

May 2004

Frank W. Nelte

WHEN SHOULD WE OBSERVE THE 7 DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD?

Recently I have received a number of questions as to exactly when we should observe the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread? Specifically, should these seven days be from the 14th to the 20th days of the first month inclusive, or should they be from the 15th to the 21st days of the first month inclusive? Should the Passover day be the first of those seven days, or should those seven days follow the day of the Passover?

The Church's understanding has always been that the Passover is to be observed on the 14th day, and that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is from the 15th to the 21st inclusive. But recently some arguments have been put forward that challenge this understanding. It has been asserted that the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread are to go from the 14th to the 20th days of the first month, that the Passover day is supposedly also the First Day of the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread. These arguments appeal primarily to references in the gospel accounts, as well as to a statement in Ezekiel 45:21.

So what is the truth? What does God expect from us? On which days of the first month does God require us to observe the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread?

WHERE ARE WE TO LOOK FOR INSTRUCTIONS?

The Bible is a large book. Many subjects are touched on in many different contexts. So where in the Bible are we to look for instructions on specific subjects? Just anywhere? What about the places where God FIRST gives instructions about a specific subject? Are they of any importance? Or are later references to the same subject more important?

Take the calendar as an example.

There are references to a calendar in the Book of Genesis. Then in Exodus 12 God gave clear instructions as to when the first month of the year should be. And in Exodus 34:22 God gave a clear statement regarding in which season the Feast of Tabernacles must be. Then there are clear statements that tell us exactly how God feels about JEWISH "new moons" (e.g. Isaiah 1:14). So should these Scriptures be our primary guidelines in establishing the correct calendar, or is it better to look to some statements in the Book of Psalms (e.g. Psalm 81:3), or to vague statements in the New Testament (i.e. vague as far as the calendar is concerned), such as Romans 3:2, or to statements about God's sovereignty? Where are we to look FIRST?

It should be quite clear that THE FIRST INSTRUCTIONS God gives on a particular subject are the most important ones. And unless God Himself later modifies those original instructions (e.g. the way we today are to observe the Passover), we should always view those original instructions as the foundation. Later statements need to be viewed from the perspective of the original instructions, rather than trying to INTERPRET the original instructions from the viewpoint of later statements about the same subject, which later statements may very well be somewhat ambiguous.

IN ESTABLISHING BIBLICAL DOCTRINES WE SHOULD ALWAYS START WITH THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE!

So regarding the timing of the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread, WHERE would God expect us to look FIRST? What is to be the foundation for understanding these seven days ... the Old Testament or the New Testament? Where should we expect to find the CLEAR statements on this subject?

It should be clear beyond any doubts or questions that we should expect to find the clear instructions for this particular feast in the books of Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy. The statements in these books must form THE FOUNDATION for understanding any statements in subsequent books of the Old Testament and in the New Testament. The priorities should be clear.

If there were no other statements at all about the Feast of Unleavened Bread outside of the books written by Moses, WE SHOULD STILL BE ABLE TO OBSERVE THIS FEAST CORRECTLY! That was the intention behind what Moses wrote, to make the instructions clear to God's people. And unless God Himself actually changed the dates on which this Feast is to be observed, then NOTHING written at a later date can change the information Moses provided on this subject.

People who claim that Moses' statements regarding the Feast of Unleavened Bread must be INTERPRETED through statements made in later books of the Bible are misleading God's people!! The information Moses provided on this subject leaves no doubts or questions as to the days on which this feast is to be observed. Without a clear indication that God changed or modified the instructions He had given through Moses, THE PROBLEM with any statements made in later books always lies with those "later books" and NEVER with the original instructions, unless the original instructions involve a mistranslation or a deliberately and deceitfully altered text.

So let's examine the original instructions before we look at "the new evidence".

A BASIC POINT OF UNDERSTANDING

Whenever GOD in the Bible spells out A PERIOD OF TIME by specifying the starting date and the ending date, THEN THE ENDING DATE IS ALWAYS, ALWAYS INCLUDED IN THAT PERIOD OF TIME! There is no instance anywhere in the Bible where the ending date for a period of time is somehow EXCLUDED from being a part of that period of time!

This is not a reference to how kings may have reckoned their regal years, since in some instances the last year of one king may perhaps also have been reckoned as the first year of the next king. I am specifically referring to periods of time that God Himself has stipulated.

Here are some examples:

1) The Day of Atonement is clearly the TENTH day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:27). So when we are told that we are to observe this day "in the NINTH day of the month AT EVEN, FROM EVEN UNTO EVEN ..." (verse 32), then this obviously means from the END of the ninth day to THE END of the tenth day. The second "even" in the expression "from even unto even" MUST here mean "THE END of the tenth day", because of verse 27, even as the first "even" MUST mean "THE END of the ninth day".

Now consider:

Should God not have said in Leviticus 23:32 that we are to observe this day "in the TENTH day of the month AT EVEN, FROM EVEN UNTO EVEN ..."? Why didn't God say it that way? Is that perhaps the way you and I would have said this? So why did God say it the way He did say it?

Fasting is a condition that is different from normal. So is not eating any leaven. Fasting means "don't eat" or "stop eating". Now when God designates a specific day for fasting, THEN we cannot observe that fast

day by only stopping our eating when that particular day starts! THAT IS TOO LATE! For a fast day we really have to "stop eating" BEFORE the previous day ends! That is the only way to ensure that no part of the "fast day" is involved with any food. So when God wants to spell out the timing for a day of fasting, then THE START OF THAT FAST must be located in the last part of the previous day, rather than in the first part of the actual fast day.

2) This statement "from even unto even shall you celebrate your Sabbath" (Leviticus 23:32) refers not only to the Day of Atonement, but also to the weekly Sabbath days and to all the other Holy Days in the year.

Now consider this expression "from even unto even shall you celebrate ...". The second "even" in this expression must in all cases mean THE END of the day mentioned, be it the weekly or the annual Sabbath days. It must always INCLUDE the whole day to which the last "even" refers, otherwise we would be observing the days BEFORE the weekly and the annual Sabbath days.

No amount of arguments about "even" referring to the beginning of a day can get away from the fact that in THIS DEFINITION of Holy Days and weekly Sabbath days the definition always goes to THE END OF THE DAY!

We do exactly the same thing in English. When we say that a day goes "from sunset to sunset", then the second "sunset" refers to THE END of the day. And when we say that a day goes "from midnight to midnight", then the second "midnight" also refer to THE END of the day. The terms "midnight" and "sunset" and "even" can apply to either, the beginning or the end of the day. A day starts at midnight (i.e. in our Roman calendar) or sunset or "the even" (i.e. in God's way of reckoning days), and a day also ends at midnight or sunset or "the even". So all three of these terms apply to both ends of a day.

By contrast, the Hebrew expression for "BETWEEN THE TWO EVENINGS" (i.e. "beyn haabayim") can ONLY refer to the beginning of the day. And that is precisely why God used this expression in Exodus 12:6, to make unmistakably clear that the Passover was to be killed AT THE BEGINNING of the day. The expression "between the evenings" removes the question as to whether "even" should refer to the start or to the end of the day. The Jewish Translation has thus correctly translated this expression as "at dusk", thus tacitly acknowledging that this expression refers to "the time immediately after sunset",

Now when "the even" applies to THE END OF A PERIOD OF TIME, then it must always mean THE END OF THE DAY THAT IS MENTIONED, inclusive.

Let's now look at some statements in Exodus chapter 12.

EXODUS CHAPTER 12

Notice Exodus 12:16.

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. (Exodus 12:16 AV)

There are two Holy Days in this Feast of Unleavened Bread, the First Day and the Seventh Day. The only two theoretical possibilities for these two Holy Days are therefore: the 15th and the 21st, as the Church has traditionally observed this, OR the 14th and the 20th, as is being proposed by the new arguments. Only one of these two options can be correct.

It is clear that the 14th day is the Passover (Leviticus 23:5). But is that 14th day ALSO the feast day, or "the Holy Day"? If the 14th is NOT the Holy Day, then the 20th also cannot be a Holy Day. These two Holy Days are linked together by being the first and the seventh days respectively of a seven-day period.

Leviticus 23:6 states very clearly:

And on THE FIFTEENTH DAY OF THE SAME MONTH IS THE FEAST of unleavened bread unto the LORD: SEVEN DAYS ye must eat unleavened bread. (Leviticus 23:6 AV)

Now this is as plain and as basic an instruction for the Feast of Unleavened Bread as you could wish to have! When GOD here calls the 15th day "the Feast", then it is foolish for anyone to argue that GOD actually meant that the 14th day is really "the Feast". And if the 15th is the first day of the Feast, then the 21st must be the seventh day of the Feast.

Any claim that attempts to make the 14th day "the Feast" is calling God a liar! God spoke the words of Leviticus 23:6, and God must surely have meant "the 15th" when He said "the 15th"! When the thought starts off with the 15th day and THEN refers to a period of seven days, it is completely illogical to assume that the 15th day God has just mentioned is actually supposed to be the second day of those seven days. Verse 5 said nothing at all about "eating unleavened bread". So when God uses the 15th day to introduce a Feast called "Unleavened Bread" and then states that this feast is to be seven days long, then the only possible conclusion is that this 15th day must be the first of those seven days.

The seven days of Leviticus 23:6 take us to THE END OF THE 21st DAY! There is no other conclusion possible if we examine this verse and this verse only! Now IF you need OTHER VERSES to change what this verse is saying, then I have no option but to question your motive and your integrity in dealing with the words of God. Did God know what He was saying in Leviticus 23:6 or did He make a mistake? Is Leviticus 23:6 perhaps a text that was deliberately altered by some dishonest Jewish scribe (as is the case, for example, in Exodus 34:25 and in Deuteronomy 16:1-6)? If this text was not dishonestly altered, and if God did indeed mean what He said in this verse, then the 14th day simply cannot be the Feast day because God specifically mentioned the 15th!

LEVITICUS 23:6 IS A CLEAR SCRIPTURE WHICH REQUIRES NO INTERPRETATION!

Let's now examine Exodus 12:17.

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. (Exodus 12:17 AV)

In this verse "the Feast of Unleavened Bread" is identified with "THIS SELFSAME DAY". Which "day" is this speaking about: the Passover day (i.e. the 14th) or THE FOLLOWING DAY (i.e. the 15th)? It can only be referring to one of these two days? So which day is it?

This "selfsame day" is identified as the day on which God brought Israel out of Egypt. So we need to ask: Did God bring Israel out of Egypt on the 14th or on the 15th day? God repeatedly refers to this "day" on which He brought Israel out of Egypt, and it is clearly a day to which God attaches very great significance.

We are plainly told that the 14th day is the Passover (Leviticus 23:5; etc.). Now did the Israelites obey

God and follow God's instructions for that first Passover or not? They were told in unmistakable terms: "NONE OF YOU SHALL GO OUT AT THE DOOR OF HIS HOUSE UNTIL THE MORNING" (Exodus 12:22). Did they obey this instruction or not? Yes or no?

If the Israelites obeyed this instruction in Exodus 12:22, then they could not possibly have left Egypt on the 14th, because they left Egypt BY NIGHT! That can only be the night of the day AFTER the 14th, which is then the night of the 15th!

Numbers 33:3 states exactly the same thing, that they left Egypt ON THE FIFTEENTH!

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)

[Comment: The Hebrew word here translated as "on the morrow after" in the KJV is "mochorath", and it means "on the DAY after", and it is so rendered in the NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NAS, NIV, etc.]

"The day AFTER the Passover" cannot possibly be the 14th! It must be the 15th! And that is precisely what Numbers 33:3 states.

So the "Feast of Unleavened Bread", which in Exodus 12:17 is connected to this day on which God brought Israel out of Egypt, must be the 15th. And that means that the 14th cannot be the Feast.

So let's note very carefully!

Numbers 33:3 makes clear that they left Egypt on the 15th day. Therefore Exodus 12:17 MUST be a reference to this 15th day. Leviticus 23:6 states that this 15th day IS the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And Leviticus 23:6 allows no other conclusions but that this 15th day is to be the First Day of Unleavened Bread, and therefore the 21st day must be the Seventh Day of Unleavened Bread.

These are the only possible conclusions the Israelites in the days of Moses could have drawn from these particular verses.

THERE IS NO WAY, SHORT OF GOD DELIBERATELY SHIFTING THIS PERIOD OF TIME, THAT ANY OTHER SCRIPTURES ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE BIBLE CAN CHANGE THESE FACTS THAT ARE ESTABLISHED BY NUMBERS 33:3 PLUS EXODUS 12:17 PLUS LEVITICUS 23:6!

Now let's look at the next verse.

EXODUS 12:18 EXAMINED

Here is this verse.

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. (Exodus 12:18 AV)

Now it is quite clear that from the 14th to the 21st inclusive is a period of EIGHT days. So if this verse is

speaking about a SEVEN-DAY PERIOD, then either the 14th day or the 21st day cannot be a part of that seven-day period. So is this supposed to be a reference to FROM THE BEGINNING of the 14th TO THE BEGINNING of the 21st, or is this supposed to be a reference to FROM THE END of the 14th TO THE END of the 21st?

How are we to understand the Day of Atonement being on the NINTH day of the month ... from THE END of the ninth to THE END of the tenth, or from THE BEGINNING of the ninth to THE BEGINNING of the tenth? In Leviticus 23:32 it is quite clear that Atonement must go FROM THE END of the ninth TO THE END of the tenth. And Exodus 12:18 is intended with the exact same way of thinking about time as Leviticus 23:32, because again special instructions apply.

So Exodus 12:18 tells us that the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread go from THE END of the 14th day to THE END of the 21st day. With the Day of Atonement it is TOO LATE to stop eating during the first part of the 10th day; with Atonement the eating has to stop before the ninth day has ended. The exact same applies to the Days of Unleavened Bread. It is TOO LATE to complete putting out leaven and to stop eating leaven during the first part of the 15th day! We must complete putting out all leaven and we have to stop eating any leaven BEFORE the 14th day comes to an end!

The Day of Atonement and the Days of Unleavened Bread both involve special instructions that entail a certain amount of preparation. With Atonement it is fasting (not eating anything at all), and with the Days of Unleavened Bread it is not eating one specific category of foods (those containing leaven). And Leviticus 23:32 shows that where eating restrictions are involved God uses the end of the day BEFORE those eating restrictions are to be observed as the identification mark for the start of the period of restriction.

Consider the impossibility of the alternative:

Is "the 21st day of the month at even" a part of the 21st day, or is that still a part of the 20th day? The "21st day at even" MUST BE a part of the 21st day! The "21st day at even" CANNOT be a part of the 20th day.

So IF people reason that the expressions "the 14th day at even" and "the 21st day at even" refer to THE BEGINNING of these days, then the following fact has to be acknowledged. The "14th day at even" MUST BE a part of the 14th day. Likewise, the "21st day at even" must be a part of the 21st day. So with THIS REASONING it would still be unlawful to eat any leaven on the 21st day "at even". Thus even with this line of reasoning leaven is still forbidden on AT LEAST THE FIRST PART OF THE 21st DAY! They were to still eat unleavened bread "on the 21st day at even". Now IF they were to still eat unleavened bread on THE FIRST PART of the 21st day, at precisely what point in time on that day would this instruction to eat unleavened bread have stopped ... at midnight or at dawn or at noon or when? If they were still eating unleavened bread "on the 21st day at even", WHEN DID THEY STOP eating unleavened bread? The only possibility is on the 22nd!

Furthermore, there is no example anywhere in the Bible where God actually mentions a specific day, when He really only means THE PREVIOUS DAY. It is foolish reasoning to claim that God actually meant the 20th day when He clearly said the 21st day in Exodus 12:18. And if even the smallest part at the start of the 21st day is included in the instructions, then the whole day must be included. Leviticus 23:32, with the clear reference to the NINTH day, when the Day of Atonement obviously goes to the end of the TENTH day, shows us how God reckons periods that go from one "even" to another "even".

So when Leviticus 23:6 tells us that "the 15th day" is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, then our preparations for that MUST BE COMPLETED BEFORE THE END OF THE 14th DAY! It is too late to complete the preparations at some point early on the 15th. That is the lesson from how God describes

Atonement. And THAT is why Exodus 12:18 starts with "the end of the 14th day" and continues to "the end of the 21st day". It is precisely the same way of reckoning time as Leviticus 23:32.

So Exodus 12:18 gives us a period of seven full days, from the 15th to the 21st inclusive. And that is what the next verse refers to.

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. (Exodus 12:19 AV)

We have already seen that Leviticus 23:6 makes exactly the same point. If we have to rely on the things Moses wrote in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, then we have no option but to accept that God instituted the Passover on the 14th day, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread from the 15th day to the 21st day inclusive.

But the Jewish religion does not accept the Passover on the 14th day. The Jewish religion has also rejected the name "the Feast of Unleavened Bread" and replaced it with the name "Passover". And so at some point some dishonest Jewish scribes CHANGED THE TEXT OF THE BIBLE, to make it conform to their unbiblical traditions. It is their unbiblical tradition of a "late 14th day Passover" that is the underlying motivation for the way they interpret the Scriptures. And it is for the traditions of their fathers that they reject the commandment of God (Matthew 15:3-6; Mark 7:9-13). See also my two short articles on Exodus 34:25 and on Deuteronomy 16:1-6, which expose these fraudulent alterations.

And so Jewish customs and traditions have created confusion around this subject of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Consider also the following point:

The Jews understand that the Bible clearly mentions THE FIFTEENTH DAY in Leviticus 23:6 and in Numbers 28:17 and in Numbers 33:3. They understand that this is a day of significance and that it is the day on which the Feast is to start. So they have shifted their "Passover" to this 15th day. In this way they have taken all significance out of the 14th day. On the other hand, those who want to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread from the 14th day to the 20th day have removed all significance out of the 15th day, and turned it into an ordinary common WORK DAY! To them THE FIFTEENTH DAY MEANS NOTHING AT ALL! They have put the emphasis on the 14th day, and by their actions they REJECT that the 15th day is the important day in the eyes of God, as far as THE FEAST is concerned.

Now let's examine Ezekiel 45:21.

EZEKIEL 45:21

Here is this verse.

In the first *month*, in THE FOURTEENTH DAY of the month, ye shall have THE PASSOVER, A FEAST OF SEVEN DAYS; unleavened bread shall be eaten. (Ezekiel 45:21 AV)

The first question we should ask: Is this Scripture introducing NEW INSTRUCTIONS, or is this verse a repetition of instructions God had already given earlier through Moses? Is this really NEW information? No, it is not new at all!

It is OBVIOUSLY a repetition of instructions God had given about 800 years earlier through Moses. So if there is a slight difference in the wording between the statements recorded by Moses and those recorded by Ezekiel, which account carries the greater authority? Would God want us to "make Moses' statements fit in with Ezekiel"? Or would God want us to understand the statement in Ezekiel on the foundation of what God had previously revealed through Moses? Which account comes first?

The answer in this case is actually quite simple. In very many Scriptures the Hebrew text does not have a conjunction, where English grammar would expect a conjunction to join different parts of a sentence. And so in very many places the translators provided words like "and" and "but", even when the Hebrew text does not specifically contain this conjunction. In most cases the translators were correct in doing this. But in some cases they provided a conjunction they should not have provided, while in some other instances they did not provide a conjunction where they really should have provided one.

Ezekiel 45:21 is such a situation. The translators really should have provided the conjunction "AND" to join the two different thoughts in this verse. The verse should read in English:

"In the first *month*, in the fourteenth day of the month, ye shall have the passover AND a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten."

This should really be self-evident, because NEVER AT ANY STAGE did Moses ever call THE PASSOVER "a feast of seven days"! The Passover is NOT "a feast of seven days" and never has been "a feast of seven days", even if Jewish customs claim that the Passover is a feast of seven days. Therefore the expression "a feast of seven days" CANNOT be a reference to "the Passover".

Leviticus 23:6 makes clear beyond any doubt that THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD is "a feast of seven days". That is very clear! And the Feast of Unleavened Bread is NOT the same as the Passover. Exodus and Leviticus makes clear distinctions between these two events.

Ezekiel 45:21 obviously assumes familiarity with God's instructions in Exodus and in Leviticus. It is not that Leviticus 23:6 somehow "assumes familiarity with Ezekiel 45:21". Leviticus 23:6 comes first, and Ezekiel 45:21 comes second! The conjunction "and" is implied in the thought of Ezekiel 45:21, and it really should have been provided by the English translators. But THE REASON they did not provide a conjunction here in this verse is because they assumed that the Jewish custom of referring to the Feast of Unleavened Bread as "Passover" has biblical approval, which it does not.

Now let's take a look at the New Testament references to the Passover.

RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

By the time of Christ's ministry the Jews had developed a religious system which was based on unbiblical traditions and which rejected the commandments of God; so said Jesus Christ in Matthew 15:3-6 and in Mark 7:8, 13.

That religious system also involved giving NEW MEANINGS to words and expressions, in order to support their unbiblical customs. For example, the Bible nowhere states how far one may travel on the Sabbath, but the Jews had developed the unbiblical standard of "a Sabbath day's journey" (see Acts 1:12). It sounds biblical, but it really has nothing to do with any instructions from God.

Similarly, the Jews simply changed the definition of the word "Sabbath", by falsely claiming that this word also means "week", which it does not mean at all! The Hebrew word for "week" is "shabuwa" (or "shabua"). But they needed this new definition of "Sabbath" in order to justify their observance of

Pentecost on Sivan 6.

Likewise, the Jews also simply changed the definition of the word "Passover" to now mean "the whole Feast of Unleavened Bread". This definition of "Passover" was also needed to justify their keeping of the "Passover" on the 15th day.

So when someone in Jewish society used the word "Passover" in New Testament times, they typically meant the popularly accepted meaning of "the whole season of the Feast of Unleavened Bread" rather than the actual Passover occasion. When "eating" is mentioned in connection with the word "Passover", THEN it is generally a reference to the actual Passover. But mostly the word "Passover" was used with the changed meaning, rather than with the biblically correct meaning.

One comment by Luke illustrates this point. Notice what Luke wrote:

Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, WHICH IS CALLED THE PASSOVER. (Luke 22:1 AV)

Luke makes clear that THE CORRECT BIBLICAL NAME for the feast is "the Feast of Unleavened Bread". But the Pharisees had changed the meaning of the word "Passover" to be the term of choice to refer to this Feast of Unleavened Bread. Because in Jewish society in general at that point in time the word "Passover" was commonly used to refer to "the Feast of Unleavened Bread", THEREFORE the gospel writers also used this word with the meaning that was generally understood, even if that generally understood meaning was biblically incorrect. Luke did the same thing when he used the term "a Sabbath day's journey".

IT IS THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE WORD "PASSOVER" IS USED, WHICH MAKES CLEAR WHICH MEANING IS INTENDED IN THAT SITUATION.

As we now examine these Scriptures, we should also keep the following in mind:

NONE of these New Testament Scriptures pinpoint any specific dates! NONE of them mention either "the 14th day" or "the 15th day". So NONE of these Scriptures are as precise in dating the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread as are the references in Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy. Clearly ALL of these New Testament references assume familiarity with the original Old Testament instructions. And NONE of the New Testament references were intended by their authors to clash with the precisely dated and pinpointed information provided by Moses in the Old Testament.

Unless Jesus Christ actually changed the dates for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it is clear that we are expected to understand all the New Testament references to this Feast in terms of the information Moses had provided in the Old Testament. We are certainly not expected to understand what Moses had spelled out over 1400 years previously in terms of the statements made by the various gospel writers. We are not to put the cart before the horse.

So when there are difficulties in understanding the precise application of a statement made in the gospel accounts, then the difficulty lies with that statement, and NOT WITH WHAT MOSES WROTE 1400 YEARS BEFORE!

Now let's look at Matthew 26:17.

MATTHEW 26:17

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? (Matthew 26:17 AV)

The words "day" and "feast" are actually not found in the Greek text. So let's omit these words which the translators should NOT have provided here. The correct text then reads:

Now the first of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? (Matthew 26:17)

So first of all Matthew did NOT say that this was on the first day "OF THE FEAST"! Matthew did not use any word for "feast" in this verse, because this most assuredly was NOT any "feast day".

Secondly, the dating of this statement is very vague, as Matthew does not mention which day of the month this happened to be. We are expected to know that from the Old Testament instructions.

Matthew continued to say that Jesus gave specific instructions, which the disciples then faithfully carried out. Verse 20 then speaks about THE EVENING, when Christ sat down to the Passover meal.

SO ON WHICH DAY WAS THE STATEMENT IN MATTHEW 26:17 MADE? ON THE 14TH OR THE 15TH?

Matthew 26:17 was spoken ON THE THIRTEENTH DAY! Therefore this statement in Matthew 26:17 does not in any way support the claim that the 14th day is supposed to be "the Feast of Unleavened Bread".

Let's understand Matthew 26:17 very clearly.

On the 13th day the disciples came to Jesus Christ and asked about the Passover. They then prepared for this event. Then the sun went down and the 14th day started. And THEN Christ sat down to the Passover meal (Matthew 26:20).

IT SHOULD BE CLEAR BEYOND ANY DOUBTS THAT THE STATEMENT "THE FIRST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD" IN MATTHEW 26:17, SPOKEN ON THE 13TH DAY OF THE MONTH, CANNOT POSSIBLY MEAN THAT THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD HAD STARTED ON THE 13TH DAY!!

It follows that we cannot possibly look to this account in the Gospel of Matthew to tell us how we are to date the Feast of the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread. To say that THIS statement, made by Matthew on the 13th day of the month, is supposed to help us INTERPRET the dated statements in Exodus and Leviticus is foolish. Anyone who claims that Matthew 26:17 applies to the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread would be forced to observe the Seven Days from the 13th day to the 19th day inclusive. And that is ridiculous.

Matthew 26:17 is an example of the gospel writers using expressions with the meanings that were generally applied to those expressions in their particular society, even though those meanings are at odds with the strict biblical meanings those expressions should have.

WE DO EXACTLY THE SAME THING TODAY!

We in God's Church know that with God days start and end at sunset. So if I see you at noon and I want to tell you that I will visit you at 9:00 p.m. tonight, I do NOT say: "I'll see you TOMORROW NIGHT AT 9", which would be correct from a biblical perspective, because "tomorrow" starts at sunset today! No, I will say: "I'll see you TONIGHT AT 9", even though in the biblical sense by 9 p.m. this evening it will be a different day from right now.

Matthew 26:17, spoken on the 13th day, was a very general statement, referring to "THE START" of that time of preparing for the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. There are no inferences regarding the Feast of Unleavened Bread that can be made from this verse.

Let's look at the next statement.

MARK 14:12

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

First of all, Mark also did NOT use any word for "feast" here. It follows that Mark was NOT trying to refer to what we biblically call "the FEAST of Unleavened Bread", as did Luke in Luke 22:1, for example. Mark was in this verse referring to exactly the same day as Matthew 26:17. Mark 14:12 is also a reference to THE THIRTEENTH DAY of the month.

Notice one other point in Mark's account here.

Mark is speaking on the 13th day, as becomes obvious from Christ only sitting down IN THE EVENING (verse 17), thus clearly after sunset, when the next day had started. So ON THE THIRTEENTH DAY Mark stated that it was "the first day of unleavened bread when they killed the Passover". Did Mark want us to draw the conclusion that the Passover was killed ON THE THIRTEENTH DAY? Certainly not! Yet that is how someone, unfamiliar with the Old Testament instructions and chronology, could reason from this verse.

It should be clear that both, Matthew and Mark, in speaking about an event that took place on the 13th day, were speaking in very general terms, which everyone in their society would have understood correctly, but without sticking to the strict biblical meanings of the expressions they were using.

THERE IS NO OTHER POSSIBILITY FOR A STATEMENT MADE ON THE 13TH DAY OF THE MONTH!

Let's look at the next statement.

LUKE 22:1, 7

Now THE FEAST of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. (Luke 22:1 AV)

Then came THE DAY of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. (Luke 22:7 AV)

First of all, Luke here points out that colloquially the Feast of Unleavened Bread was referred to as "the

Passover". Secondly, Luke points out that this Feast was "DRAWING NEAR". It was not yet here, but it was approaching.

Now notice the contrast. In verse 1 Luke stated that THE FEAST of Unleavened Bread was approaching, and in verse 7 he states that THE DAY of unleavened bread was when the Passover must be killed. "The day" of unleavened bread is NOT the same as "the Feast" of Unleavened Bread.

The context once again makes clear that Luke 22:7 was ON THE 13TH DAY, because this was clearly before sunset, and after that sunset, on the 14th day, Jesus Christ then kept the Passover.

IF Luke 22:7 is supposed to have been "the 1st Day of Unleavened Bread", THEN it would mean that Jesus Christ would only have kept the Passover (verse 15) on THE SECOND DAY OF UNLEAVENED BREAD! And then the Pharisees would only have kept their "Passover" on THE THIRD DAY OF UNLEAVENED BREAD!

And that is clearly impossible.

We just have to think through the consequences of assuming that Luke 22:7 was supposed to be "the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread".

Having told us in Luke 22:1 that the Feast was still APPROACHING, in verse 7 Luke then simply uses the expressions as they were commonly used by the Jews at that time.

Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7 all refer to something that occurred on the 13th day of the month. All the writers used the expression "unleavened bread" in a very general sense, like I might do when I say "I'll see you TONIGHT at 9", even though from God's point of view that will actually be "tomorrow".

Let's now also look at John 13:1.

JOHN 13:1

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. (John 13:1 AV)

This is probably the clearest of these New Testament references. Notice:

1) John here refers to "the Feast of UNLEAVENED BREAD" as "the Feast of the PASSOVER". By using the word "FEAST" here, John is making quite clear that he really did mean THE FEAST of Unleavened Bread. Luke 22:1 has already told us that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was at that time called "the Feast of the Passover", and that is precisely the terminology John has used here for "the Feast of Unleavened Bread".

2) This verse is speaking about the actual Passover observance by Jesus Christ on the 14th day. The next verse reads: "AND DURING SUPPER ..." (John 13:2 RSV, NAS, etc.), showing that verse 1 is also a part of John's discussion of the Passover.

3) BUT in verse 1 John stated VERY PLAINLY that this occasion was "BEFORE" the Feast of Unleavened Bread (then called the Feast of the Passover, Luke 22:1).

4) So John here makes clear that THE PASSOVER IS BEFORE THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD!

Read verse 1! That's what it says! Verse 1 is not speaking about this being "ON the Feast of the Passover". No, verse 1 is speaking about this being "BEFORE the Feast of the Passover".

The Apostle John obviously understood very clearly that the Passover was on the 14th day, observed soon after sunset at the start of the day. And he knew that the Feast of Unleavened Bread (more popularly then called the Feast of the Passover) went from the 15th day to the 21st day inclusive. And so John stated here in John 13:1 that this actual Passover observance by Jesus Christ was BEFORE the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was just a factual observation made by the Apostle John.

So where Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7 are all speaking about something that took place on the 13th day, John 13:1 is speaking about something that took place on the 14th day. In John 13:1 the Passover meal was already in progress.

And that should cover all the relevant New Testament references on this subject.

AN INTERESTING PARALLEL

One other strong inference that the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread FOLLOW the Passover is found in the way God organized the annual observances.

The whole annual calendar revolves around the Day of Trumpets. That is the central day. The events before the Day of Trumpets are mirrored by the events after the Day of Trumpets. Notice:

- 1) A 1-day event (the Passover)
- 2) A 7-day Feast immediately follows this 1-day event (Feast of Unleavened Bread)
- 3) A 1-day event (Pentecost)

THE CENTRE: THE DAY OF TRUMPETS

- 3) A 1-day event (the Day of Atonement)
- 2) A 7-day Feast (the Feast of Tabernacles)
- 1) A 1-day event immediately follows this 7-day Feast (the Last Great Day)

The 8-day period at the end of the Holy Day year (i.e. Tabernacles plus the Last Great Day) is mirrored by the 8-day period at the start of the Holy Day year (i.e. Passover plus the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread). This mirroring is also seen in the 8-day period at the start going from the 14th to the 21st, and the 8-day period at the end going from the 15th to the 22nd, with BOTH 7-day periods going from the 15th to the 21st.

Now IF the Passover were to be reckoned as the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, THEN this symmetry would be completely lost. While this is not the "proof" for what has been discussed in this article, it is an interesting observation; and I don't believe that this symmetry is unplanned and coincidental. God must have planned it this way.

IN CONCLUSION

So when does God want us to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread? The Old Testament Scriptures are quite clear in showing that the Passover is to be observed at the start of the 14th day. In Jewish society 2000 years ago this day was commonly known as "the DAY of unleavened bread", because it would be the first occasion in the year for the whole nation where unleavened bread was needed.

Then the Feast of Unleavened Bread is to be observed from the 15th day to the 21st day inclusive. This is then "the FEAST of Unleavened Bread". In John 13:1 the Apostle John made quite clear that the day of the Passover is BEFORE THE FEAST of Unleavened Bread.

The other gospel accounts all refer to the 13th day of the month, and make some very general statements about unleavened bread, but WITHOUT referring to "A FEAST". And they certainly did not intend to contradict anything that Moses had written regarding the timing of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

For information regarding the texts that were at some point deliberately altered by some Jewish scribes, see the two articles on Exodus 34:25 and on Deuteronomy 16:1-6.

The Church has been correct all along in observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread from the 15th to the 21st days of the first month.

Frank W. Nelte