

The Timing of the Lord's Supper

by Mike R. Prevost

The timing of the Lord's Supper and the crucifixion of Christ are subjects over which there has been much heated controversy throughout the centuries. This controversy, however, seems to have resulted from attempts to force the scriptures to say something that they do not, and has led to many complex theories that cannot be adequately proven.

The primary issue is the apparent disagreement between the Synoptic gospels and the gospel of John as to the timing of events. Some assert that John records the crucifixion as having taken place on the day the Passover lambs were being slain in the temple. However, the Synoptic gospels are consistent in their agreement that the crucifixion took place on the day after Passover and that the Lord's Supper was instituted during this Passover meal. Of course, the gospel writers are not in disagreement because "*the scripture cannot be broken*" (Joh 10:35). It is the opinion of the author that the resolution proposed herein stretches the scriptures the least and is therefore more likely to be correct.

A REVIEW OF THE PASSOVER AND UNLEAVENED BREAD

The Passover, as you know, was instituted when the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt and is recorded in Exodus 12:

"1 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, **2** This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. **3** Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: **4** And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. **5** Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: **6 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.** **7** And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. **8** And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. **9** Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but

roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. **10** And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. **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. **12** For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. **13** And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. **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. **15 Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread;** even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. **16** And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. **17** And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. **18 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.** **19** Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. **20** Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.” (Exo 12:1-19)

It is interesting that when the Lord instituted the Passover, He also changed the calendar. The month they left Egypt was declared to be the first month. This was probably done to mark the start of a new dispensation. The Jews called this month Abib and later Nisan. So, the feast of Passover was on the 14th of Abib at even (literally “between the evenings” which meant between noon, when the sun starts its descent, and sunset, when it passes beyond the horizon). Additionally, the seven-day feast of Unleavened Bread was instituted on the seven days following Passover. The day of the 14th was spent preparing the Passover meal and ridding the house of leaven. Notice that the feast of Passover overlapped the feast of Unleavened Bread and only included a few hours of the 14th because the lamb was killed that evening. The Passover lamb was roasted and eaten that night which, since days were reckoned from sundown to sundown, technically began the 15th, the first day of unleavened bread.

Another important attribute of the Passover festival is seen in Deu 16:5-6:

“5 Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee: But at the place which the LORD thy God shall

choose to place his name in: **6 But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in**, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt.” (Deu 16:5-6)

This instruction differentiates the first Passover in Egypt from the annual commemorative Passovers. In the first Passover, each family killed the Passover Lamb, but in the subsequent Passovers, the lamb was killed “*at the place the LORD shall choose to place his name in*” (i.e., the tabernacle and, later, the temple). This is further shown in Ezr 6:19-20 and 2 Chr 35:10-11:

“19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. 20 For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.” (Ezr 20:16-20)

“So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their courses, according to the king's commandment. 11 And they killed the passover, and the priests sprinkled the blood from their hands, and the Levites flayed them.” (2 Chr 35:10-11)

That the Passover must be killed at the temple is also demonstrated in Deu 16:16 which states that there are three feasts that required a journey to the temple:

“16 Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles” (Deu 16:16)

So we see that the Jews did not kill the Passover themselves, rather the priests in the temple performed the sacrifice. In fact, Deu 12:5-6 stipulates that all offerings and sacrifices take place at the temple.

Additionally, Josephus records that the lambs were slain in the temple in Jesus day. On one occasion, the priests were instructed to count the lambs as they were slain as a way to estimate the number of Jews attending the feast in Jerusalem.

“Cestius, desiring to inform Nero, who was inclined to condemn the nation, of the power of the city, requested the high priests to take a count, if possible, of the entire population. So these high priests did so upon the arrival of their feast which is called the Passover. On this day they slay their sacrifices from the ninth hour until the eleventh, with a company of not less than ten belonging to every sacrifice -- for it is not lawful for them to have the feast singly by themselves -- and many of us are twenty in a company. These priests found the number of the sacrifices was two hundred and fifty-six thousand five hundred; which, if we assume no more than ten feasted together, amounts to two million seven hundred thousand and two hundred

persons; but this counted only those that were pure and holy, for as to those that have leprosy, or gonorrhea, or women that have their monthly periods, or persons that are otherwise polluted, it is not lawful to be partakers of the sacrifice, nor indeed for any foreigners either who come here to worship.” (Josephus, War 6.9.3 422-427)

The fact that the Passover lambs must be killed by a priest at the temple is an important limiting factor that constrains the possible interpretations of the Passover observances in Jesus’ day and also of the timing of the Lord’s Supper.

CHRIST OUR PASSOVER

The next concept to be established is that the Passover lamb foreshadowed Christ. This is established in many ways, but is plainly stated in 1 Cor 5:7: “*Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even **Christ our passover** is sacrificed for us.*” So, even if Christ was not crucified on the same day as the Passover lambs were slain, in the scripture, He is still reckoned to be “*our Passover*”. Of course, John the Baptist, upon seeing Christ, on two occasions said “*Behold the Lamb of God*” (Joh 1:29, 36). Just like the Passover lamb, Christ was a male “*without blemish and without spot*” (1 Pet 1:19, Exo 12:5), was “*brought as a lamb to the slaughter*” (Isa 53:7) and was slain “between the evenings” between noon and sunset (Ex 12:6, Joh 19:14). Also, like the Passover lamb, “*not a bone of him was broken*” (Joh 19:36, Psa 34:20, Num 9:12). Christ is also described as a “*lamb as it had been slain*” (Rev. 5:6-9, 12).

HARMONIZING THE GOSPELS

The *sequence* of the events is clear across the four gospels. Of significant controversy has been the *timing* of these events with respect to the killing of the Passover lambs. That the resurrection was on the first day of the week (the day after the weekly Sabbath) is not disputed, but “On which day was the crucifixion?” and “On which day was the Lord’s Supper instituted?” and “When did these events occur in relation to the Passover?” These are the controversial questions.

In the following table, the author has attempted to harmonize the gospels with respect to the events in question. Small excerpts are included where a passage contained a clue as to the timing of the event. This type of presentation is very useful as it allows the relevant passages to be viewed simultaneously.

EVENT	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Scribes and chief priests conspire, Satan enters Judas, Judas visits the chief priests before Passover	Mat 26:2-5, 14-17 “ <i>after two days is the feast of the passover</i> ” (vs. 2) “ <i>Then assembled together the chief priests</i> ” (vs. 3) “ <i>But they said, Not on the feast day</i> ” (vs. 5) “ <i>Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests</i> ” (vs. 14)	Mar 14:1-2, 10-11 “ <i>After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him</i> ” (vs. 1), “ <i>But they said, Not on the feast day</i> ” (vs. 2) “ <i>And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests</i> ” (vs. 10)	22:1-6, “ <i>Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the passover</i> ” (vs. 1), “ <i>Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. 4 And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains</i> ”	Joh: N/A
Disciples prepare the Passover	Mat 26:17-19 “ <i>the first day of the feast of unleavened bread</i> ”	Mar 14:12-16 “ <i>the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover</i> ”	Luk 22:7-13 “ <i>the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed</i> ”	Joh: N/A
Jesus identifies His betrayer Judas leaves the supper	Mat 26:21-25	Mar 14:18-21	Luk: N/A	Joh 13:21-30, “ <i>When Jesus had thus said</i> ” (vs. 21), “ <i>He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night.</i> ” (vs. 30)
Lord’s Supper instituted during Passover meal	Mat 26:20-35 “ <i>when the even was come</i> ”	Mar 14:17-31 “ <i>in the evening</i> ”	Luk 22:14-38 “ <i>when the hour was come</i> ”	Joh 13:1-17 “ <i>before the feast of passover</i> ” (vs. 1), “ <i>supper being ended</i> ” (vs. 2)
Jesus washes the disciples feet during Passover meal	Mat: N/A	Mar: N/A	Luk: N/A	Joh 13:4-12 “ <i>he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments</i> ” (vs. 4), “ <i>after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again</i> ” (vs. 12)
Jesus and disciples leave the upper room and go the Mount of Olives	Mat 26:30 “ <i>when they had sung an hymn</i> ”	Mar 14:26 “ <i>when they had sung an hymn</i> ”	Luk 22:39	Joh 18:1 “ <i>When Jesus had spoken these words</i> ”
Jesus warns Peter about denying Him thrice <i>[Note: Luke and John seem to have the warning of Peter as occurring before they left the upper room, but Matthew and Mark, after.]</i>	Mat 26:33-35	Mar 14:29-31	Luk 22:31-34	Joh 13:36-38

EVENT	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Jesus prays at Gethsemane	Mat 26:36-46 <i>"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane"</i>	Mar 14:32-42	Luk 22:39-46 <i>"And when he was at the place"</i>	Joh 18:1 <i>"When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden"</i>
Jesus apprehended at Gethsemane	Mat 26:47-57 <i>"And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came"</i>	Mar 14:43-53 <i>"And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas"</i>	Luk 22:47-54 <i>"And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas"</i>	Joh 18:2-12 <i>"Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither"</i>
Jesus brought before the high priest	Mat 26:57-68	Mar 14:53-65	Luk 22:54,63-71	Joh 18:12-14,19-24
Peter's three denials	Mat 26:69-75 <i>"And immediately the cock crew"</i> (vs. 74)	Mar 14:66-72 <i>"And the second time the cock crew"</i> (vs. 72)	Luk 22:55-62 <i>"And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew"</i> (vs. 60)	Joh 18:15-18,25-27 <i>"Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew."</i> (vs. 27)
Jesus taken before Pilate	Mat 27:1-2,11-26 <i>"When the morning was come"</i>	Mar 15:1-15 <i>"straightway in the morning"</i>	Luk 23:1-25 <i>"as soon as it was day"</i> (22:54)	Joh 18:28-19:16 <i>"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"</i> (vs. 18:28), <i>"And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!"</i> (vs. 19:14)
Jesus Crucified	Mat 27:27-56	Mar 15:16-41 <i>"it was the third hour and they crucified him"</i> (vs. 25)	Luk 23:26-49	Joh 19:16-30
Darkness over the whole land	Mat 27:45 <i>"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour."</i>	Mar 15:33, <i>"And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour"</i>	Luk 23:44 <i>"And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour."</i>	Joh: N/A
Jesus Dies	Mat 27:50 <i>"when he had cried again with a loud voice"</i>	Mar 15:37	Luk 23:46 <i>"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost."</i>	Joh 19: 30

EVENT	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Jesus Buried	Mat 27:57-61 <i>"when the even was come"</i>	Mar 15:42-47 <i>"when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath" (vs. 42)</i>	Luk 23:50-56 <i>"that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on" (vs. 54), "And they returned, and ... rested the sabbath day according to the commandment" (vs. 56)</i>	Joh 19:31-42 <i>"because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath was an high day)" (vs. 31), "There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand" (vs. 42)</i>
Jesus Resurrected	Mat 28:1-10 <i>"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week"</i>	Mar 16:1-11 <i>"when the sabbath was past" (vs. 1), "very early in the morning, the first day of the week, ... at the rising of the sun" (vs. 2), "early the first day of the week" (vs. 9)</i>	Luk 24:1-11 <i>"upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning" (vs. 1)</i>	Joh 20:1-18 <i>"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark" (vs. 1)</i>

Table 1: Harmonization of the relevant events

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

As Table 1 shows, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all show an identical timing of events with respect to Passover and the Lord's Supper. The Synoptic record shows, without controversy, that the Lord's Supper was instituted during the annual Passover meal. Consider both the words of Jesus and the actions of the disciples regarding the preparation of the Passover meal:

"17 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? **18** 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. **19** And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and **they made ready the passover. 20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.**" (Mat 26:17-20)

"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? **13** And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. **14** And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where **I shall eat the passover with my disciples?** **15** And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. **16** And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and **they made ready the passover. 17 And in**

the evening he cometh with the twelve. 18 And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.” (Mar 14:12-18)

“**7** Then came **the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. 8** And he sent Peter and John, saying, **Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat. 9** And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? **10** 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. **11** And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where **I shall eat the passover with my disciples? 12** And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. **13** And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and **they made ready the passover. 14** And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. **15** And he said unto them, **With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: 16** For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” (Luk 22:7-16)

The following is the order in which the events occurred.

- Jesus told the disciples to prepare the Passover. He told them this on “*the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed*” (Luk 22:7), i.e., on “*the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover*” (Mar 14:12). (Note that it is *very* clear from these passages that Jesus did not die on the day the Passover was killed. He was not apprehended in the garden of Gethsemane until late that night.)
- Jesus told them who to see about a room in which to keep the Passover, “*And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?*” (Mat 28:18, Mar 14:13, Luk 22:10). From these arrangements, we know **where** Jesus kept the feast of the Passover. He kept it in a large upper room in a man’s house, not at the Cross. We can also glean more information about from Jesus meant by the words “*I shall eat the passover with my disciples*”. Jesus said that He would not only “*keep the passover*” but also that He would “*eat the passover*” which further indicates that He was referencing the Passover meal and not only that He would fulfill the role of the Passover lamb at the Cross. He also said that He would keep it “*with [His] disciples*” which could not be said of the Cross, for they all forsook Him.
- Jesus specifically said that He would eat the Passover with His disciples and that He had been earnestly awaiting it (“*With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer*” (Luk 22:15)). Are we to assume that Jesus failed to keep an appointment that He very explicitly arranged? Again, Jesus explicitly said “*I will keep the passover*” (Mat 26:18) and “*I shall eat the passover with my disciples*” (Mar 14:14, Luk 22:11). Was Jesus mistaken or confused? Did Jesus lie? Certainly not. He did exactly as He said He would do. He ate the Passover with His disciples

in a large upper room at a man's house. Also note that He did this "*before I suffer*" (Luk 22:15). That is, He ate the Passover meal **before** His crucifixion.

- After "*they made ready the passover*" (Luk 22:13), they waited until "*even had come*" (Mat 26:20, Mar 14:17), the appropriate time to eat the Passover, and Jesus "*sat down, and the twelve apostles with him*" (Luk 22:14, Mar 14:17-18, Mat 26:20) and ate it. It was in this context that the Lord's Supper was instituted. Jesus could not have kept the Passover a day earlier than the Jews. The Synoptic writers are very explicit that this occurred on "*the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed*" (Luk 22:7), i.e., on "*the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover*" (Mar 14:12). These two verses in combination indicate that "*they killed the passover*" (Mar 14:12) "*when the passover must be killed*" (Luk 22:7), i.e., on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan, not a day earlier or later. Furthermore, as we have seen, the Passover lamb must be killed by a priest in the Temple, which did not occur until the day "*when they killed the passover*" (Mar 14:12), so there could not be an early Passover.
- Jesus identified Judas as His betrayer before the institution of the Lord's Supper (Mat 26:25, Mar 14:20, Joh 13:21-30).
- Just after the institution of the Lord's Supper, they sung a hymn and went to the garden to pray (Mat 26:30, Mar 14:26, Luk 22:39, Joh 18:1). It was night and the start of the 15th of Nisan. Judas knew that Jesus would be at Gethsemane (Luk 22:39, Joh 18:2) and came with a mob to apprehend him.
- He was taken to the chief priests and tried in the early hours of the morning just before sunrise. This is the time when Peter denied the Lord thrice (cocks crow in the morning).
- Shortly after sunrise they brought Jesus before Pilate. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod who, in turn, sent him back to Pilate. Pressured by the Jews, Pilate then sat in the judgment seat and pronounced the sentence. This occurred about 9:00 AM (the third hour).
- About noon (the sixth hour), darkness covered the sky for about three hours.
- Christ said his final words and died about 3:00 PM (the ninth hour).
- The malefactors' legs were broken to speed their death so that the bodies could be taken off the cross in observance of the weekly Sabbath, which shows that this event occurred on Friday, i.e., the day before the Sabbath.
- Joseph of Arimathaea (with the help of Mary and the other women) buried the body of Jesus just before sunset of the same day.
- Joseph and the women then observed the weekly Sabbath and came back just before sunrise on the first day of the week to find that Christ had already risen.

This is the traditional understanding of these events: a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection. This understanding precludes the crucifixion from occurring while the Passover lambs were being slain in the temple because Jesus ate the Passover before He was apprehended.

The Lord's Supper was instituted Thursday evening, "*the same night in which he was betrayed*" (1 Cor 11:23). The Synoptics are extremely clear and leave room for no other interpretation.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Were it not for John's seemingly incongruent account, there would be no controversy regarding the timing of events. However, John cannot be discounted. His account must also be acknowledged as correct. The fact that three writers seemingly disagree with one is of no consequence if we believe John's Gospel also to be written under divine inspiration. It falls to us to pursue an interpretation that brings all the Gospels into agreement. In this pursuit, many elaborate theories have been proposed. Many of which rely solely on speculation and extra-biblical evidence. In my opinion, the simplest resolution that allows scripture to interpret itself has the most likelihood of being correct. In the words of Albert Einstein, "Things should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler."

JOHN 13: WAS IT THE LORD'S SUPPER?

"1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. **2** And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;" (Joh 13:1-2)

"29 For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor." (Joh 13:29)

"37 Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. **38** Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice." (Joh 13:37-38)

The first controversial passage is John 13. This chapter is traditionally held to coincide with the Lord's Supper as found in Mat 26, Mar 14 and Luk 22. I believe this to be correct, but some analysis must be done to prove that this is the case. But, first, we will examine an alternate view.

EXAMINATION OF DR. JOHN LIGHTFOOT'S ARGUMENTS ON JOHN 13

Dr. John Lightfoot, in "*A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*" (see his notes on Matt 26:6) presents a very convincing argument that the supper of John 13 is not the Lord's Supper (which he also believes to have occurred on the Passover), but that it is actually the same supper that occurred in Bethany at the house of Simon the Leper (Mat

26:6-14, Mar 14:3-10). His argument is based in part on his assertion that the words in John 13:1, “*before the feast of the passover*”, indicate that the supper of John 13 occurred at least one day before the Passover, i.e., some day prior to the 14th of Nisan. In addition, Dr. Lightfoot argues convincingly that the supper of John 13 could not be the Passover because some of the disciples thought that Judas had gone out to “*buy those things that we have need of against the feast*” (Joh 13:38), which Lightfoot interprets as the “*feast of the passover*” from vs. 1. But, as we shall see later, “*against the feast*” could mean the remainder of the “*the feast of unleavened bread [...], which is called the Passover*” (Luk 21:1).

The problem with Lightfoot’s interpretation is that his treatment of Joh 13:38, “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice*”, is very weak. Jesus used almost the exact words when warning Peter in each of the Synoptic gospels and in each, Jesus gave this warning just after the institution of the Lord’s Supper. It is far easier to accommodate “*before the feast of the passover*” (vs. 1) and “*buy those things that we have need of against the feast*” (vs. 38) than it is to accommodate the warning of Peter (vs. 38).

Let’s examine, for a moment, the supper at the house of Simon the Leper (Mat 26:6-14, Mar 14:3-10) and the strikingly similar account of the supper in Joh 12:1-12, both of which occurred while Jesus was staying in Bethany. This will illustrate the difficulty of harmonizing John’s timeline with that of the Synoptics. At the supper in Mat 26:6-14 and Mar 14:3-10, “*a woman*” broke an “*alabaster box of very precious ointment*” and “*poured it on his head, as he sat at meat*” (i.e. Jesus’ head). In the supper of Joh 12, “*Mary*” took “*a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair*”. Strangely, Jesus and the disciples reacted *exactly* the same way in both cases using almost exactly the same words. At first glance, the similarity of these two events gives the appearance that they are the same event, but that the details of John’s account are in conflict with those of Matthew and Mark. These might be understood as different occurrences because of the following.

- In the Synoptic accounts, the supper was held two days before the passover (Mat 26:2, Mar 14:1), but, in John’s account, it was held “*six days before the passover*” (Joh 12:1).
- In the Synoptic accounts, Jesus’ head was anointed, but, in John’s account, His feet were anointed.
- In the Synoptic accounts, Jesus was anointed by “*a woman*”, but, in John’s account, He was anointed by “*Mary*”.
- In the Synoptic accounts, Judas leaves to conspire with the chief priests, but in John’s account, this is not mentioned.

However, John 12:1-8, Mat 26:6-14 and Mar 14:3-10 could be viewed as describing the same event if the following assertions are considered true.

- There is a four day gap between verses 1 and 2 of John 12 (which is entirely possible, as vs. 1 may be merely indicating when Jesus arrived in Bethany and not the exact day of the supper).

- Both Matthew and Luke chose to refer to Mary as “*a woman*” (this may be reasonable if it was significant that this act was performed by a woman rather than a man, e.g., if preparing bodies for burial was traditionally the job of women, which is congruent with the preparation and application of spices at Christ’s burial, cf. Mar 16:1, Luk 23:55-56).
- Mary broke an “*alabaster box of very precious ointment*” (Mat 26:7) containing “*a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly*” (Joh 12:3) and anointed both Jesus’ head and feet.
- John does not have to record that Judas left to conspire with the chief priests, especially since Matthew, Mark, and Luke, whose Gospels were written much earlier than John’s, already had recorded it.

So, in contrast to Dr. Lightfoot’s proposition, it is conceivable that John describes the supper at the house of Simon the Leper (Mat 26:6-14, Mar 14:3-10) in John 12 and not John 13. This is much more plausible than that John 13 was the supper at Simon the Leper’s house given the difficulties Dr. Lightfoot has with the warning of Peter in John 13:38.

ARGUMENTS SHOWING JOHN 13 IS THE LORD’S SUPPER

We will now present the arguments that show that John 13 does describe the Passover meal in which the Lord’s Supper was instituted and give plausible explanations of the problematic verses.

John 13:18-30 Jesus Identifies Judas as His Betrayer

“**18** I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. **19** Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he. **20** Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. **21** When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. **22** Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. **23** Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. **24** Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. **25** He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? **26** Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. **27** And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. **28** Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. **29** For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. **30** He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night.” (Joh 13:18-30)

John 13:18-30 gives the account of Jesus identifying Judas as His betrayer. This event is also described in Matthew and Mark. Although there is more detail in John's account of this event than in the Synoptic accounts, the fact that both John and the Synoptics include this event helps to establish that the supper of John 13 is the same Passover supper described by the Synoptic writers.

[Given this understanding, it is interesting to note that in the Synoptic accounts, the departure of Judas happened just before the institution of the Lord's Supper. This helps us understand the sequence of events as it relates to foot washing and the Lord's Supper. Many have supposed that foot washing occurred after the Lord's Supper because of the words "supper being ended" in Joh 13:2. However, the timing of the departure of Judas just before the institution of the Lord's Supper says that foot washing must have occurred before the institution of the Lord's Supper for that is the timing given by the Synoptics. According to Luk 22:20, Jesus used "the cup after supper" to institute the Passover. This "cup after supper" would correspond to the third or four cups of wine mandated by the Jewish Passover traditions of the time. So, the Passover supper was still underway when Judas left. That foot washing occurred before the Lord's Supper is further substantiated by observing that when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, "He riseth from supper" (Joh 13:4), i.e., supper was in progress. In addition, when Jesus was finished washing their feet, He "set down again" (Joh 13:12), i.e., He resumed the supper. Also, Greek scholars, A. T. Robertson and Marvin R. Vincent, both agree that "supper being ended" in vs. 2 means "during supper" or "while supper was in progress".]

John 13:38 "... The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice."

John 13:38 gives one of the most convincing proofs that John 13 describes the Passover meal in which the Lord's Supper was instituted.

"38 Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice." (Joh 13:38)

"34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." (Mat 26:34)

"30 And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." (Mar 14:30)

"34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. (Luk 22:34)

This is one of Christ's prophecies and is central to the study of the life of Peter. It occurs once in each of the four Gospels. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, this warning to Peter occurs just after the institution of the Lord's Supper. Its occurrence at the end of John 13 is a very strong indicator that the supper of John 13 is the Passover in which the Lord's Supper was instituted.

John 18:1 “When Jesus had spoken these words ...”

Another verse in favor of John 13 being the Lord’s Supper is John 18:1.

“**1** When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples.”
(Joh 18:1)

John 18 describes Christ’s betrayal by Judas and His apprehension by the chief priests and captains in the garden of Gethsemane. An examination of John 14-17 reveals that there are no breaks that indicate that Jesus and his disciples left the place of the supper in John 13. It appears that words of John 14-17 were all spoken in the context of the supper of John 13. The phrase “*When Jesus had spoken these words*” in John 18:1 indicates that after Jesus’ “high priestly prayer” in John 17, He “*went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples*” (Joh 18:1), i.e., to the garden of Gethsemane. In the Synoptics, Jesus and His disciples left the upper room, where they celebrated the Passover and instituted the Lord’s Supper, and went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray (Mat 26:30,36, Mar 14:26,32, Luk 22:39-40). The departure to the garden of Gethsemane and Christ’s betrayal and apprehension there is an important time marker that helps us harmonize John’s timeline with the Synoptic accounts.

PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR PROBLEMATIC VERSES IN JOHN 13

There is controversy over whether or not John 13 describes the Passover meal in which the Lord’s Supper was instituted, because there are several aspects of the chapter that are hard to reconcile with the Synoptic accounts.

Two Big Differences: The Lord’s Supper and Foot Washing

At first glance, there are two striking differences between John’s account and that of the Synoptics. First, the Synoptics describe the institution of the Lord’s Supper, but this is not described at all in John’s account. Secondly, John’s account of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet (Joh 13:4-12) is not mentioned in any of the Synoptic accounts. Both of these alleged disparities can be explained by acknowledging that John’s gospel was written much later than the Synoptics and that John was “filling in the gaps” that were left by the Synoptic writers. The Synoptics had already recorded the details of the institution of the Lord’s Supper three times, so John did not need to describe it again. However, none of the Synoptic writers mentioned Jesus washing the disciples’ feet, so John filled in that gap in his account.

[As an aside, many feel strongly that the Lord’s Supper and “foot washing” should be practiced together by the Church. However, it is interesting to note that the Bible describes the institution of the Lord’s Supper and Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet in a mutually exclusive fashion. In addition, no reference to foot washing is found in 1 Cor 11, where Paul is instructing the Corinthians how to properly keep the Lord’s Supper and

there is no example of a “foot washing service” actually performed as a religious ceremony in the New Testament. If “foot washing” and “communion” were supposed to be associated and practiced together, then it seems that the Lord would have made such an association in the scriptures or given examples thereof in the book of Acts or the Epistles. However, the Bible specifically describes them separately.]

John 13:1 “before the feast of the passover”

“1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. **2** And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;” (Joh 13:1-2)

We have shown that the Synoptic writers very clearly place the institution of the Lord's Supper to have occurred in the context of a traditional Passover meal. The Synoptics are extremely explicit about the timing of these events. The Lord's Supper was instituted on the *“first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover”* (Mar 14:12, Mat 26:17, Luk 22:7) We have also shown that because of Jesus warning to Peter in John 13:38, and because Jesus departed to Gethsemane just after the supper of John 13 (Joh 18:1), that it is very difficult to have any understanding other than that the supper of John 13 is the same as the Synoptics' Passover supper in which the Lord's Supper was instituted.

Why then does John use the phrase *“before the feast of the passover”*? Greek scholar A. T. Robertson gives this explanation.

“Now before the feast of the passover (pro de tes heortes tou pascha). Just before, John means, not twenty-four hours before, that is our Thursday evening (beginning of 15th of Nisan, sunset to sunset Jewish day), since Jesus was crucified on Friday 15th of Nisan. Hence Jesus ate the regular passover meal at the usual time.” (A. T. Robertson on Jon 13:1, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*)

Robertson indicates that *“before the feast of the passover”* means earlier in the day on the 14th of Nisan, prior to sitting down at the Passover supper.

While Robertson's assertion is correct in his conclusion, the phrase *“before the feast of the passover”* can also be viewed from another angle. The grammar John 13:1 is complicated by many clauses. The essential sentence is *“he loved them unto the end”*. The other clauses serve to augment and modify the meaning of this essential sentence. The clause *“having loved his own which were in the world”* clarifies **whom** He loved, *“his own which were in the world”*, and states that in addition to loving them unto the end, Jesus had loved them up until this time. The clause *“when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father”* indicates **when** *“he loved them unto the end”*. The clause *“before the feast of the passover”* indicates **when** *“Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this*

world unto the Father". So, in 13:1, John not only introduces the context of the Passover, but he also states that Jesus approached this Passover with great anticipation because He "*knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father*". In this verse, John also conveys Jesus' love toward his disciples. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown write the following.

"having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end — The meaning is, that on the very edge of His last sufferings, when it might have been supposed that He would be absorbed in His own awful prospects, He was so far from forgetting "His own," who were to be left struggling "in the world" after He had "departed out of it to the Father" (Joh 17:11), that in His care for them He seemed scarce to think of Himself save in connection with them ..." (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown on Jon 13:1, A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments)

This interpretation is entirely consistent with the content of the rest of scripture. That Jesus greatly anticipated this final Passover with His disciples, and that He knew that after this Passover He would suffer is evidenced in Luk 22:15, "*And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer*". In the discussions that occurred between Jesus and the disciples after the supper (Jon 14-17), He did not cease encouraging them. He made clear that He will be with them in the form of the Holy Ghost, saying "*I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you*" (Joh 14:18). He warns that they will be sorrowful over His death, but reassures them saying "*ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy*" (Joh 16:20). Truly, His focus was not on Himself, but "*his own*". Truly, "*he loved them unto the end*".

Even though John 13:1 is somewhat confusing, it can be easily interpreted in the light of the other evidence in John 13 that shows that the supper of John 13 is the same Passover supper described by the Synoptics (e.g., the identification of Judas as the betrayer, the warning to Peter, and the departure to Gethsemane). John primary purposes in John 13:1 are to state (1) that that Jesus was aware that He was about to suffer and that He knew this "*before the feast of the passover*" and (2) to express that Jesus loves His disciples.

JOHN 18:28 "... BUT THAT THEY MIGHT EAT THE PASSOVER"

"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." (Joh 18:28)

The next controversial passage in John is 18:28 in which John records that the Jewish mob "*went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.*" At first glance, the phrase "*that they might eat the passover*" seems to indicate that the Jewish mob had not yet eaten the traditional Passover meal. This leads many to believe either that John's account is somehow incongruent with the Synoptic accounts or that the supper of John 13 could not have been the Passover.

We cannot view John's account as being incongruent with the Synoptics if we believe that "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*" (2 Tim 3:16). In his own Gospel, John himself stated "*the scripture cannot be broken*" (Joh 10:35). Jesus taught that every "*jot*" and every "*tittle*" is important (Mat 5:18).

Thus far, we have shown that the Synoptic accounts clearly and explicitly describe the Lord's Supper as having been instituted in the context of a traditional Passover meal. We have also shown clear evidence of the congruency of the events of the supper of John 13 with the events of the Synoptic accounts of the Passover supper in which the Lord's Supper was instituted (e.g., the identification of Judas as the betrayer, the warning to Peter, and the departure to Gethsemane).

Why then does John 18:28 seem to say that the Jewish mob has not yet eaten the Passover? The answer lies in the Passover terminology used in scripture. We will now examine the Passover terminology used in the both the New Testament and the Old Testament and show that such terminology offers a plausible explanation of John 18:28.

PASSOVER TERMINOLOGY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Consider the following verses.

"1 Now the feast of **unleavened bread** drew nigh, **which is called the Passover.**" (Luk 22:1)

"7 Then came **the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed.**" (Luk 22:7)

"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?" (Mar 14:12)

"17 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?" (Mat 26:17)

All Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem (i.e., "*the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in*", Deu 16:6) to celebrate the feast of Unleavened Bread (Exo 23:14-17, Deu 16:16). The Passover meal was held on the evening of the 14th of Nisan which, since days were reckoned from sunset to sunset, began the 15th of Nisan, which was technically the start of the feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:6). Since the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread were so close together and since they must make the journey to Jerusalem to keep them, both feasts were often considered as one eight day long feast and referred to by the same name. Sometimes they were referred to as "Unleavened Bread" and sometimes as "Passover".

Luk 22:1, "*Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover*", shows that the feast of Unleavened Bread was called the Passover. Also, the 14th of Nisan (Lev 23:5),

“when they killed the passover” (Mar 14:12, Luk 22:7), was called *“the first day of unleavened bread”* (Mar 14:12, Luk 22:7, Mat 26:17).

PASSOVER TERMINOLOGY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is not only in the New Testament that the names of the two feasts are interchangeable, but also in the Law. For example, in Exo 12:18, Unleavened Bread is described as lasting from the fourteenth, the day of Passover, until the twenty-first (an eight day period including the Passover).

“17 And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance forever. 18 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.” (Exo 12:17-18)

Consider also the following instructions from Deu 16:

“1 Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. 2 Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there. 3 Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life. 4 And there shall be no leavened bread seen with thee in all thy coast seven days; neither shall there any thing of the flesh, which thou sacrificedst the first day at even, remain all night until the morning. 5 Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee: 6 But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt. 7 And thou shalt roast and eat it in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: and thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents. 8 Six days thou shalt eat unleavened bread: and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work therein.” (Deu 16:1-8)

Notice in Deu 16:3 how Passover and Unleavened Bread are combined: *“Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it [i.e., the Passover]; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith [i.e., with the Passover]”*. So from this verse we see that “eating the Passover,” although normally understood to indicate the eating of the Passover lamb, *can* refer to other meals from the evening of the 14th until sundown on the 21st. This is an important point to remember when interpreting John 18:28. Also note that Deu 16:4 refers to the day the Passover lamb is slain as *“the first day”*

of Unleavened Bread, which is entirely congruent with Mar 14:12, “*the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover*”.

Deu 16:2 also shows how Passover and Unleavened Bread are combined. Notice that it says “*Thou shalt sacrifice the Passover [...] of the **flock and the herd**.*” This is significant when you remember that the Passover sacrificed on the evening of the 14th had to be a “*male [lamb] of the first year [...] from the sheep, or from the goats*” (Ex 12:5). It had to be from the flock (sheep or goats) and not from the herd (cattle). Sacrifices from the herd must be additional sacrifices other than the Passover lamb. Numbers 28:17-19 shows that they sacrificed additional meat offerings that included cattle during unleavened bread, specifically on the 15th:

“**16** And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the LORD. **17** And in the fifteenth day of this month is the feast: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. **18** In the first day shall be an holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work therein: **19** But ye shall offer a sacrifice made by fire for a burnt offering unto the LORD; **two young bullocks**, and one ram, and seven lambs of the first year: they shall be unto you without blemish” (Num 28:16-19)

So, we see that to “sacrifice the Passover,” although normally understood to indicate the sacrificing of the Passover lamb, *can* refer to other sacrifices made from the evening of the 14th until sundown on the 21st. Note also that the language of Num, 28:16-17 that states that the 14th is the Passover and the 15th is the “feast” as if to mean the “feast of the Passover” or the “feast pertaining to the Passover”. This is an important point to remember when interpreting John 18:28.

THE RESOLUTION OF JOHN 18:28

We have shown from the scriptures that, in the terminology of both the Old and New Testaments, the terms Passover and Unleavened Bread are used interchangeably. This intermingling of the names of the feasts is so extensive that the sacrifices made during Unleavened Bread are referred to as being Passover sacrifices (“*Thou shalt sacrifice the Passover [...] of the flock and the herd*”, Deu 16:2) and that they ate unleavened bread *with the Passover* for seven days (“*Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it [i.e., the Passover]; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith [i.e., with the Passover]*”, 16:3).

In John 18:28, John noted that “*they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover*”. In this case, the Jewish mob was not concerned about not being able to eat the Passover lamb itself, but the other meals and sacrifices that were made during the feast Unleavened Bread (e.g., the two young bullock commanded in Num 28:16-19).

The terminology of John 18:28 is entirely consistent with the Passover terminology of both the Old and New Testaments, and does not necessitate that the Passover had not yet taken place.

The commentaries also agree with this interpretation of “*that they might eat the passover*” in John 18:28.

“But might eat the passover (alla phagosin to pascha). Second aorist active subjunctive of the defective verb *esthio*, to eat. This phrase may mean to eat the passover meal as in Mat 27:17 (Mar 14:12, Mar 14:14; Luk 22:11, Luk 22:15), but it does not have to mean that. In 2Ch 30:22 we read: “And they did eat the festival seven days” when the paschal festival is meant, not the paschal lamb or the paschal supper. There are eight other examples of pascha in John’s Gospel and in all of them the feast is meant, not the supper. If we follow John’s use of the word, it is the feast here, not the meal of Joh 13:2 which was the regular passover meal. This interpretation keeps John in harmony with the Synoptics.” (A. T. Roberson on John 18:28, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*)

“That they might eat the passover - Some maintain that t? pas?a here does not mean the paschal lamb, but the other sacrifices which were offered during the paschal solemnity - for this had been eaten the evening before; and that our Lord was crucified the day after the passover.” (Adam Clarke on John 18:28, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible*)

“that they might eat the passover; pure and undefiled; not the passover lamb, for that they had eaten the night before; but the “Chagigah”, or feast on the fifteenth day of the month.” (Dr. John Gill on John 18:28, *John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*)

“that they might eat the passover, not the paschal lamb (that was eaten the night before) but the passover-feast, upon the sacrifices which were offered on the fifteenth day, the *Chagigah*, as they called it, the passover-bullocks spoken of Deu 16:2; 2Ch 30:24; 2Ch 35:8, 2Ch 35:9.” (Matthew Henry on John 18:28, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*)

“That they might eat the passover - See the notes at Mat_26:2, Mat_26:17. This defilement, produced by contact with a Gentile, they considered as equivalent to that of the contact of a dead body Lev_22:4-6; Num_5:2, and as disqualifying them to partake of the passover in a proper manner. The word translated “passover” means properly the paschal lamb which was slain and eaten on the observance of this feast. This rite Jesus had observed with his disciples the day before this. It has been supposed by many that he anticipated the usual time of observing it one day, and was crucified on the day on which the Jews observed it; but this opinion is improbable. The very day of keeping the ordinance was specified in the law of Moses, and it is not probable that the Saviour departed from the commandment. All the circumstances, also, lead us to suppose that he observed it at the usual time and manner, Mat_26:17, Mat_26:19. The only passage which has led to a contrary opinion is this in John; but here the word passover does not, of necessity, mean the paschal lamb. It probably refers to the Feast which followed the sacrifice of the lamb, and which continued seven days. Compare Num_28:16-17. The whole feast was called the

Passover, and they were unwilling to defile themselves, even though the paschal lamb had been killed, because it would disqualify them for participating in the remainder of the ceremonies (Lightfoot).” (Albert Barnes on John 18:28, *Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible*)

JOHN 19:14 “*THE PREPARATION OF THE PASSOVER*”

“**13** When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. **14** And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!” (Joh 19:13-14)

The final knot to unravel is Joh 19:14 where John states that Christ was crucified on “*the preparation of the passover*”. Some, who want to believe that Christ was crucified while the Passover lambs were being slain in the temple, profess that the phrase “*the preparation of the passover*” proves that Christ was crucified on the 13th or early on the 14th because the preparations for the Passover (i.e., ridding the house of leaven, sacrificing the animals, etc.) were being made that day. This would be an admirable attempt did it not stretch the Synoptic account grossly out of shape.

The term “the preparation” was clearly used to indicate the day before the weekly Sabbath. This is plainly stated in Mark 15:42 which unambiguously states that Christ was crucified on “*the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath.*” Joh 19:31 also makes this clear by stating “*it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath was an high day)*” (also see 19:42). Every Passover week (i.e., Passover + Unleavened Bread), since it was an eight-day period, included a weekly Sabbath. These Sabbaths were treated with extra reverence (i.e., “*an high day*”). Deu 21:22-23 makes it clear that those who are put to death are to be buried the same day because their bodies are abhorrent to God.

“**22** And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: **23** His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.” (Deu 21:22-23)

The following day was the annual Passover Sabbath and they took great care not to defile it. “*The preparation of the passover*” means the preparation that occurred within the Passover week. Note that the text does not read, nor is it translated, “the preparation *for* the passover”.

OTHER THEORIES

Those who hold that Christ must have been crucified on the 14th of Nisan as the Passover lambs were being slain will go to extreme measures to force the scriptures to say what they clearly do not say.

Some propose that the Jews had corrupted the Passover by observing it a day late, on the 15th. They argue that Christ kept the Passover on the 14th, the correct date, and then was crucified on the 15th. This could not have been because the Passover had to be slain in the temple (Deu 16:5) and because of this there would have been no lamb.

Others fix this omission by proposing the Pharisees and the Sadducees disagreed on the date and that Passover lambs were slain on both days. They cite the Dead Sea scrolls for some evidence of this. These arguments either have Christ celebrating the Passover on the wrong day or being crucified on the wrong Passover.

Still others insist that Christ was crucified on Wednesday because Christ said that He would be three days and three nights in the belly of the earth. The traditional understanding only has Christ in the tomb for two nights and one day (not counting fractional days and nights). A Wednesday crucifixion does indeed place Christ in the tomb three days and three nights, but it is totally out of step with the biblical account that Christ was buried on the evening before a weekly Sabbath, one area where all four Gospels agree.

SUMMARY

The exact timing of the Lord's Supper in relation to the Passover has been the subject of vigorous debate over the centuries. However, there are several boundaries that constrain the set of plausible understandings of this subject. First, neither the Synoptic gospels, nor the gospel of John can be considered independently. They must be harmonized. Second, the instructions regarding the Passover in the Law must be taken into account (e.g., that the Passover must be killed by a priest at the temple). And lastly, it must be recognized that the distinctions between the feasts Passover and Unleavened Bread are blurred in both the Old and New Testaments.

Based on these arguments, one should be reasonably convinced that the Lord's Supper was instituted in the context of a traditional Passover. This fact provides a very strong argument that Jesus broke unleavened bread at the Lord's Supper since leavened bread was not permitted at the Passover.