

# Was the “Last Supper” the Passover?

## Did Christ Have to Die At the Same Time As the Passover Lamb Was Sacrificed?

by John Sash

Matthew, Mark, and Luke plainly state or imply that the Last Supper Christ ate with His disciples was the Passover. Yet why is it that many do not believe this? There are basically three reasons. First, Paul, in I Corinthians, calls this meal the Lord’s Supper and leaves out the term “Passover”. Second, John seems to say this meal took place twenty-four hours before the Passover, and third, Christ had to die the exact time the Passover lambs were killed. This last item seems to be the most important reason for this belief for many.

We are going to examine the synoptic gospel accounts and see that they plainly state **this meal was the Passover**. Next we will examine the issue of whether Christ was to die at the same time the Passover lambs were killed, and we will find that **to fulfill the symbolic meaning of the Passover lambs Christ had to die after the Passover lambs were killed and not at the same time**. We will then examine John’s account and find that John actually supports the synoptic accounts, when a few difficult scriptures are understood properly. Finally, we will look at I Corinthians and see that it is more logical to interpret Paul’s words to describe the Passover rather than a weekly or periodic Lord’s Supper.

Let’s carefully go over the synoptic accounts. Reading these accounts objectively and carefully will do far more to convince a reader whether or not the synoptic accounts say the last meal was the Passover than my saying one way or the other. I have underlined portions that indicate the meal was the Passover.

*Matthew 26:17-21, “Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, ‘Where do you want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?’ And He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, “The Teacher says, ‘My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.’”’ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. Now when evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. Now as they were eating....”*

*Mark 14:12-18, “Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, ‘Where do you want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?’ So He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, ‘Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. And wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, “Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?”’ Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us.’ And His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover. In the evening He came with the twelve. Now as they sat and ate....”*

*Luke 22:7-16, “Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.’ So they said to Him, ‘Where do You want us to prepare?’ And He said to them, ‘Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, “The Teacher says to you, ‘Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’” Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.’ So they went and found it as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover. And when the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’”*

## Fulfillment of the Passover Lamb

Christ fulfilled the Passover Lamb, but was the fulfillment His death on the stake? Most of us believe so, and therefore we reason that the Last Supper was not the Passover because Christ had to die at the same time as the Passover lambs died at the end of the 14th of Abib. This is a logical assumption, but that's just the problem. We have assumed rather than study it thoroughly. When we study the meaning of the Passover lamb as well as the meaning of the other sacrificial offerings, we make an astounding discovery! **It is the other sacrificial offerings, and not the Passover lamb, that symbolize the death of Christ! All of these other sacrifices were given on the 15th, the day after the Passover lamb was killed. Therefore for Christ to fulfill these sacrifices, He had to die on the same day, the 15th. That means the Last Supper was the Passover at the end of the 14th.**

The following are major defining aspects of Christ's death on the stake:

1. Christ's death covers all men.
2. Christ's death redeems us from death.
3. Christ's death pays for our sins.
4. Christ's death was a holy offering to God.
5. Christ's blood sanctifies and atones for our sins.
6. Christ's death was outside the gates of Jerusalem.
7. Christ's death immediately wrought victory.
8. Christ's death was accompanied by great suffering.
9. Christ's suffering and death took place on one day.
10. Christ's sacrificial death was a total offering to God.

We will discover that each of these defining characteristics of Christ's death on the stake fulfilled the symbolism of the other sacrificial offerings, but not of the Passover lamb.

- 1. Christ's death covered all men.** This was not true of the Passover sacrifice, which only covered the first-born. But the other sacrifices did cover everyone, including the stranger.
  - A. *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive"* (I Cor. 15:22).
  - B. *"And not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad"* (John 11:52).
  - C. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"* (John 3:16).
  - D. *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23).
  - E. *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 4:8).
  - F. *"And He died for all, ... that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them"* (II Cor. 5:15, 19).
  - 1. The Passover lamb covered only the firstborn.**
    - a. *"And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the maidservant who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the beasts"* (Ex. 11:5).
    - b. *"And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock"* (Ex. 12:29).
  - 2. The other sacrifices covered all men.**
    - a. *"One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who sojourns among you ..."* (Ex. 12:49).

- b. *“Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally .... Then the bull shall be killed before the Lord”* (Lev. 4:13-15).
- c. *“You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally, both for him who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them”* (Num. 15:29).

## **2. Christ’s death redeems us from death.**

- A. *“Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath by His Life”* (Rom. 5:10).
- B. *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive”* (I Cor. 15:22).
- C. *“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified”* (Heb. 10:14).
- D. *“He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death ... that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance”* (Heb. 9:15).
- E. *“For the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever .... That he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit”* (Ps. 49:8-9).

### **1. The Passover lamb did not redeem men from death, but only caused the death angel to pass over the firstborn. They still had to be redeemed later.**

- a. *“The Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animal; therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem”* (Ex. 13:15).
- b. *“You shall take the Levites for Me ... instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel”* (Num. 3:41).
- c. *“And for the redemption of the two hundred and seventy three of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are more than the number of the Levites, you shall take five shekels for each one individually”* (Num. 3:46-47).

### **2. The other sacrifices symbolized the redemption in Christ. However, all of Israel was redeemed and maintained that redemption through the yearly sacrifices.**

- a. *“And who is like Your people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people, to make for Himself a name ... and to do for You great and awesome deeds for Your land ... before Your people whom You redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever”* (II Sam. 7:23-24).
- b. *“It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience ... imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come ... not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption”* (Heb. 9:9-12).

## **3. Christ’s death pays for our sins.**

- A. *“Who gave Himself for our sins”* (Gal. 1:4).
- B. *“Tut this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God”* (Heb. 10:12).
- C. *“But now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”* (Heb. j9:26).
- D. *“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations”*, (Luke 24:47).
- E. *“Because He poured out his soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and*

*He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).*

F. *“That Christ died for our sins” (I Cor. 15:3).*

G. *“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14).*

**1. The Passover lamb did not pay for any sins. It merely told the death angel to temporarily pass over the firstborn. Later they still had to be redeemed as we saw above. It didn't even address or cover the non-firstborn.**

**2. The other sacrifices symbolize the forgiveness of sin.**

a. *“The priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering ... put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering .... So the priest shall make atonement for his sin that he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him” (Lev. 4:35).*

b. *“The Priest shall make atonement for him, for his sin that he has sinned in any of these matters; and it shall be forgiven him” (Lev. 5:13).*

c. *“So the priest shall make atonement for the whole congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it was unintentional; they shall bring their offering, their sin offering before the Lord, for their unintended sin. It shall be forgiven the whole congregation of the children of Israel and the stranger who sojourns among them” (Numb. 15:25-26).*

d. *“For every high priest ... offer[s] both gifts and sacrifices for sins” (Heb. 5:1).*

e. *“Who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Heb. 7:27).*

f. *“... since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Heb. 8:4-5).*

g. *“But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins ...” (Heb. 9:7).*

h. *“For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself ... not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another ... so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:24-28).*

#### **4. Christ's death was a holy offering to God.**

A. *“Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:2).*

B. *“Who does not need daily, as those High priests, to offer up sacrifices ... for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Heb. 7:27).*

C. *“For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something of offer” (Heb. 8:3).*

D. *“So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:28).*

**1. The Passover lamb is not an offering!** The evening sacrifice was not begun yet; there was no temple yet! It is not mentioned in the first seven chapters of Leviticus which describe all the offerings to God. The Passover lamb was never brought to the tabernacle to be offered to God. No part of it was offered as a burnt offering, a sin offering, a trespass offering, a peace offering, or a grain offering. No part was given to the priest. No part was heaved up or waved before God. The priest did not kill it before God. Rather, the Israelites simply killed it themselves at home and ate it themselves. Not once in the Bible is the Passover mentioned as an offering to God.

**2. All of the other sacrifices are always described as offerings to God.** They were brought to the tabernacle before the priest. They were killed by the priest. Depending on the type of



offering they were wholly burnt, eaten by the priests, heave offered up to God, eaten by the person offering it, or waved before God. ***These are the offerings that picture Christ's offering.***

- a. *"When any one of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the livestock; ... he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord"* (Lev. 1:2-3).
- b. *"This is the law of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the trespass offering, the consecrations, and the sacrifice of the peace offering, which the Lord commanded Moses on Mount Sinai, on the day when He commanded the children of Israel to offer their offering to the Lord"* (Lev. 7:37-38).
- c. *"It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered ...; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God* (Heb. 9:9, 14).

## **5. The blood of Christ's offering sanctifies us. It cleanses us from sin.**

- A *"Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place ...; how much more shall the blood of Christ ... purge your conscience from dead works"* (Heb 9:12, 14).
- B. *"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matt. 26:28).
- C. *"You were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish"* (I Pet. 1:18-19).
- D. *"So His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; so shall He sprinkle many nations"* (Isaiah 52:14-15).
- E. *"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins"* (Col. 1:14).

**1. The blood of the Passover lamb did not sanctify or forgive anyone.** It was not sprinkled on the altar or upon the person who offered it. It was wiped upon the lintel and doorposts of the common houses as a sign for the death angel to pass over that house and spare the first-born therein. The blood did not redeem the firstborn because they later were redeemed with a monetary payment and with the substitution of the Levites. The blood was not holy. It was merely a sign.

### **2. The blood of the sacrifices offered to God did sanctify, and was holy.**

- a. *"And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words'"*, (Ex. 24:8).
- b. *"The altar shall be most holy .... Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement .... It is most holy to the Lord"* (Ex. 30:10).
- c. *"He shall kill the bull before the Lord ... and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar"* (Lev. 1:5).
- d. *"But the firstborn of a cow, sheep, or goat, you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar"* Num. 18:17).
- e. *"For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ ..."* (Heb. 9:13-14).
- f. *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no*

pleasure'. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come ... in the volume of the book it is written of Me ... to do Your will, O God.'" (Heb. 10:4-7).

## **6. Christ died outside the gates of Jerusalem.**

- A. "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate" (Heb. 13:12).
- B. "And He, bearing His stake, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha" (John 19:17).

### **1. The Passover lamb was killed and consumed in the Israelites' homes.**

- a. "Every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household" (Ex. 12:3).
- b. "You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire" (Ex. 12:10).

### **2. The burnt offerings for sins of the priest and the people were taken outside the camp.**

- a. "But the bull's hide and all its flesh, with its head and legs, its entrails and offal ... the whole bull he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire; where the ashes are poured out it shall be burned" (Lev. 4:11-12).
- b. "For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:11-13).

Note: The death of Christ fulfilled the prophecy of Ps. 118. Parts of this psalm were sung in the hallel at the Passover. The ritual of the Passover meal ended with this psalm. It pictures the anticipation of a sacrifice to God being bound to the altar.

- a. "I called on the Lord in distress; The Lord answered me and set me in a broad place .... I will not fear. What can man do to Me? .... I shall not die, but live .... Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them .... You have answered me, and have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone .... Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! .... and He has given us light; Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar" (excerpts from Ps. 118).
- b. "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat .... Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach", (Heb. 13:10, 13).

### **1. The Passover lamb was not bound to the altar.**

### **2. The sin and burnt offerings were bound to the altar.**

- a. "You shall make its horns on its four corners" (Ex. 27:2).
- b. "And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the meat and the blood, on the altar of the Lord your God" (Deut. 12:27).

## **7. The victory over Satan, the payment for our sins, the tearing apart of the veil between us and God was achieved the moment Christ died.**

- A. "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His son" (Rom. 5:10).
- B. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8)
- C. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 15:56-57).

- D. *“And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom”* (Mark 15:37-38, also Heb. 10:19-20).
1. ***In contrast, there was no deliverance whatsoever at the moment of the death of the Passover lambs.*** The deliverance of the Israelites did not begin to occur until the death angel began going through Egypt late the night of the following day and the deliverance was not completed until the afternoon of that day.
    - a. *“The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight (of the fourteenth)”* (Ex. 12:6).
    - b. *“And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt”* (Ex. 12:29).
    - c. *“And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste”* (Ex. 12:33).
    - d. *“Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth”* (Ex. 12:37).
    - e. *“They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day (morning) after the Passover .... Then the children of Israel moved from Rameses and camped at Succoth”* (Numb. 33:3).
    - f. *“So it came to pass, on that very same day, that the Lord brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt”* (Ex. 12:51).
  2. ***When we look at the sacrificial offerings we see that the deliverance, the forgiveness of sins, and the reconciliation with God all symbolically take place immediately, on the same day.***

**8. Christ’s sacrificial death was in great suffering.**

1. ***The Passover lamb was merely killed and eaten***
2. ***Christ suffered greatly when he was being killed, as typified by the ritual of skinning the burnt offering, cutting it into parts, burning it on the altar, beating the grain into fine flour, and no doubt in other ways as well.***

**9. Christ’s suffering and death took place on one day.**

1. ***The Passover lamb was killed on one day, but it was eaten on the night of the next day and what was left was burned.***
2. ***The sacrifices offered to God were killed, and either burned or eaten the same day.*** The one exception was the peace offering which could be eaten the second day, but if any remained on the third day it was burned. It is interesting that Christ was resurrected for our “peace” on the third day, completing this fulfillment of the peace offering.

**10. Christ’s offering was a total offering to God.**

1. ***The Passover sacrifice was not an offering to God, and it was not total in the sense that not all of it was burnt.***
2. ***The burnt and the sin offerings for the priests, the individuals, and the congregation were wholly burnt, symbolizing the total sacrifice of Christ.***

## **Christ Fulfilled the Passover Lamb: Meanings of the Passover Lamb**

Christ fulfilled the Passover lamb. Just as the Israelites kept the Passover lambs for three days, during which they had light in their dwellings while the Egyptians dwelt in darkness, so Christ was a shining light to the world during the three years of his ministry. This is part of the symbolic meaning of the Passover lamb.

Then the Passover Lamb was killed; its function as the light ended. Now He was giving himself to be the total offering the next day. The blood that he was offering that Passover night was the Passover sacrifice. It was saying, "Look, here is my blood which I am offering to be shed tomorrow in fulfillment of all the sacrificial offerings. *"Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us"* (I Cor. 5:7).

During the three days of darkness the Israelites had light in their dwellings! Christ fulfilled the symbolism of this in His ministry which lasted three years, each year for a prophetic day. During this time Israel had light as seen by the following scripture:

*"The people who sat in darkness saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned"* (Matt. 4:16).

*"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men"* (John 1:4).

*"That was the true Light which gives light to every one who comes into the world"* (John 1:9).

*"I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

*"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world"* (John 9:5).

The lamb provided light to the Israelites until the eve of the 14th. Then its symbolic role as the light ended. Likewise Christ's role as the light of the world ended when He could no longer preach openly. Remember that Christ and His disciples were keeping the Passover in secrecy because the authorities were seeking to arrest Him. His role as the Light of the world was over.

The Passover lamb was killed, not sacrificed as an offering to God. The killing of the lamb simply ended its role as the light to Israel. In like manner, **the role of Christ being the light to Israel ended the eve of the Passover, and His next role, of being the fulfillment of the sacrificial offerings to God, was about to begin the next day.**

A second meaning of the Passover lamb is that it was a sign telling the death angel to pass over the Israelites because a future propitiation would be made. This is a totally different meaning than the meaning of the sacrificial offerings. The sacrificial offerings were symbolic of the very sacrifice and death of Christ itself, whereas the meaning of the blood of the Passover lamb was to merely temporarily pass over the Israelites because of the anticipation of a yet future propitiation. Its meaning was wholly anticipatory. And its anticipatory meaning would continue right up to that last Passover in anticipation of the sacrificial offering of Christ to God the next day. **Just as physical Israel was freed from Egypt the next day, so was spiritual Israel, the Church, freed from spiritual Egypt the next day by the sacrifice and death of Christ on the stake.**

The last act Christ did as the Passover Lamb occurred when the troop came to take Him at midnight. Symbolically, this troop was the fulfillment of the death angel. Christ asked, *"Whom are you seeking?"* (John 18:4).

Then He said, *"I have told you that I am he, Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way"* (John 18:8). Christ was saying, as the Passover Lamb, that here was his blood that He was offering to the troop, and therefore to "pass over" his disciples, which symbolized spiritual Israel. Christ fulfilled the last symbolic meaning of the Passover lamb by telling the troop to "pass over" His disciples.

Thus ended Christ's role as the Passover lamb. **Now a new role was beginning, that of fulfilling the symbolism of the entire sacrificial system.** The firstborn males of man and animal belonged to God, but in the Old Testament God provided a way for the firstborn of man to be redeemed. This was not the case with Christ, the first-born son of God. There was no redemption to be made. Rather, Christ was the redemption for mankind. Therefore, He would be sacrificed and die as the firstborn. The death angel killed the firstborn. In fulfillment, the troop took Christ the firstborn at midnight and lead Him away to be killed. **It was the death of the firstborn of God — Christ — on the fifteenth, who was made sin for us, that set us free, just as it was the death of the firstborn of Egypt set Israel free on the fifteenth.**



*“I adjure You by the living God that You tell us if You are .... the Son of God. Jesus said, It is as you said”* (Matt. 26:63-64).

## John’s Account of the Last Supper

Now we come to John’s account. Does it contradict the synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) as many assert? Yes, it does, but only on the surface as we shall now see.

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

John is not saying that the following meal took place before the Passover. Rather, he is simply saying that Christ knew ahead of time that he would be giving his life at this Passover feast. This opinion is shared by many Biblical scholars. Even Moffatt, who rejects the statements of the Synoptics, translates thus: *“Now before the Passover festival Jesus knew that the time had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had loved his own in this world and he loved them to the end.”*

Geldenhuis writes, “If, however, we take the expression ‘before the feast’ along with ‘knowing’, the verse immediately reads more naturally, for then we may translate it as follows: *‘Knowing (already) before the Passover that His hour had come to depart out of this world unto his Father, Jesus, he who loved his own in this world, loved them unto the end (or “to the uttermost”)*’. When thus translated, this verse gives beautiful sense as a prologue or a summarizing title to what follows in chapters 13 to 18. Accordingly, this translation gives a deep and glorious meaning to the words of John and is perfectly clear and intelligible”, (Geldenhuis, pp. 657, 658).

John describes several characteristics about this meal that apply to the Passover, but not to an ordinary meal. John 13:10 states that the disciples were in a state of Levitical purity, which was required for eating the Passover, *“he who has bathed”*. This was the required plunge bath on the seventh day of the time of cleansing, (Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 49).

John records that they reclined rather than sat at this meal, verses 12, 23, 25, 28. Jeremias quotes several ancient sources to show that it was impossible for them to recline at ordinary meals, but it was a ritual requirement for the Passover meal.

John records that the meal took place in Jerusalem (John 18:1). During this last stay in Jerusalem, Jesus regularly left the city in the evening to spend the night in Bethany. Jerusalem was overcrowded at this time. Why would he choose to eat this meal in Jerusalem except that it was a requirement to eat the Passover in Jerusalem.

John records that this meal took place at night (John 13:30). This was highly unusual for an ordinary meal because the custom was to eat two meals a day, one about 10 a.m. and the main meal in the afternoon. However, the Passover was required to be eaten at night.

John describes the attendance of 12 disciples. Is it a coincidence that this is the prescribed number for the Passover meal?

John does not mention specifically that this meal was the Passover as the synoptics do, but neither does John mention the taking of the bread or the taking of the wine, both crucial symbols of the body and blood of Christ. Neither does John mention the hallel at the end of the meal. Do we then negate totally the bread and wine and the hallel in favor of John’s account simply because he doesn’t mention them? Of course not! Neither should we negate the assertion of the synoptics that this meal was the Passover. **John was adding to the synoptics thirty years later, not contradicting them.**

John records in chapter 13:29 that the disciples thought Jesus told Judas to buy what they had need of for the feast, or to give something to the poor. How strange this would be if it were the beginning of the 14th because they would have all the next day to buy what they needed for the feast, as well as have things to give to the poor. Why get up from a meal in the night to give something to the poor? It makes no sense. But it

makes perfect sense if it were the Passover night. Why? Because the next day was the Feast day, and the purchase of necessities in an emergency was permissible this night (Jeremias, p. 53). Also it was a Jewish tradition at the time of Christ to go out on the night of the Passover and do something for the poor (Jeremias, p. 54).

After the meal Jesus and the disciples did not return to Bethany where they were staying. Instead they went over the Brook Kidron, (John 18:1). This is rather strange until you realize that on the Passover night the people were not allowed to leave the greater environs of Jerusalem. The Brook Kidron and the Mount of Olives were within greater Jerusalem, but Bethany was outside these limits (Jeremias, p. 55).

John records a considerable amount of activity going on this night, far more than what seems normal. Judas was able to get a troop from the priests that night. There were apparently many people at the courtyard of the priests. And it seems they all stayed up until the cock crowed. This would be highly unusual on a week night, but on the night of the Passover it was the tradition to stay up most of the night.

The long discourse of Jesus that John records is according to the Jewish tradition of the head person of the Passover meal explaining the symbols of the meal, not only from a historical approach, but an eschatological approach. **Jeremias devotes most of his classic work, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, to showing how the words of Christ during the Last Supper match perfectly with the traditional liturgical formula used during the Passover ceremony. For this eminent conservative scholar, this was the convincing proof that the Last Supper was indeed the Passover.**

If this was the Passover, then why does John say the Jews didn't enter the Praetorium because they were going to eat the Passover that coming night? The fact is, John never said this! We've only assumed it.

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

First, note that grammatically the sentence is complete and makes perfect sense if you put a period after "defiled". The clause, "*but that they might eat the Passover*", stands alone as a clause that further adds information to the preceding sentence. This is just the way John meant it. The word "but" is translated from the Greek word *alla*, which is a rarely used word in the New Testament, meaning "therefore, other things, contrariwise, but, nevertheless ..." (Strongs). Thus, John is adding a thought that helps explain the preceding statement. If John were merely adding that the Jews were going to eat the Passover he would have used the very common word *kai* which was a conjunction meaning "and".

Now we come to the very important tense of the word "might eat", or *phago* in the Greek. John did not use the future tense, which he would have done had he been describing a future event! John used the **ao­rist subjunctive active tense**. What does this tense mean? One of the preeminent Greek scholars of the world, Apiros Zodhiates, writes in his *Complete Word Study New Testament*:

"The aorist tense is used for simple, undefined action. ...the verb does not have any temporal significance. In other words, it refers only to the reality of an event or action, not to the time when it took place."

What this means is that "*might eat the Passover*" is not a proof that the Passover was yet a future event! Most of the time this tense is used for future events because the tense implies an uncertainty of the action, which often is because it is a future action and its fulfillment is not certain. In fact, there are several instances of this same verb, *phago*, in this same tense, the aorist subjunctive active, where the action is definitely in the past. Some of these instances are Matt. 15:32, Mark 6:36, and Mark 8:1-2.

How can the tense of a verb be used to prove a future event when the tense does not specify when the event occurs? Very simply, it can't be used as proof!

**It makes perfect sense for John to be telling us that the Jewish priests were ritually clean from their cleansing, they had properly observed the Passover, and now since they would be officiating and eating of all the sacrifices of the Feast, they wouldn't dare enter the Praetorium and defile themselves again.**

A second explanation for John 18:28 is that John uses the term "*eat the Passover*" to refer to the sacri-

fices of the Passover Festival that the priests would be eating that day and the following six days. In every other instance of the word “Passover” in John’s account it can be argued that John is referring to the entire seven day festival. If that is true in this scripture then this explanation is very plausible.

Let’s go now to John 19:14, “*Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover ...*”. It has been argued that John was saying that the day was the preparation for the Passover meal. If this is true, then it is the first time ever that the term “preparation” has been found in Biblical or historical literature to describe the day before the Passover meal. In every other instance in the Bible, *paraskeue* describes the day before the weekly Sabbath. John also uses *paraskeue* alone in verse 42, which has to refer to the day before the weekly Sabbath. *Paraskeue* was so commonly used to describe the day before the Sabbath that it meant the same as “Friday”, as Jeremias and Geldenhuys both show from historical references. Also notice John did not say “Preparation day **for** the Passover”, but rather **of** the Passover”. If John had meant the entire festival by the word “Passover”, as he does throughout his gospel, then the meaning becomes very clear. John is saying that it was the Friday of the Passover; in other words, it was the Friday of the seven day festival, or Passover Friday.

The final scripture that seems to contradict the synoptic accounts (and bear in mind there are only four verses in all of John’s account that cause a problem) is John 19:31, “*Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day) ...*”.

The day approaching is the Sabbath. That much is clear. Which Sabbath was it, the weekly Sabbath or the First Day of Unleavened Bread? If we claim John meant the First Day of Unleavened Bread, then why didn’t he say “Preparation for the Passover” to be consistent with verse 14, which we would also claim to refer to the day before the Passover?. Instead John simply uses the term *paraskeue* which, in all references, is known simply as the day before the weekly Sabbath.

The word “high” in “high Sabbath” is confusing to us because we think of the annual feast days as high Sabbaths. That is not the meaning in the Greek. The word for “high” is *mezas*. It is used about 200 times in the New Testament and simply means large, great, notable, of age. It is translated as “high” only once, “*having a high priest over the house of God*”, (Heb. 10:21). *Mezas* describes a Sabbath in only one other reference, “*on the last day, that great day of the feast*”, (John 7:37). The reference is to the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. In other words, it was the great and final day of the Feast. We already know it was the Sabbath because it was the “last day” of the feast.

In the *Jewish New Testament* by David Stern we have a much clearer reading of John 19:31, “It was Preparation Day, and the Judeans did not want the bodies to remain on the stake on Shabbat, since it was an especially important Shabbat”.

The question that naturally arises is, why were the Jews so desirous of removing the bodies so that they did not remain on the stake on the Sabbath if that day on which they were crucified was also a Sabbath, being the First Day of Unleavened Bread? The answer is that **the annual Sabbaths had a separate set of rules that were less stringent**. Jeremias quotes several ancient references showing the different activities that were allowed on the Feast Days that were not allowed on the weekly Sabbaths. A person could be buried, but a grave could not be dug. (Christ was placed in a grave already hewn out.) Remember that the Torah demanded same day burial at His death, (Deut. 21:22).

The main question is, could the Jews execute a man on the Feast day? Jeremias gives several historical references showing that indeed they could. In fact, in serious cases, such as being a false prophet, which they considered Jesus to be, they “are not to be executed at once but are to be brought to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem and kept in prison until the feast, and the sentence carried out at the feast”, (Jeremias p. 78f).

Thus, we see that there are many indications in John’s account that support the Last Supper being the Passover, but only four verses that appear to contradict this. However, when we look closely at these four verses we see that there are at least two ways of interpreting the verses. Therefore, these four verses cannot be used to prove the Last Supper was before the Passover.