

WAS THE PASSOVER EARLY OR LATE ON NISAN FOURTEENTH?

In Reply to Norman S. Edwards on a Late Fourteenth Passover

by Eric V. Snow

As part of the general controversy in the Church of God over the Sacred Calendar, the date for the Passover is being debated. The basic dispute surrounds whether the symbols of the Passover service, the bread and wine, should be observed on the night of Nisan (or Abib) fourteenth, or on Nisan fifteenth. Norman S. Edwards, though he is hardly alone, sincerely believes that the symbols of accepting Christ's sacrifice should be taken on Nisan fifteenth, the date the Jews observe their Passover meal, but which traditionally has been called in the Church of God "the Night to Be Much Observed (Remembered)." He maintains: "The lamb was slain and prepared on the 14th late in the day, so we say we believe in a 'late 14th Passover'. . . . The 'night to be much observed' (Ex. 12:42, KJV), therefore, is the eating of the Passover meal!" But actually, as it has been traditionally taught in the Church of God, the lambs were slain early on the fourteenth, at the same time of the day and year Christ ate a Passover meal with his disciples in 31 A.D., which should be the same time Christians today should footwash fellow believers, and take the bread and wine symbolizing their acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice for them.

THE PROBLEM OF REMEMBERING WHEN THE JEWS END AND BEGIN DAYS

First of all, certain complexities need to be admitted, before presenting the case for an early fourteenth Passover. One ever-present source of confusion is that the Hebrews (and in the Bible generally) the days begin and end at sunset, not at midnight as the Romans did. In the Bible, with the evident exception of the Gospel of John, the days BEGIN at sunset, which is not natural to the modern, Western mind used to reckoning days midnight to midnight. Notice how in Genesis 1 the "evening" preceded the "morning" for the six days of (re)creation. Similarly, the Day of Atonement began at sunset on the ninth day, even though it was considered to be on the tenth day: "On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement . . . It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath" (Lev. 23:27, 32, NASB throughout, unless otherwise noted). Similarly, when Ex. 12:18 says, "in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening," it refers to the end of the fourteenth in this case, to sunset, and the beginning of the fifteenth, because it refers Days of Unleavened Bread, which we know from Lev. 23:6 begin on the fifteenth. We always have to keep in mind how days end and begin at sunset in the Bible, especially when examining the implications of the Hebrew words ben ha arbayim, which literally mean "between the two evenings," for dating the Passover.

THE PROBLEM OF THE GENERAL USE OF THE WORD "PASSOVER" IN SCRIPTURE

Another complexity that makes settling this debate difficult is how a general meaning of the word "Passover" is used in Scripture and by the Jews historically. The word "Passover" gets applied to Nisan fourteenth, Nisan fifteenth (the first Holy Day of the Days of Unleavened Bread), as well as the entire eight-day period, including all the Days of Unleavened Bread as well as Nisan fourteenth. For example, "Passover" is applied to the seven days of Unleavened Bread in John 2:23: "Now when He [Jesus] was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name." In Matt. 26:2, the word "Passover" is applied to Nisan fourteenth only: "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be delivered up for crucifixion." In Mark 14:1, we face this general terminology, which basically conflates together Nisan fourteenth and the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread: "Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread was two days off, and the chief priests and scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth, and kill Him." "Passover" is applied to the entire eight (or seven?) day period in Luke 22:1: "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching." Nisan fourteenth is a Day of Unleavened Bread in Matt. 26:17: "Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" Similarly, there is Luke 22:7: "Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed." A loose use of the word "Passover" is not confined to the New Testament, for it is found in the Old as well: "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten." While elsewhere the ancient Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37-100 A.D.) distinguishes Nisan fourteenth from the seven Days of Unleavened Bread that follow it, in one place he labels the whole eight-day period by one name, by saying "we keep a feast for eight days, which is called the feast of unleavened bread" (Antiquities of the Jews, II-15:1). Elsewhere, he effectively equates the two: "Now, upon the approach of that feast of unleavened bread . . . which is called the Passover, and is a memorial of their deliverance out of Egypt" (Antiquities, bk. 17, ch. 9, sect. 2). "As the Jews were celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which we call the Passover . . ." (Antiquities, bk. 18, ch. 2, sect. 2). The great medieval Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) reflects traditional Jewish thinking by effectively eliminating the fourteenth as a festival, and by calling the Days of Unleavened Bread and Passover by the term "Passover" alone: "The reason for the Passover is well known. It is kept seven days, because the period of seven days is the unit of time intermediate between a day and a month" (The Guide for the Perplexed, p. 352). Hence, whether we turn to scripture or to traditional Jewish thinking historically, we must admit to the generality of the term "Passover" as well as even "Day(s) of Unleavened Bread."

HOW THE FOURTEENTH "EVAPORATES" IN THE LATE FOURTEENTH/FIFTEENTH VIEW

The fundamental problem with the "late fourteenth" understanding of the Passover is how the festival on Nisan fourteenth basically evaporates, perhaps being composed of a few hours in its late afternoon (c. 3-6 PM). For all other festivals and holy days in Scripture, when a given day is listed as something to observe, it's to be observed for a twenty-four hour period, not just a few hours near its end. Hence, for the Day of Atonement, we have "from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath" (Lev. 23:32). Only with the Passover do we suddenly employ a different procedure, without any clear text for justifying it. In Lev. 23:5-8, the fourteenth is clearly distinguished from the Days of Unleavened Bread: "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight ["between the two evenings"] is the Lord's Passover. Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. . . . On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work." Similarly, the two are distinguished in Num. 28:16-18: "Then on the fourteenth day of the first month shall be the Lord's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of this month shall be a feast, unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work." While the general use of the term "Passover" as used elsewhere in scripture and by the Jews historically favors the late fourteenth view, any move towards specificity favors the early fourteenth view. What matters is what scripture says when it is instructing us how and when to observe these days specifically, instead of when (especially in the New Testament) it is referring to the general festival season by (often) short hand means as a historical chronological/time marker during the events that led up to Jesus' crucifixion.

The principal dispute concerning the Passover's timing concerns exactly when the lambs were killed during the fourteenth of Nisan, and, by extension, when Israel left Egypt (c. 1446 b.c.). Were the lambs were killed early on the fourteenth, just after sunset ended the thirteenth, or did this happen in the late afternoon of the fourteenth? Ex. 12: 5: states: "And you shall keep it [the lamb or goat] until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight." The battleground term, which the NASB translates "at twilight," in the Hebrew is "ben ha arbayim," which literally translated means, "between the two evenings." If this term refers to the period between sunset and full darkness, the early Nisan fourteenth view is triumphant. Since the day for the Hebrews begins and ends at sunset, then the Passover sacrifice had to have occurred just after sunset but before full darkness at the beginning of the day. On the other hand, if this term refers to the late afternoon (c. 3-6 PM), then the late fourteenth (or fifteenth) view is victorious. Then it could not possibly refer to the late afternoon of the thirteenth, since that would be another day.

EVIDENCE GENERALLY FAVORS "BETWEEN THE TWO EVENINGS" AS MEANING "TWILIGHT"

On which side are the standard Bible helps and lexicons? Here we face some divided opinion, but the general weight, especially more recently, favors the Church of God's traditional interpretation and practice. Gesenius' (1847) (p. 652) says about "between the two evenings" that:

i.e. according to the opinion of the Karaites and Samaritans (which is favoured by the words of Deut. 16:6), the time between sunset and deep twilight. The Pharisees, however . . . and the Rabbinites considered the time when the sun began to descend to be called the first evening . . . and the second to be the real sunset.

Brown-Driver-Briggs (1906) (p. 788) states: "Between the two evenings, i.e. prob[ably] between sunset and dark. . . . on form as poss[ibly] only expanded pl[ural] v. [see] Ges[enius] . . ." The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (1956) maintains: "'Between the evenings,' ben ha Arbayim, was the interval between sunset and darkness." Merrill Unger and William White Jr.'s Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament (1980) remarks (p. 71): "The phrase 'between the evenings' means the period between sunset and darkness, 'twilight' (Exod. 12:6; KJV, "in the evening)." Noticeably, the more recent the lexicon or word dictionary, the more definite is the opinion towards a "twilight" interpretation of "between the two evenings." When a recent translation chooses to take a definite stand on what the meaning of "between the two evenings" means in Ex. 12:6, the "twilight" interpretation certainly has been winning. For Ex. 12:6, the NASB, NKJV, NRSV, NIV, and New Jerusalem have "twilight," the NAB has "during the evening twilight," the New Century has "in the evening before dark," and the Revised English Bible and Moffatt have "between dusk and dark." Mr. Edwards cites the Chumash, a 1995 Jewish translation of the Old Testament, which renders "between the two evenings" as "afternoon." No translation I have does this in Ex. 12:6. This translation certainly appears to be reading mainstream Jewish tradition back into its interpretation of this term. Even the Jewish Publication Society's Holy Scriptures uses "dusk" in Ex. 12:6, which can't refer to the mid-afternoon. The Jewish Socino Commentary defines ben ha arbayim as the "period of approximately one-and-a-third hours between sunset and the disappearance of the light which subsequently penetrates through the clouds." While I can't read Hebrew at all, a layman's look (hopefully aided by the Holy Spirit) at this idiomatic phrase is still worth some consideration. Does it not make more sense that the two "evenings" would refer to a definite break or event of the day? That one "evening" is sunset, while the other is complete darkness? How is 3 PM, in the mid-afternoon, a clear break in the day, or "evening"? There is no definite "event" that occurs in the day between mid-afternoon and sunset as the sun gradually sinks towards the horizon, so looking for an "evening" at 12:01 PM or 3 PM certainly seems dubious. Additionally, one can see from the Brown-Driver-Briggs (p. 787) that in other Semitic languages (such as Arabic, Ethiopic, and Assyrian, which are related to Hebrew) that the root word for "evening" is strongly tilted towards "sunset" in meaning, as the place the sun goes down, in contrast to another Arabic word that means "depart" or "withdraw." So while scholarly opinion displays some division on the meaning of "between

the two evenings" (ben ha arbayim), in recent decades it certainly appears to be tilting towards the Church of God's traditional understanding, in favor of a early Nisan fourteenth interpretation.

Mr. Edwards runs through a number of texts that use "between the two evenings" while attempting to say they refer to the late afternoon. None of these are terribly persuasive, largely due to the texts' ambiguities. For example, Ex. 30:8 mentions Aaron trimming (making brighter) his lights at "twilight" (NASB). Was the tabernacle--a large tent that was not especially tall--in the wilderness so large that at 5 PM this operation was necessary? On a non-cloudy day, probably not. The language of Ex. 29:42-43 is ambiguous enough that its not clear whether the meetings at the tabernacle had to occur "at twilight" (v. 41). God may have just been saying, "This is where I will meet with the sons of Israel," i.e., at this spot in front of the tabernacle, regardless of when they are called (especially note v. 43). The crowd that assembled after Ezra started praying to God, if from Jerusalem alone, could easily have found its way back after the prayer ended during the period of "one-and-a-third hours" between sunset and the disappearance of sunlight, especially if there was a reasonably full moon that night (see Ezra 9:5-10:7). The prayer, at least as recorded, certainly wouldn't have taken all that long to say (easily under five minutes, if spoken continuously). So even if it really was much longer, with what is in Ezra 9 being a mere summary, the crowd of men, women, and children still could have found their way home in time by sunset. Even in the case of Elijah and his "empirical test" (v. 24) before Israel as to whether Yahweh and Baal was the true God in Kings 18, it appears that much of the described activity occurred before the time of the evening sacrifice. It says the prophets of Baal (v. 29) "raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice." While Baal's prophets ranted, it seems, much of what Elijah did in fixing the altar to Yahweh, digging a trench around it, cutting up the ox, drenching it with water, etc. occurred before the time of the evening sacrifice . Notice what time he prayed at (v. 36): "Then it came about at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said . . ." All these preparations occurred beforehand, so it appears. So, depending on how long it took to kill the prophets of Baal (v. 40), and assuming Elijah's exchanges with Ahab about rain coming occurred on the same day, there still could have been enough sunlight left to be able to tell whether many black clouds were in the sky after that time. In none of these texts does any compelling evidence exist to prove that "between the evenings" means "mid to late afternoon."

WHAT THE WORD "EVENING" MEANS BY ITSELF

We should also consider what the definition of the word "evening" (ereb) (6153) is by itself. Wilson's (p. 150) has "to be or grow dark . . . the evening, when the day begins to be obscured." Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament (p. 71) says: "This word represents the time of the day immediately preceding and following the setting of the sun . . . In its first biblical appearance, ereb marks the 'opening of a day': 'And the evening and the morning were the first day' (Gen. 1:5). . . . Second, in a late poetical use, the word

can mean 'night': 'When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? And I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day' (Job 7:4)." Brown-Driver-Briggs (p. 787) has, for various forms: "(sun)set, evening . . . 1. a. evening, orig. sunset, and hence perh. . . . at the time of sunset . . . time of sunset, evening . . . at the turn of evening." Since the word "ereb" is definitely tilted towards meaning sunset or even darkness, it seems dubious to follow Jewish tradition, and maintain that, somehow, in the plural, idiomatic form ben ha arbayim that one of its "evenings" means "anytime after 12 PM (noon) and before sunset in the afternoon."

THE LATE FOURTEENTH/FIFTEENTH VIEW TRIES TO CRAM TOO MUCH INTO ONE NIGHT

Now let's look at the events at the start of the Exodus, to see whether they could basically all have occurred in a single night (Nisan 15). Another basic, fundamental problem with the late fourteenth understanding of the Passover is that it crams too much into a single night, in particular in the approximately six hours occurring between midnight and daybreak. Both sides agree that Israel left on a night, and that that night was the fifteenth. Notice Deut. 16:1: "Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night." In the late fourteenth view, Israel sacrificed the lambs in late afternoon of the fourteenth, and stayed in their homes until midnight on the fifteenth, because the death angel would kill any first born outside his or her home that night (Ex. 12:12-13, 23, 29). Then they left between midnight and six o'clock in the morning on Nisan fifteenth. The early fourteenth view sees Israel as staying in their homes all night on the fourteenth, and as having left on the night of the fifteenth because of the command of Moses in Ex. 12:22: "None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning." During the daytime of the fourteenth Israel loaded up their animals, got organized as a collective, and left on the night of the fifteenth. So now--which view is right?

Consider what the Israelites had to do before leaving Egypt. Some 2.5 to 3 million men, women, and children had to be evacuated, with all their possessions, including animals. This had to be done without the aid of newspapers, radio, television, or any other modern means of communication. Furthermore, this all occurred at night in the late fourteenth view, without any modern means of lighting. To give an example of the numbers involved, let's consider the population of some modern American cities. Let's take the example of the Detroit metro area, since I have cruised down its freeways on a number of occasions. According to the 1990 census, there are about 4.66 million people in this area, a number not wildly higher than ancient Israel's population in Egypt. How easy would it be to evacuate all these people, say as part of some civil defense measure, in twenty-four hours today? Let alone six? Even with modern means of communication, they would be hard pressed. Or, contemplate the city of Chicago. Within its city limits, the 1990 census reported 2.78 million people lived there. Could they all leave in six hours? Even with the threat of a nuclear attack, assuming such a disaster threatened with that much warning, this would be

difficult to accomplish, even with the aid of modern transportation and communication. Furthermore, the land of Goshen, where Israel was, was a fairly significant piece of territory. Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary (p. 438) estimated it had "perhaps 900 square miles." Unger's Bible Dictionary (p. 420) said Goshen extended "thirty of forty miles in length centering in Wadi Tumilat and reach[ed] down from Lake Timsa to the Nile." To make these figures more understandable, note that Chicago has 224.03 square miles within its city limits, while our smallest state, Rhode Island, has 1,212 square miles. Getting the message out by word of mouth would take time, especially the Pharaoh was not living in Goshen when he gave the command for them to get out, but had to call for Moses and Aaron to come (Ex. 12:31), who then would have to return to relay the message. And we have to remember that Israel did not leave as a disorganized mob helter-skelter, but "the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt" (Ex. 13:18). Assuming the Death Angel actually killed all of Egypt's first born instantaneously in, say, a single minute after midnight is problematic also. The example of God punishing David for taking a census by using a death angel to punish Israel through pestilence shows more time may have been involved (II Sam. 24:13, 15-16). This shrinks the amount of time for Israel to leave Egypt by possibly an hour or more, though this must remain a matter of speculation. Clearly the organizational problems of getting some 2.5 to 3.0 million people packed, organized, and ready to leave from Ramses pose one of the biggest obstacles to late fourteenth interpretation of the Old Testament Passover.

Someone may object to the foregoing, and observe that Israel ate the Passover in haste with their loins girded, their sandals on, and staffs in hand (i.e., ready to go on short notice) (Ex. 12:11). This still doesn't eliminate the preparations that were necessary outside their homes which they could not do until the Death Angel had passed, such as loading up their animals, getting themselves into "martial array," arriving at Ramses before departing (Num. 33:3), etc. It certainly still seems implausible to think in six hours (or less) this could be accomplished, especially when not all of them would have known it right away after midnight, but news would have to spread by word of mouth in the confusion of the night over a piece of land some thirty or forty miles long composed of possibly 900 square miles. After all, if in Ex. 12:13 God promised, "when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you," and (Lev. 23:5) "on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord's Passover," doesn't make sense that the actual "passing over" would occur on the day given that actual name, instead of the day after, the First Day of Unleavened Bread (the fifteenth)?

THE MEANING OF THE WORD BOQER ("MORNING") POINTS TO AN EARLY FOURTEENTH PASSOVER

There are other problems with saying the Israelites left in the six hours during the night of the fifteenth. First, the Israelites had to burn the uneaten leftovers of the Passover lambs: "And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire" (Ex. 12:10). Doing this would not only take up a certain

amount of time, but points to departure occurring after daybreak, since the word here is boqer. Another command about the morning occurs in Ex. 12:20: "None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning." This text remains one of the strongest arguments for an early fourteenth Passover. It renders moot all the discussion above about whether Israel was capable of leaving in six hours between midnight and daybreak: They weren't allowed to leave then anyway. Mr. Edwards replies to this argument by saying this was a temporary command God soon changed, comparing it to how Moses' command to "stand by" was canceled by God telling Israel to "go forward" in crossing the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13-15). The problem with this argument is that no place in Ex. 12 does God cancel the command of Ex. 12:20 to stay inside all night. While Pharaoh did command them to get out (Ex. 12:31-32), this can't be seen as an inspired command of the Eternal like the words of Moses, a prophet of God. Furthermore, even with his command, since it contradicted God's, they may have chosen to disobey their "civil government" for a few hours until dawn arrived, and then left. Arguments by others that the Hebrew word for "morning" (boqer) here can include anything from 12:01 AM to 6 AM at night are not credible. It imputes to the Hebrew mind the Roman (and modern) mentality of starting days at midnight, making anything after midnight and before noon "morning." Gesenius' (p. 137) has for boqer: "morning, daybreak, dawn ['and even before light, Ruth 3:14'], so called from the breaking forth of light; see the root No. 2." Brown-Driver-Briggs (p. 133) similarly has: "morning (N[ew] H[ebrew] id.; from split, penetrate, as the dawn the darkness, light through the cloud-rifts, etc.) . . . 1. morning (of point of time, time at which, never during which, Eng. morning=forenoon):--a. of end of night . . . b. implying the coming of dawn, and even daylight . . . c. of coming of sunrise . . . d. of beginning of day." Wilson's (p. 279) has for this word: "the first breaking forth of light,; dawn of prosperity and happiness." Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words (p. 152) explains: "This word means 'morning,' though not the period of time before noon. Rather it indicates the point of time at which night is changing to day or that time at the end of night . . . Boqer can represent the time just before the rising of the sun. In Judg. 19:25 we read that the men of Gibeah raped and abused the Levite's concubine "all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go" (cf. Ruth 3:13). . . . Boqer can mean 'daybreak' or 'dawn.' . . . Sometimes boqer appears to mean 'early morning,' or shortly after daybreak." They maintain only in the term "morning watch" does it mean something potentially useful to the cause of the late fourteenth Passover advocates (2 AM to sunrise). Both of these commands concerning the morning in Ex. 12 point to Israel's departure occurring later, on the night of the fifteenth, since boqer doesn't mean, or include in its meaning, "anytime between midnight and dawn," but normally refers to a specific point or moment in time when night ends or is about to.

NUMBERS 33:3-4--A MAJOR OBSTACLE TO THE LATE FOURTEENTH VIEW OF THE PASSOVER

Then we come to one of the most problematic texts for the late fourteenth view of the Passover. Note Num. 33:3-4: "And they journeyed from Ramses in the first month, on

the fifteenth day of the first month; on the next day after the Passover the sons of Israel started out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians, while the Egyptians were burying all their first-born whom the Lord had struck down among them." Here we get the simple statement that the day after the Passover is the fifteenth, which means the fourteenth is the Passover then. It can't be, by a strict definition, a festival that extends over two days, in which the fifteenth also is the "Passover." The word translated "next day" literally means "morrow." This word, Mahorat, is said to mean in Brown-Driver-Briggs (p. 564): "the morrow (the day following a past day)." Under its heading for "tomorrow," the Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament (p. 264) says: "'the next day.' . . . About 28 times Mahorat is joined to the preposition min to mean 'on the next day.' . . . In 3 passages this adverb is preceded by the preposition l^c, but the meaning is the same." Gesenius' (p. 466) has: "(1) the morrow . . . to-morrow, Nu. 11:32; hence--(2) . . . to-morrow . . . the next day, the day after . . . until the next day . . . the morrow of that day." Wilson's (p. 279) has a similar definition: "to-morrow, the morrow." Then, notice the ominous implications for the late fourteenth/fifteenth advocates stemming from v. 4 above: The Egyptians were burying their dead when Israel left Egypt. Now--did the shell-shocked Egyptians rush out at night between midnight and six o'clock on the fifteenth to bury their dead husbands, wives, children, parents, etc.? Obviously not. Instead, after their dead had been killed between midnight and six o'clock on the fourteenth at night, they were burying their dead on the fourteenth during the daytime on into the evening. During the daytime on the fourteenth, after Israel had gathered all their possessions together, got organized, and arrived at Ramses to leave Egypt for the night of the fifteenth, one could say "the sons of Israel started out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians" since they could easily see them go to Ramses in the daytime. Num. 33:3-4 is easily the most problematic Old Testament text for the late fourteenth view, after Ex. 12:22.

HOW DEUT. 16:6 ACTUALLY SUPPORTS AN EARLY FOURTEENTH PASSOVER [!?!]

Traditionally, the best text for the late fourteenth/fifteenth view of the Passover has been Deut. 16:6 (KJV): "Thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt." Mainstream Jewish tradition interprets the phrase "at the going down of the sun" very literally, and says it can mean any time between noon and sunset, since the sun during this entire period gradually sinks towards the horizon before the day ends. However, note the expression of a parallel thought in this verse, similar to the standard refrain of Hebrew poetry in the Psalms or Proverbs. The sacrifice was to be made "at even, at the going down of the sun." Can "evening" (ereb) be 12:01 PM or 3 PM? As noted above, ereb does not have this meaning. So then, why does mainstream Jewish tradition interpret "at the going down of the sun" to mean "any time between noon and sunset" when the parallel, redundant word means "evening" in this verse? When translators do opt for a less literal translation of the Hebrew words translated "at the going down of the sun," "sunset" is the preferred translation.

Hence, the NRSV has "you shall offer the passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, the time of day when you departed from Egypt." The NASB, NAB, Jerusalem, Moffatt, Amplified, and New Jerusalem have "in the evening at sunset," the New World Translation "in the evening as soon as the sun sets," the TEV has "Do it at sunset," and the CEV "Kill the sacrifice at sunset." Even such a translation as the New Century Version, while more literal in this passage, clearly ties "evening" and the sun going down together into referring to the same time period: "Offer it in the evening as the sun goes down, which is when you left Egypt." And when did they leave Egypt? It wasn't during the daytime, but was at night (Deut. 16:1), so stretching "as the sun goes down" to refer to the entire afternoon is ridiculous.

The standard Jewish interpretation of Deut. 16:6 resorts to an overly literalistic interpretation of the phrase "at the going down of the sun" in order to justify their traditional date for the Passover. The verb translated "at the going down" in Deut. 16:6 has the strong tendency to refer to include where something has or will arrive at, at some destination, not just "go" (i.e., "move"). Hence, Gesenius' (pp. 106-7) has for the word bo: "to come in, to enter . . . to enter into . . . to enter into the house of a husband . . . to come in, to be brought in . . . to come . . . to bring to." While it can mean "go," simply put, that is not its main meaning. Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament (p. 39) says about bo: "to go in, enter, come, go . . . First, this verb connotes movement in space from one place toward another. . . . Sometimes bo refers to the "going down" or "setting" of the sun (Gen. 15:12)." Consider the implications of bo's main meaning when used to describe the sun's motion: It refers to where the sun will arrive at, its destination, i.e., the horizon, making it a way to refer to sunset. This word is used in Amos 8:9: "And it will come about in that day,' declares the Lord God, that I shall make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight." Notice how the sun going down is directly tied to darkness--which is hardly a good description of 12:01 PM or 3 PM at most latitudes most of the year! (See also Gen. 17:12; 28:11; Lev. 22:7; Deut. 23:11; 24:13, 15; Josh. 8:29; 10:12-13; Judges 19:13-14; II Sam. 3:35; I Kings 22:35-36; II Chron. 18:34; Eccl. 1:5; Jer. 15:9; Micah 3:6. In each of these texts, some form of the word bo is used in reference to the sun). Citation of other texts using the word bo about the sun's motion decisively destroys the idea that in Deut. 16:6 the going down of the sun can refer to the whole afternoon. It properly refers to the time of, at, or perhaps around, sunset. Furthermore, since Deut. 16:6 refers to the Passover sacrifice being done "in the evening, at sunset," the view that our old friend, ben ha arbayim ("between the evenings") can possibly refer to the late afternoon (3 PM to 6 PM) takes a major, perhaps mortal blow. If it is "in the evening, at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt," "twilight" becomes a much more sensible translation for this term, instead of "afternoon." Again, notice what Gesenius' said about ben ha arbayim: "according to the opinion of the Karaites and Samaritans (which is favoured by the words of Deut. 16:6), the time between sunset and deep twilight." Hence, ironically, the text--Deut. 16:6--most often cited to support a late fourteenth/fifteenth Passover actually becomes, upon some systematic word study, one of the best proofs for an early fourteenth Passover!

THE JEWS MENTALLY RUN TOGETHER THE PASSOVER AND DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Now we should consider some of the historical evidence in favor of the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread being originally separate festivals that the Jews ended up running together. The Jewish Encyclopedia (vol. 9, Funk and Wagnalls, 1905) said: "Comparison of the successive strata of pentateuchal laws [from the first five books of the Bible] bearing on the festival makes it plain that the institution, as developed, is really a composite character. Two festivals, originally distinct, have become merged." Anciently, Josephus recognized this as well, at least at times (Antiquities II-14:6) (my emphasis):

He kept them together in one place: but when the fourteenth day was come, and all were ready to depart, they offered the sacrifice, and purified their houses with the blood. . . . Whence it is that we do still offer this sacrifice in like manner to this day, and call this festival Pascha, which signifies the feast of the Passover; because on that day (my emphasis) God passed us over, and sent the plague upon the Egyptians; for the destruction of the first-born came upon the Egyptians that night.

Notice how he recognizes this as having all occurred in one day. Similarly, he recognized the two as different elsewhere (Antiquities III-10:5): "And so do we celebrate this passover in companies, leaving nothing of what we sacrifice till the day following. The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the passover, and falls on the fifteenth day of the month, and continues seven days." Interestingly, he combines them together elsewhere, but recognizes the extra day involved in this statement (Antiquities, II-15:1): "We keep a feast for eight days, which is called the feast of unleavened bread." Similarly, we in the Church of God today mentally tend to run together the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day, so we should not find it surprising the Jews did this concerning the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread anciently. Hence, The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible ("Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread," vol. 3) has properly observed that:

As the employment of the one title, Passover, indicates, the Mishna [ancient Jewish commentary], like Josephus, treated all the observances as parts of a single integrated Feast. This has not always been so. . . . Amid all the uncertainty about the Passover and Unleavened Bread in Israel there is general agreement on two points: the feast contains two originally separate components.

Again, to reiterate, the basic problem with the late fourteenth view is that the fourteenth basically vaporizes; the Passover proper becomes just a few late afternoon hours going into the First Day of Unleavened Bread. Where is the compelling scriptural evidence that this particular festival should receive special treatment and be just (say) three hours long, and the other festivals be observed for twenty-four hours on each day they occur?

THE PASSOVER BRIEFLY CONSIDERED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Now we should turn to the Passover in the New Testament. What is obvious is that Jesus and His disciples had their Passover meal a day before the rest of the Jews had theirs. Notice John 18:28, concerning events on the day Jesus was crucified while He was being tried before Pilate: "They [the Jews] themselves did not enter into the Praetorium in order that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover." So, according to John, the Passover had not yet occurred. But in Matt. 26:17, 19 we find this: "Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread [here clearly the fourteenth, not the fifteenth. This bears witness to how the two festivals were becoming merged in people's minds, for the day of the fourteenth was a day to clean out leaven and prepare for the first holy day (John 19:31)--EVS] the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?' . . . And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover." Then there's Luke 22:7: "Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.'" See also Mark 14:12, 14; Luke 22:11, 13, 15. Through the use of such straightforward language it becomes hard to say this was just a Passover meal just because it fell on the fourteenth early on the day during an eight-day festival often just called "the Passover," as opposed to being the Passover meal for the disciples and Jesus, since no qualifications are made in the terms used. So then--how do we explain this discrepancy?

In light of the above analysis of the Old Testament which points to an early Nisan fourteenth timing being correct, it becomes evident Jesus and the disciples were observing the Passover on the right day, while Jewish tradition had led them to observe it a day later. This we should not find as a complete shock--after all, mainstream Judaism observes Pentecost on Sivan 6, while most of the Church of God observes it always on the Sunday seven weeks after the wave sheaf was waved. The Jews have preserved the Sacred Calendar and the Hebrew Old Testament for us today (Rom. 3:2), but their interpretations of them can be in error. In John 18:28, John was merely describing what most were doing in the culture Jesus and His disciples were in. Fundamentally, what makes things difficult to nail down here is how the terms "Passover" and "Day(s) of Unleavened Bread" were used quite generally in the New Testament, as fitting how the Jews they were used in the time of Christ. Consider this example, which treats the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread as a unity (Mark 14:1-2): "Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread was two days off; and the chief priests and scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth, and kill Him; for they were saying, 'Not during the festival, lest there be a riot of the people.'" The New Testament notes that these days were observed, but doesn't tell us much about how to keep them. But for the specific, precise terminology, we have to turn to the Pentateuch and its instructions on how to keep the Holy Days, such as in Lev. 23, Ex. 12, Deut. 6, and Num. 28.

TYOLOGY: THE BEST ARGUMENT FOR A FIFTEENTH PASSOVER REBUTTED

So then we face this conclusion: If Jesus took the symbols on the night of the fourteenth, and Christians are to follow in His footsteps (II Pet. 2:21; I John 2:6), shouldn't we take them at the same time He did? But then comes the rebuttal, the seemingly the best argument for taking the symbols on the fifteenth: Jesus died on the fourteenth, in the late afternoon, at the same time the lambs were being killed at the temple for the Passover the Jews at large were observing (note Mark 15:34-39). Furthermore, since the Passover lambs in type represented Jesus' death long in advance, His death had to be when they died, which then shows ben ha arbayim means "afternoon," not "twilight." As good as this argument appears on the surface, it suffers from two major flaws. First, the Passover observes the time of Jesus' death, and that death occurred on the fourteenth, not the fifteenth. To make a proper annual memorial of it, the symbols should be taken on the day He died, the fourteenth, not the day after, on the fifteenth. Second, consider Vance Stinson's point that Jesus' sacrifice was not something just occurring at a single moment in time ("Essay: Why We Take the Bread and Wine Early on the 14th," The Journal, March 26, 1997, pp. 14-15):

But when the Bible speaks of the "death of Christ" and of Christ as a "sacrifice," it is not speaking of that single sliver of time when His bodily organs ceased to function and His consciousness faded into oblivion. The truth is that the sacrifice of Christ entails far more than that. It included His suffering, which began during the night of His betrayal. Yes, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ began the very night He gave His disciples bread and wine and said, "This do in remembrance of me." How appropriate that we should commemorate His sacrifice on the very night His sacrifice began. . . . [After quoting from Isa. 53:3-7] Read the prophecy of Isaiah 53 and see if you think the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was restricted to the moment of His death. In truth, His sacrifice was a life-long experience, but His final offering, commemorated in the Lord's Supper, began in the evening He was taken from His disciples.

Interestingly, although Stinson believes the Passover lambs were sacrificed late on the fourteenth, and Israel ate them early on the fifteenth, he still says the symbols should be taken on the fourteenth, just as Jesus did so with His disciples before His crucifixion.

DID JESUS EAT OF THE PASSOVER HIMSELF?

Perhaps the most surprising of Mr. Edwards' discoveries is that Jesus did not take the symbols of the Passover (the bread and wine) Himself at the Last Supper (Servants' News, Jan./Feb. 1997, p. 18): "Did our Savior participate in the Passover? Yes he did! But he did not eat a lamb! That was not his role that year. He was the lamb! . . . He would have liked to eat the Passover with his disciples, but his suffering was far more important."

To prove this he cites Green's Interlinear Bible's translation of Luke 22:15-16: "And he said to them, With desire I desired to eat this passover with you before My suffering. For I say to you that never in any way I will eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Now the Greek words translated "never in any way" are ouketi ou me. In two other interlinears, the Emphatic Diaglott and the Kingdom Interlinear, the last two words here are translated simply "not" and "not." So then let's focus our attention on the first of these words, ouketi. This word, according to the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English lexicon (p. 592), means: "no more, no longer, no further." What this means is no additional thing or act will be done after the one just done, such as how it is used in Matt. 22:46: "And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question." Similarly, Mark 14:23, 25 reads: "And when He had taken a cup, and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. . . . Truly I say to you, I shall never again (NJ, "any more," Phillips, "no more") drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." On this basis, Green's translation of Luke 22:16 apparently is defective, because it replaces a "not again" or "no more" with a "never." Furthermore, elsewhere it does appear to say Jesus did eat the Passover with his disciples. For example, he told the disciples to ask (Luke 22:11): "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?" (See also Mark 14:14). This question certainly implies He would eat it with the rest of His disciples, instead of just sitting back and watch them eat it. True, Jesus was perfectly righteous, and therefore did not need to take the symbols Himself to be forgiven for sin like we do today. But He chose to be baptized by John despite He had no sin to be atoned for, which obviously was done to set an example for His disciples to follow (Matt. 3:13-16). On this basis, it makes sense Jesus took the symbols (the bread and wine) Himself at his last dinner, to be an example for His followers, including us today.

CAN WE DETACH THE TAKING OF THE SYMBOLS FROM THE DAY THEY WERE FIRST TAKEN ON?

Significantly, this line of reasoning by Mr. Edwards forms much of the foundation of his most surprising doctrinal move: He detaches the Lord's Supper (communion) from the Passover, and maintains Christians may take the symbols as often as they meet for services, by citing mainly I Cor. 11. After all, if Christ and the disciples were not really observing the Passover, then the symbols need not be seen as intrinsically part of it. The basic problem with reading I Cor. 11 as referring to weekly communion (one can hardly label it then "the Passover"!) is that it ignores Old Testament precedent. Since Christ turned the wine and bread into sacrificial symbols (when they hadn't been so before) on the night of the Passover, there has to be good reason for saying they aren't part of it. For if taking the symbols is part of it, then it has to be an annual ceremony, since the Passover is a once-a-year festival. In I Cor. 11:23 Paul does note that "the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed [Nisan fourteenth] took bread," which certainly places the taking of the symbols on the time of the Passover, since that's when Jesus and His disciples first took it. Since Jesus said to take the cup and bread "in remembrance of Me," this also implies a once-a-year observance, since normally memorials are done annually, such as birthdays and

wedding anniversaries. Taking them annually has the advantage of giving them more meaning when they are taken, for when they are taken too often, much of the meaning involved naturally tends to drain away (which is one reason why the SDAs take them quarterly, not weekly). Furthermore, looking to the strategic context of I Cor. 11, the discussion of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread in I Cor. 5 certainly may imply Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians around that time. If so, it would be understandable why he didn't mention the words "Passover" or "Days of Unleavened Bread" in I Cor. 11. In short, since the symbols were first taken on the Passover, during what Scripture labels a Passover meal, they should intrinsically be seen as part of the Passover, taken once a year, and not detached from it, and so becoming a (possibly) weekly ceremony.

HOW A RELATIVE ADVERB UNDERMINES WEEKLY COMMUNION SERVICES

Now we need to consider I Cor. 11:26, a verse long used to justify weekly communion services: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." Now, when we see the word "often," we automatically tend to think a multiple number of times in a short period of time must be involved. But this depends on how the term is used grammatically. Suppose I said, "As often as I travel 500 miles or more one way, I go to the Feast of Tabernacles." Then, "as often as" refers to an annual event. What has to be realized is that the Greek word translated "as often as" (osakis) is a relative adverb (see Thayer's, p. 456; Vine's, p. 443). How often something occurs in one part of the sentence is conditionalized upon what is mentioned in the rest of the sentence, in the subordinate clause. Consider this example, which I've lifted from an old high school English handbook: "That is the mountain where the little boy was lost." It is very similar to a relative pronoun. In that case, the subordinate clause of the sentence is tied to some idea or word which preceded it through the relative pronoun. Examples of relative pronouns in English are the words "who," "whom," "whose," "which," "what," and "that." When used this way, these words generally appear somewhere in the middle of the sentence. For example, "The teacher praised Mary, who is the best student in the school." So now you may say, what is the point of this grammatical lesson? It becomes evident, from comparing osakis with other Greek words translated "often" into English (see the list in Vine's on p. 443) that had Paul used these words instead, that Mr. Edwards (and many others before him) would be right about taking communion weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc., leaving it up to any individual's or organization's judgment as to what was best. For example, the Greek word polla, a form of polus, appears in the NKJV in Matt. 9:14: "'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?'" Obviously, this adverb implies a high level of frequency in this construction. Nothing in one part of this sentence is being conditionalized by another part, a subordinate clause, unlike the case of I Cor. 11:26. Or consider this use of another similar Greek word, pollakis, also an adverb, in II Cor. 8:22: "And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things." The same story is true here. Had this word been used in I Cor. 11:26--which appears to be a likely root word for poly, a prefix for "many" in English--Mr. Edwards would have excellent evidence for his case. But once we realize

what part of speech is being used here, a relative adverb, not just a regular adverb concerning frequency, his argument collapses. Once we perceive the grammatical structure of Paul's statement in I Cor. 11:26, we shouldn't let the word "often" spook us into thinking communion can be taken many times in any arbitrarily, human-chosen period.

CONCLUSIONS: THE HAZARDS OF BEING TOO ANXIOUS THAT WE ARE WRONG DOCTRINALLY

From the above, it becomes evident that Mr. Edwards' innovations concerning when the Passover occurred and how often to take communion (the Passover) have been found wanting. Grammatical study of ben ha arbayim ("between the two evenings") certainly appears to undermine, even destroy, a late fourteenth/fifteenth understanding of when the Passover lambs were killed. His claim that at the Last Supper Christ did not partake of the food certainly seems to contradict texts he himself cites in other connections (such as Mark 14:14 and Luke 22:8, 11). His detaching of the taking of the symbols from the festival of the Passover doesn't appear to be warranted. And his argument about taking communion weekly (if we wish to) doesn't recognize the part of speech Paul used. What we need to consider, although I'm hardly a dogmatic Gerald Flurry/PCG conservative on the matter, is that we should be careful about changing from what HWA taught at the time of his death, unless we have clear scriptural evidence presented to prove he was wrong. This certainly has been done concerning church government, although his errors here have been exaggerated. While we shouldn't become complacent in our knowledge, as Mr. Edwards notes (p. 13), neither should we have an unnecessary bias towards innovation either. So, let us now do as we have done in the past, and take the Passover symbols on the night of the fourteenth, confident there are good reasons for doing so. After all, if it was good enough for Christ and his disciples the night before He died for our sins, shouldn't it be good enough for us today?

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