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THE PASSOVER OBSERVANCE

After Mr. Armstrong's death one of the early attacks on the true teachings of God's Church was focused on the Passover. Those attacks took place back in the late 1980's and the early 1990's. The attacks were twofold: the correct time for observing the Passover was attacked, and the correct symbolism for the Passover was attacked.

The correct time for observing the Passover was challenged by claiming that back in Egypt the people of Israel supposedly had only observed the Passover at the end of the 14th day of the 1st month. For this attack appeals were made to the Jewish customs surrounding the Passover. The Jewish customs relegate the killing of the Passover lambs to the end of the 14th day, some time between 3:00 p.m. and sunset.

Modern Jewish teachings reject a Passover at the beginning of the 14th day, i.e. between sunset and the onset of total darkness. And so today the Jewish people don't observe anything at all on the 14th day; they only start their "Passover observances" at the beginning of the 15th day. These Jewish customs were heavily relied upon to challenge the Church's understanding that we are to observe the Passover at the beginning of the 14th day.

The correct symbolism for the Passover was also attacked, by discrediting the real significance of the broken bread in the Passover ceremony. The concept of "physical sins" was first questioned and then discredited. "Physical sins" was the term Mr. Armstrong had coined to refer to sins that don't involve a moral guilt, but which involve transgressions of the physical laws which God has established, and which transgressions then at times result in sicknesses and diseases and injuries.

The correct symbolism for the Passover recognizes and freely acknowledges that before being killed for our sins, Jesus Christ was first brutally beaten with many "stripes" (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24), to make possible the forgiveness of our physical transgressions that have brought sicknesses and injuries upon us.

The concept of "physical sins" is thoroughly discussed in my October 2017 article "WHAT IS SIN?". Please refer to that article for more details.

The result of the attacks in these two areas of Passover observance was that a number of people became confused about the correct way to keep the Passover. Some people became unsure about when the people of Israel had kept the Passover in Egypt ... at the beginning of the 14th day or at the end of the 14th day? And some people became unsure regarding: is there really such a thing as "physical sins" for which Jesus Christ was then beaten with many stripes on our behalf?

Today there are still people who are confused about these things. In this article we'll examine the first of those two attacks, the claim that back in Egypt Israel had observed the Passover at the end of the 14th day.

A CAUTION

Because the Old Testament was recorded in Hebrew, therefore there has been a tendency by some people to assume that Jewish understanding of all things Old Testament must be correct. So, for example, if we want to understand how the Passover was observed in the Old Testament, then we should, by this line of reasoning, look to how the Jewish people keep the Passover, their customs and their understanding.

That line of thinking is a huge mistake!

While Jewish scholars can indeed be very helpful in establishing the correct meanings for Hebrew words, Jewish interpretations regarding what the Scriptures actually mean, and what the Scriptures plainly tell us, is atrociously flawed. Jesus Christ very plainly told the Sadducees: you err because you don't understand the Scriptures (see Matthew 22:29). And the lack of understanding of the Pharisees was even worse than that of the Sadducees.

I have on my computer a copy of the Jewish Talmud, which is the primary authority for Jewish religious understanding. Over the years I have done a fair amount of research through the books comprising the Talmud. And it is a very easy task for me to present from the pages of the Talmud hundreds upon hundreds of utterly ridiculous explanations for verses and passages in the Old Testament. The Talmud is filled with contradictory statements, as far as biblical teachings are concerned.

For any open-minded member of God's Church, who makes the effort to delve into the teachings of the Talmud, the picture that emerges very clearly is: they don't really understand the Old Testament at all! Obvious Old Testament teachings are never comprehended correctly. And when they seem to be on the right track, then they still end up drawing the wrong conclusions.

I have no desire to here present a lengthy list of utterly absurd statements from the Talmud, to prove my point. My focus is not to expose wrong Jewish understanding (or, for that matter, wrong Catholic understanding, or wrong Protestant understanding). My point is simply: **don't look to Jewish customs and understanding** regarding how God's people are to observe the Passover.

Let's look at the Scriptures, and not at customs and traditions. The only time we can consider customs and traditions is when they can be established from the Bible to be correct. The Scriptures must be the foundation, not traditional understanding.

THE PARTS OF A DAY

With God a day starts and ends at sunset.

Every 24-hour day consists of two distinct parts, and two distinct periods of transition between the two parts: **two parts** and **two transition periods**.

The two parts we call: **day** and **night**.

The two periods of transition we call: **dusk** and **dawn**.

Dusk represents the period of transition from day to night, the period from total light to total darkness. Dusk is also referred to as "**evening**". And dawn represents the period of transition from night to day, the period from total darkness to total light. Dusk consists of the light still available after the sun has set

below the horizon, and dawn consists of the light already available before the sun has risen above the horizon.

Sunset is the one precise point in time in that 24-hour cycle. Sunset can be pinpointed to within a second or so. Sunset is the time God uses to start and end days.

We can represent the biblical 24-hour day as follows:

1 whole day = DUSK + NIGHT + DAWN + DAY, or

1 whole day = EVENING + NIGHT + DAWN + DAY

In every 24-hour period there is only one dusk (or one evening), even as there is only one night and one dawn and one day. Specifically, when we are talking about periods of time, **a day does not contain two evenings.**

The period of dusk is the only period in the 24-hour day that can be referred to as "evening". There is no other period of time that can be called "evening". Specifically, the time between noon and sunset (i.e. 1:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m., 5:00 p.m., etc.) cannot be called "evening". Any attempt to do so is hypocritical. "Evening" only starts once the sun has set.

The only possibility for "two evenings" within a 24-hour period is to use the word "evening" not to refer to periods of time, but to refer to **two specific points in time.** The "first evening" refers to the point in time when the period of evening starts (i.e. **sunset**); and the "second evening" refers to the point in time when the period of evening ends (i.e. **the onset of total darkness**).

Now let's consider what the Bible has to say about the Passover.

BASIC PASSOVER INSTRUCTIONS

The original Passover instructions are recorded in Exodus 12. Notice this statement:

And you shall keep it (the Passover lamb) up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel **shall kill it in the evening.** (Exodus 12:6)

It is well-known that here the expression "in the evening" is a translation of the Hebrew expression "beyn ha'arbayim", and that this expression means "**between the two evenings**". So how are we to understand this?

These are the words of God. So the question is: what did God mean by "two evenings"? It was God who had said: the evening and the morning were the first day (see Genesis 1:5).

God very obviously did not mean "between sunset today and sunset tomorrow"; i.e. God obviously did **not** mean "**between two consecutive sunsets**".

The two "evenings" God is referencing in this statement must both be within the same 24-hour period. The word "evening" refers to a period of time, the period of transition between total daylight and total darkness. As already indicated, **it is one period of time that is bounded by two markers:** it starts at sunset and it ends when total darkness has set in.

This is the period of time that God is identifying in Exodus 12:6. The "**first evening**" is the point of **sunset**. And the "**second evening**" is the point of **total darkness**, when the period of dusk has come to an end. And it is "**between**" those two benchmarks that the Passover lambs were to be killed. And that is exactly what happened in Egypt.

Instead of saying that every family in Israel was to kill the Passover lamb "**after sunset and before total darkness**", God simply said that they were to kill the lambs between these two markers, "between the two evenings".

There is only one evening in every 24-hour period. And that one evening starts when the sun has set (the "first evening"), and that one evening ends when total darkness sets in (the "second evening"). The expression "between the two evenings" is not intended to introduce some other supposed "evening" period into the discussion. The expression "between the two evenings" is only intended **to define the length of time that makes up the period of time we call "evening"**.

TWO PARTS TO THE PASSOVER OBSERVANCE

In Old Testament times observing the Passover involved two very distinct parts. Both parts took some time to complete.

The **1st part** of observing the Passover consisted of **killing the lamb**. That was a very specific activity, and it vividly portrayed the person's responsibility for the death of the lamb. Back in Egypt it was the head of the family who killed the lamb.

The **2nd part** of observing the Passover consisted of first roasting and then **eating the lamb**. Thus: part 1 = kill, and part 2 = eat. It obviously took some time before the meat was ready for eating, typically two to three hours.

These two parts very clearly make up **one ceremony**. Either part is meaningless without the other. There is no point in killing the lamb, if it is not going to be eaten; and there is no possibility of eating the lamb unless it is first killed.

These two parts of that one ceremony cannot be separated to fall on different days. The flawed Jewish understanding of the exodus account has the killing of the lambs take place at the end of **the 14th day** (i.e. between 3:00 p.m. and sunset), and the eating of the roasted meat take place on **the 15th day** (i.e. a couple of hours after sunset). It is unbiblical and unequivocally wrong to start the Passover proceedings on one day, but to only conclude them on the next day.

The entire Passover proceedings must take place on one specific day, the 14th day of the 1st month. The Passover cannot possibly be spread over two consecutive days. Yet that is precisely what Jewish traditions do; they have placed a sunset between these two parts.

THE BIBLICAL DATE FOR THE WHOLE PASSOVER

And you 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. (Exodus 12:6)

Here we see part 1, the killing of the Passover lambs, set for the 14th day.

In **the fourteenth day** of the first month at even *is* the LORD'S Passover. (Leviticus 23:5)

Here it is called "the LORD's Passover", meaning that it belongs to God. It is His Passover because that is the day God (i.e. the death angel at God's instructions) "passed over" the houses of the Israelites in Egypt. The "passing over" took place **after the Israelites had all eaten the meat** of the roasted Passover lambs.

So Exodus 12:6 shows that part 1 of the Passover activities took place on the 14th day. And Leviticus 23:5 shows that part 2 of the Passover activities took place on the 14th day.

Let the children of Israel also keep the Passover at his appointed season. In **the fourteenth day** of this month, at even, you shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and **according to all the ceremonies thereof**, shall you keep it. (Numbers 9:2-3)

This Scripture tells us that both parts of the Passover (i.e. "all the ceremonies thereof") are to take place on the 14th day. Therefore no part of the Passover activities may take place on the 15th day.

And in **the fourteenth day** of the first month *is* the Passover of the LORD. (Numbers 28:16)

This is a repetition of Leviticus 23:5. The same comments apply.

And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on **the fourteenth day** of the month at even in the plains of Jericho. (Joshua 5:10)

The expression "kept the Passover" includes both parts: killing the lambs and eating the roasted meat. And the Israelites did all of that on the 14th day.

Moreover Josiah kept a Passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the Passover on **the fourteenth day** of the first month. (2 Chronicles 35:1)

In the days of King Josiah the Passover was still killed and eaten on the 14th day.

And the children of the captivity kept the Passover upon **the fourteenth day** of the first month. (Ezra 6:19)

After the Babylonian captivity the people of Judah killed and ate the Passover on the 14th day.

The correct biblical date for the Passover is always the 14th day of the 1st month. The Passover is never on the 15th day. No part of the Passover may take place on the 15th day. The killing of the lambs and the eating of the roasted meat cannot take place on separate days; these two things cannot be separated by a sunset between them.

Now let's consider how the Jews have understood the biblical instructions for the Passover.

JEWISH UNDERSTANDING

Let's start by looking at the Jewish Publication Society Translation of the Old Testament. My copy of this version is copyrighted in 1917 and in 1945, and printed in May, 1967. Here is Exodus 12:6.

and ye shall keep it unto the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the

congregation of Israel shall **kill it at dusk**. (Exodus 12:6 JPS)

This shows quite clearly that the Jews understand the expression "beyn ha'arbayim" to refer to the period between sunset and total darkness. That is obvious from their use of the word "dusk" in this verse.

Let's now look at the **Universal Jewish Encyclopedia**. This reference work, copyright 1942, was published in the USA. In Volume 8, Page 406, the article "**Pascal Lamb**" states the following:

"The Pharisees and Sadducees had a dispute as to the time when the slaughtering (of the lamb) should take place; **the former** held it should be in the last 3 hours **before sunset, the latter, between sunset and nightfall.**" (UJE, vol.8, p. 406)

The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia here freely acknowledges what God's Church has taught for 50 years ... that the Sadducees (i.e. they were mainly the levitical priests) kept the Passover at the beginning of the 14th day, "between sunset and nightfall", while the Pharisees had already adopted the custom of keeping the Passover at the end of the 14th day, "in the last 3 hours before sunset".

Very clearly, all the people in Jerusalem understood that some people would be observing the Passover after sunset, at the start of the 14th day, while other people would only observe it the following afternoon. And obviously, those Sadducee priests would not be slaughtering any "Passover lambs" at the Temple on the afternoon of the 14th, not when they themselves had already observed the Passover the previous evening after sunset.

The point is this:

When Jesus Christ sent His disciples to say to the owner of the large upper room "where is the guest-chamber **where I shall eat the Passover** with My disciples" (Mark 14:14), that "goodman of the house" very obviously understood that Jesus Christ was going to eat **a real Passover**, just like all the Sadducees were also going to eat a real Passover at the very same time.

In the dispute between the Pharisees and the Sadducees over the correct time for the Passover, as recorded in the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Jesus Christ very clearly agreed with the Sadducees, and disagreed with the Pharisees.

Now let's look at another Jewish reference work, **The Encyclopedia Judaica**, published in Jerusalem. This quotation is from the 3rd printing, 1974, Volume 13, Page 170, Article "**Passover**".

"The feast of Passover consists of two parts: The Passover ceremony and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. **Originally both parts existed separately; but at the beginning of the exile they were combined.** Passover was originally not a pilgrimage feast, but **a domestic ceremony** consisting of the slaughtering and eating of the paschal animal." (EJ, vol. 13, p. 170)

The Encyclopedia Judaica freely acknowledges that the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are two distinct events. They acknowledge that "originally" they were separate! That's how God established it in the days of Moses: the Passover is one event, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is another event.

EJ admits that at some point Jewish religious leaders decided to combine these two distinct observances, and to then refer to the combined result as "Passover". There is no biblical authority or approval for combining these two distinct events into one observance.

EJ has the time for this "combining" wrong, but EJ is correct in stating what actually happened. These two events were not combined "at the beginning of the exile"; they were only combined when the sect of the Pharisees got started with the zugot, the five successive pairs of scholars. This was in the second century B.C. This subject is discussed at length in my 2007 article "The Development of Jewish Laws Through the Ages".

One consequence of this factual Encyclopedia Judaica statement is that originally the Passover could not possibly have been in the afternoon at the end of the 14th day. If, theoretically, the Passover lambs were only slaughtered between 3:00 p.m. and sunset, then the meat could not possibly have been eaten until after sunset, and therefore at the start of the 15th day. But if the meat of the Passover was only eaten in the early part of the 15th day, then the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread could not have "existed separately".

We have now seen three Jewish works, JPS and UJE and EJ, which all make clear that originally the Passover was observed at the beginning of the 14th day, at dusk. The Passover lambs were killed between sunset and darkness at the beginning of the 14th day, and the meat was then eaten a couple of hours later, but still on that same 14th day.

THE PASSOVER IN EGYPT

In Exodus 12:21 Moses had called the elders of Israel together. Moses had said to them, for them to tell the people: "**none of you** shall go out at the door of his house until the morning" (Exodus 12:22). Moses was not saying that he himself might not go out before morning. This was an instruction for the people, not for Moses. God wanted Moses to see Pharaoh one more time, after all the firstborn in Egypt had been killed. And so Exodus 12:22 was not an instruction for Moses, but for the people.

So the Israelites killed the Passover lambs after sunset, at the start of the 14th. A couple of hours later they ate the roasted meat of the Passover animals. Then, a few more hours later, at midnight, the death angel passed through the land of Egypt, and "passed over" the houses of the Israelites.

Some time after all the firstborn in Egypt had been killed, but while it was still night, Moses went to see Pharaoh one last time. Moses then returned, and when the sun rose on the 14th day, the Israelites came out of their houses and spoiled the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36). They spent the rest of the day gathering all their belongings together, in preparation for leaving Egypt.

Think of the hours your family spends just to get ready to go to the Feast for eight days. Most of us take several hours to pack just to go to the Feast. What if we had to pack our cars with the knowledge that we would never return? That would take us even longer to pack. And that is what it was like for the Israelites preparing to leave Egypt.

After sunset and at the start of the 15th day they started to walk out of Egypt. Very quickly it became night.

Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover unto the LORD your God: for in the month of Abib the LORD your **God brought you forth out of Egypt by night.** (Deuteronomy 16:1)

This Scripture is very clear in stating that they left "by night". But "night" is the first of the two parts that make up a 24-hour day. So the Israelites, after a daylight period of packing and spoiling the Egyptians, left Egypt at the start of a new day. They left 24 hours after they had killed the Passover animals.

And they departed from Rameses in the first month, **on the fifteenth day** of the first month; **on the day after the Passover** the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians.
(Numbers 33:3)

The Israelites left at night, at the beginning of the 15th day. That was "the day" after the Passover; i.e. it was very close to 24 hours after they had killed the Passover animals.

The attack on the Church of God observing the Passover at the beginning of the 14th day is patently flawed. There is no justification for claiming that Israel supposedly killed the Passover animals before sunset, at the end of the 14th day. That idea is extremely contrived. The Church of God in this age is observing the Passover at the correct time, after sunset at the start of the 14th day.

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