

# The Missing 24 Hours of Passover

by John Campbell

As we read the account of the last supper – which we have always thought to be a traditional Passover meal, we have difficulty reconciling the accounts of the synoptic gospels with that of the Gospel of John. There is a clear 24-hour difference between the two accounts.

## The Synoptic Gospel Accounts

**Mark 14:12** *And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the Passover?*

**Mark 14:17-18** *And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.*

---

**Matthew 26:17-21** *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the Passover. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*

---

**Luke 22:7-13** *Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the Passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the good man of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples? And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the Passover.*

**Luke 22:15** *And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer:*

---

In all the above accounts, Jesus is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane shortly after the eating of this meal, late in the evening. According to these accounts that would have been late on the day of Passover.

## John's Account

John doesn't give an account of the eating of the meal in the same terms as Matthew, Mark and Luke, but in John 13 the meal and its events is described as "*before the feast of the Passover*" (John 13:1). There follows the washing of the feet and this is clearly the same meal as described in the synoptic gospels.

But in John 18 there is a very clear account of the post arrest activity and its timing.

**John 18:28** *Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover.*

We can very clearly set the clock according to John. This is early in the morning before Passover which would begin at sundown that evening. It is Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

There is not a chance in a million that the High Priest and his motley crew of religious zealots would have allowed themselves to be defiled by holding court on the Passover, so we can be sure that John's account is reliable. It so happens also that in the year of the crucifixion, that Passover fell on the Sabbath, which as it were, doubly confirms John's record.

**John 19:31** *The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.*

### **What Can We Make of This?**

There is beyond doubt an apparent 24 hour difference between the accounts. The synoptic accounts all say it was the Feast of Unleavened bread when the Passover lambs are killed, and John makes it clear that the killing of the Passover lambs is yet to come later that afternoon.

Commentators, apologists and historians who explain these differences by concluding that some of the source material is wrong do not understand the fundamental point of Scripture. Scripture is inerrant. If it were anything else how would we ever know what to believe and what not to believe? It is the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). If it is of God, it cannot lie. Therefore the apparent error can be no error at all and must have a rational explanation.

### **Question 1 – Was the meal that Jesus ate a traditional Passover meal, the meal we know as the last supper?**

I have to say it was not a traditional Passover meal! That might be bold, but my reason for doing so is based on Scripture alone.

**Exodus 12:11** *And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S Passover.*

**Exodus 12:14** *And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.*

**Exodus 12:25-27** *And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.*

The Lord's Passover as described here was eaten standing up. It was an ordinance forever, and the Israelites were to keep it unchanged when they arrived in the Promised Land. And when the children asked about it, which they would because of the oddity of eating standing up, they were to be told the wonderful account of their deliverance out of Egypt.

God has never revoked this ordinance, even though in later years the Jews did eat the Passover sitting down. But to do so was against the ordinance of God – Ex 12:11,14.

Jesus NEVER broke the law or any ordinance of God. He would have eaten the traditional God-ordained meal standing up and dressed as directed in Ex 12:11. But he sat (Mark 14:18)! So it cannot have been the Passover meal. I say this firstly because John makes clear it would have been a day too early to eat it, and secondly because Jesus sat down rather than stood to eat the meal. These two facts taken together would indicate strongly that it was not the Passover meal as kept and still kept by the Jews, but something else.

## **Question 2 - So What Was the Meal?**

This meal, which we know as the Lord's Supper, and which the synoptic gospels would appear to describe as the Passover meal, has to be something other than the traditional Jewish Passover.

**Luke 22:15** *And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer:* Here Jesus would appear to be emphasising that there is something special about this meal – and that it is a particular meal rather than an annual Passover. Jesus has longed to eat **this** Passover – which appears not to have been a Passover at all.

My conjecture – and I cannot emphasize strongly enough that I might be wrong – is that it was the NEW Passover, and that is why it was eaten sitting down and why Jesus had longed to eat it with them. He had presumably eaten at least two prior Passover meals with His disciples, but this one was different.

It is also possible that Jesus had explained to His disciples – though we are not told specifically about it – that this was a new Passover, one where His people were not dressed ready to flee from the Devil and his wiles, but the start of a new dispensation where the Devil would flee from those submitted to God (James 4:7).

But still we have a problem because Jesus would never have celebrated the Passover - new or old - on any other than the prescribed day. But this meal was eaten on 13<sup>th</sup> Nisan rather than the 14<sup>th</sup> and yet it is called the Passover.

My further conjecture and reasoned explanation is this.

### **Joshua's Long Day**

**Joshua 10:12-14** *Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? **So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day.** And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel.*

Note that the sun did not go down for about a whole day.

We have another forty minutes of time available to be added to Joshua's long day when the sun was moved back ten degrees on the sundial for Hezekiah.

**Isaiah 38:8** *Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.*

I am as certain as I can be that these two events when added together will equal 24 hours exactly - or one day.

The significance of this is as follows.

At Ex 12:11 the Lord gives the Israelites the Feast of Passover. Later in Exodus he also gives them their calendar. From this point on, the days are ticking by, time is on the march, and God's calendar has in part been revealed.

But when the sun stands still for Joshua and Hezekiah, a day is lost from the Jewish calendar. When the sun went down on a certain day and then stayed up for two days before going down again, the Israelites did not adjust their calendar to take account of this. They considered the long day to be but a single day as far as the calendar was concerned.

But God did not consider as the Israelites considered. His calendar has been 24 hours ahead of the Jewish calendar ever since Joshua's long day. Which brings us neatly back to the Passover of Matthew, Mark and Luke. This day was God's Passover; the next day was the Jewish Passover.

Jesus celebrated a New Passover meal with His disciples on the day of God's Passover – Nissan 13 on the Jewish calendar. It was a new Passover, not dressed to flee, but dressed to relax in the Presence of the Lord. According to Luke 22:15 Jesus had longed to celebrate this Passover with them.

## **Two Calendars**

So now we see that there are two calendars running – God's calendar and the Jewish calendar, and they differ by 24 hours.

Jesus goes to the cross on God's Passover – the Lamb of God, the true Passover Lamb. (Paul calls Jesus our Passover - **1 Corinthians 5:7** ..... *For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*)

On God's Passover Jesus freely and willingly offers Himself as the Passover Lamb to His heavenly Father - **Mark 14:36** *And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.*

Having offered Himself for sacrifice Jesus is crucified on His own alter – the cross – and dies at the ninth hour – about three in the afternoon on the First Day of Unleavened Bread according to the Jewish calendar – just at the moment the Passover lambs are being sacrificed on the North side of the temple.

**Mark 15:34-39** *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.*

I repeat - Jesus dies at the ninth hour – about three in the afternoon – just at the moment the Passover lambs are being sacrificed on the North side of the temple. And as the blood of the lambs is being mixed with the water of the underground cisterns to help it run away down the mountain, so after Jesus side is pierced the blood and the water run down the side of the Rock of our salvation and as His sinless blood touches the ground so the sin of the world is paid for once and for all.

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah.

**Conclusion**

Jesus held a final Passover meal for His disciples on the true Passover – God’s Passover - which was 24-hours in advance of the Jewish calendar caused by Joshua’s long day. We might conclude from the text in the synoptic gospels that Jesus had already explained this to His disciples as it is impossible to conclude they would have made a mistake about the date.

We now refer to this as the Lord’s Supper and celebrate it at Holy Communion. But it is a new Passover where instead of being ready to flee from the Devil and his purposes because the Lord has made a way as in the old Passover, we now sit in the Presence of the Lord and the Devil has to flee from us.

The cup which Jesus picked up therefore was almost certainly the cup of Elijah laid out at Passover, although it could equally have been the Kiddush cup. It is referred to as “the cup” in most bible translations so it certainly wasn’t any old cup.

Jesus died on God’s Passover, physically dying at the moment the Passover lambs were being sacrificed at the temple.

At this moment the veil of the temple separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was torn from top to bottom.

The centurion standing guard over Jesus on the cross cries out – “Truly this man was the Son of God”.