in decades. Thus, many came from far away to keep the Passover who had never done so before. Many had not come soon enough, and had not gone through the proper rituals outlined in the law to cleanse themselves. Once they had been sanctified, it is clear that they would have been approved, not only to eat the Passover, but also to slaughter it for themselves. Since they were not sanctified, however, the Levites slaughtered the Passover animals for them. So we see that not only did the priests not have to slaughter the

Passover, but it was not even usually necessary for the Levites to do it. The Passover was traditionally slaughtered by the head of each Israelite family. This would have taken almost no time at all, for every Israelite family could kill their own Passover at the same time. What took time was cleansing everyone beforehand, but they had four days to do this, since they were supposed to be getting ready ever since the tenth of the month (Exodus 12:3.)

So, the assumption that the Passover lambs had to be killed the day before Passover since the priests could not have killed enough on Passover evening is wrong. The priests never were in charge of killing the Passover. This was something that was done by every family for themselves. That is the way it was done on the first Passover, and that is how it was done on every Passover since. The institution of the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods did not change this in the slightest. The exception of II Chronicles 30 proves the rule for us. The sacrifice of the Passover animal was something that was normally done by every man in Israel for his own family, and it was done properly on Passover evening.

Luke 22:1. *Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover.*

Moving on, this is a fascinating passage. It tells us that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was called Passover. Yet we know that these were two separate feasts held at two different times. How could Unleavened Bread then be called Passover? Let us keep this verse in mind as we continue this study, and the explanation will soon be forthcoming.

Luke 22:7. *Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed.*

Again, as I said above, the Passover was killed on the evening of the same day that it was to be eaten, not on the day before. The idea here is that it was coming near, and they were to prepare for it.

John 18:28. *Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.*

Some would point to this as proof that the Passover had not yet occurred, since these men, chief priests and religious leaders, were worried about being defiled so they could not eat it. How could this be, they ask, if they would have already eaten the Passover, just as the Lord and His disciples had? Does this not prove that the Passover was not until the following night? Yet those who would use this verse in this way forget the laws of the Passover as set forth in Exodus 12:10.

*10. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it.*

The rule of the Passover was not that it had to all be eaten in one meal. It could be eaten in more than one meal, as long as this was done that same night. If one wished to get up before daybreak and make a second meal of the Passover lamb, there was no law against doing so. The only stipulation was that it had to be eaten before morning. Since at this time it was still before daylight, "early morning," the Passover could still be eaten. No doubt many of the Sanhedrin had either not yet eaten the Passover, or else they had leftovers still from the Passover that they planned to eat before morning. We will often make more than one meal out of a holiday feast ourselves. Why should we think that the thrifty Pharisees would not do the same?

John 19:14. *Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"*

Now, this day is called the Preparation Day of the Passover, which would seem to indicate that those who say this was the day BEFORE Passover are right. So is there a contradiction here between the truth that Christ and His disciples ate the Passover meal together that night, and the

fact that it is stated here that it was only the Preparation Day of the Passover? Have we at last discovered an unsolvable discrepancy?

I believe that we can make logical sense of all this, and once again we will find that the Word of God is not in error. Remember that the evening after Passover began the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as we saw above from Leviticus 23. All leaven or yeast had to be removed from the dwellings of all the Israelites before this feast. No doubt, many Israelites would be busy sweeping out their houses and getting ready for the Feast of Unleavened Bread on Passover day. Remember, Passover was not a Sabbath, and work could be done on that day. The actual Passover festivities ended when the sun came up, for the Passover was to all be eaten by then, as we saw above. What would the Israelites, gathered in Jerusalem for this feast, do during the rest of this day? I believe it naturally would have been used as a preparation day for the upcoming Feast of Unleavened Bread, and a time to do all the work necessary to insure that their homes were yeast-free. This makes perfect sense, and is probably what we would do ourselves in the same situation.

Yet what of the fact that it is repeated that the disciples wanted to prepare the Passover during Unleavened Bread, a feast that was supposed to follow the Passover? Well, I believe that we have already read the key in the form of Luke 22:1. "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover." This tells us that the name "Passover" could also be used for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is similar to children's "Christmas Vacation" in our day. Many children's Christmas break goes right through the following celebration of New Year's Day. Though January first is rightfully called "New Year's Day," any one of these children could also say that it is part of their Christmas break. We also tend to extend Christmas out the other direction. At just about any time in the month of December, and sometimes now even before, we can hear people say that "it is Christmas." For someone who insisted that Christmas is only on December 25<sup>th</sup>, this would seem most confusing. Yet we realize that we are using the word "Christmas" loosely in this case to refer to the whole time period surrounding it.

In the same way, it seems that the Israelites were not always rigidly technical on how they referred to their feast days. Since these two feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread were kept back-to-back, it seems that they had the habit of referring to the entire "feast season" by the name of one of the two, both referring to the Passover as part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and referring to the Feast of Unleavened Bread as part of the Passover. Thus, when Passover is called part of Unleavened Bread, it is only an outgrowth of this same kind of phenomena as we experience when we might call a day in early December "Christmas." So if, as the Bible says, it was the day when Passover was killed, then it must have been the fourteenth day of Nisan, the day called "Passover," and not technically part of Unleavened Bread. Yet the Israelites would call this day part of Unleavened Bread, as the Bible tells us. This was the most natural thing for them to do, and yet it is understandably confusing to us if we try to make these references strictly technical. But we don't have to understand them this way. They referred to their holidays in loose terms, just like we do ours. This is the most natural thing in the world. It makes no sense to charge the Bible with a contradiction because of this.

Finally, if the Lord died on the day before Passover, there would have been no time for the women to buy spices to anoint His body. For we know He died the day before a Sabbath, according to John 19:31.

*31. Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.*

If this was the Preparation Day for Passover, not Unleavened Bread, then the Sabbath referred to could not have been a high day, but would have to have been the regular, weekly Sabbath, since Passover Day is not a Sabbath. Then, the NEXT day would have been the first day of Unleavened Bread, which IS a Sabbath, as we saw in Leviticus 23:7-8. So Christ could not have risen until Monday. But then, when did the women buy spices? As we read in Luke 23:54-56:

*54. That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near. 55. And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. 56. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.*

We know the Lord died at about 3:00PM. Joseph had to go to Pilate and ask for the body. He had to come and take Christ down. He had to transfer Him to his own tomb, put Him in it, and seal it. All this would have taken considerable time. By the time the women left the tomb, it would have been the end of the day. There would have been no time to prepare spices and fragrant oils before the Sabbath Day began. Yet it clearly says they prepared the spices and oils BEFORE they rested the Sabbath Day. This makes sense if Passover was on a Tuesday evening, and it was Wednesday when the Preparation Day occurred and Christ died. Then Wednesday night to Thursday evening was the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Then, from Thursday night to Friday evening the women had time to prepare the spices and oils. Then, Friday night to Saturday evening they rested on the weekly Sabbath. Then, late Saturday night or early Sunday morning they went to anoint Him. This is the only scenario that gives them time to prepare spices and oils before the Sabbath. Him dying the day before Passover does not.

Finally, this scenario I have suggested above has Christ in the tomb three days and three nights, as He predicted in Matthew 12:40. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Yet the scenario of Him dying on the day before Passover leaves Him in the tomb only two days and two nights, which denies the truth of this passage. There is no other way to work it but that He was only in the tomb two days if He died on the day before Passover. So the whole thing ONLY makes sense if He died on Passover Day, not the day before.

There is no contradiction here. All these things work out, and all these problems are cleared away, if only we take the time to look into them. And I believe we should take that time. For this book we are dealing with is not just a book written by men, a book that we can criticize and find errors in. Rather, this is the perfect Word of God. Let us ever treat it with the respect it deserves, and keep in mind that it is God's perfect Word, and contains no contradictions.

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