



"Compromise is but the sacrifice of one right or good in the hope of retaining another—too often ending in the loss of both."  
—Andrew Carnegie

**13-Mar-15**

## **Is Passover on the First Day of Unleavened Bread? (Part Two)**

In Part One, we saw that by the lifetime of [Jesus Christ](#), the Jews had two competing ways to determine when to observe the [Passover](#). One of them was observed by the people in their homes in the evening as Abib 14 began, and the other, led by the priests at the Temple, was kept in the late afternoon of Abib 14. In the Gospels, Jesus and His disciples are shown observing the Passover in a private home at the beginning of Abib 14, a meal that tradition calls "the Last Supper."

However, [the Gospel](#) writers penned a few verses that seem to contradict God's instructions to Israel about keeping the Passover at that time. For instance, [Matthew 26:17](#) reads, "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?'" (italics in original). As we noted, this could not be the first day of Unleavened Bread because [God](#) says no customary work is to be done on it. If it were, the disciples would not use it to prepare for the Passover.

So how are we to understand this verse? First, notice that the words "day of the Feast of" are italicized, showing that the translators added them to the

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text. The Greek literally reads, "And on the first unleavened. . . ." The word translated as "first," *protos*, typically signifies a thing that is first in a sequence or first in prominence. However, it can also indicate an order of events, as well as whether an event occurs before or concurrently with another.

For example, in [John 1:15](#) John the Baptist acknowledges Christ's pre-existence, saying, "He who comes after me is preferred before [above] me, for He was *before* [*protos*] me" (see also verse 30). Also, in [II Peter 2:20](#), Peter says of those who become entangled in [the world](#) again, "the latter end is worse for them than the *beginning* [*protos*]," again showing an order of events.

[Matthew 26:17](#), then, can more accurately be translated, "Now *before* [the Feast of] Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, 'Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?'" In other words, this incident happened before the [Feast of Unleavened Bread](#) had begun. Since they were inquiring about preparing the Passover, this could have taken place either late in the day on Abib 13 or possibly just after sunset on Abib 14 (since the Passover lamb was to be killed between sunset and dark as the 14<sup>th</sup> began).

[Mark 14:12](#) contains another time marker that seems to contradict the Passover instructions: "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?'" As we have seen, the word *first* can also mean "before" or "the beginning." The word translated as "day," *heeméra*, can refer to a literal 24-hour period of time, but it can also indicate a general period of time or a season (see [Luke 9:51](#); [17:24](#); [19:42](#); [23:7](#); [John 8:56](#); [Acts 2:20](#); [8:1](#); [17:31](#); [Romans 2:5](#); [I Corinthians 3:13](#); [II Corinthians 6:2](#); [Ephesians 6:13](#); [Hebrews 3:8](#)). So the first part of [Mark 14:12](#) could also be translated, "Now *at the beginning of the season of* Unleavened Bread . . ." or "Now *at the beginning of the time of* Unleavened Bread . . ." Nothing dictates that in this case *heeméra* designates a specific 24-hour period, and much argues against it.

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We have already seen from [Matthew 26:17](#) that the disciples asked this question before the Feast of Unleavened Bread and before they had kept the Passover. But how are we to understand the explanation, "when they killed the Passover lamb"? In the Greek, the word translated as "killed" is *éthuon*. It can indeed refer to the singular act of slaying an animal ([Acts 11:7](#)), but also to a religious sacrifice ([Acts 14:13](#)) or to the entire occasion of which a slaughtered animal was paramount, such as the fatted calf being killed for the prodigal son ([Luke 15:23](#), 27, 30). In addition, in the sentence in question, the verb tense indicates *an action in progress but not yet completed*.

In other words, the sacrificing of the Passover lamb—or preparations for doing so—was taking place at the time the disciples asked their question! Remember, most of the people did not observe a Temple-kept Passover; in [Mark 14:12](#), the common people were sacrificing lambs throughout the city, not the priests. The priests would not slay the Temple Passover lambs until the following afternoon. But as Abib 14 was drawing near, the disciples observed people around them on the outskirts of Jerusalem in the process of sacrificing—at least engaging in the necessary preparations, even if they did not perform the sacrifice itself until after sunset—prompting them to ask Jesus where He wanted them to likewise prepare for Passover.

[Luke 22:7-8](#) contains this same occasion, but with a slightly different emphasis: "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.'" As we have seen, God instructs Israel to kill the Passover on Abib 14, not on the first day of Unleavened Bread, which falls on Abib 15. Yet here we have something called "the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover *must* be killed," and it is taking place even before the Passover!

This is easily resolved when we remember that "day" in Greek, *heeméra*, does not have to refer to a specific span of 24 hours, but may indicate a general period of time or a season. The Passover sacrifice was certainly made within the time or season of unleavened bread—not the specific feast but the food itself. In fact, Abib 13—the day before Passover—was the day that the Jews disposed of all leavening, and they prepared unleavened bread for the Passover meal.

According to the Mishna, on Abib 13 the Jews would burn the leaven by 10:00 am, and they were not allowed to eat anything leavened after 11:00 am. The unleavened bread was baked and ready for the Passover by 3:00 pm. Abib 13 was the beginning of the time of unleavened bread, and the Passover was sacrificed during this time, even though the Feast of Unleavened Bread did not begin until Abib 15.

Thus, [Mark 14:12](#) and [Luke 22:7](#) are about, not the holy day that begins the weeklong Feast, but the *season* of unleavened bread, which begins on Abib 13. As that day was ending, the disciples asked Jesus about their own preparations for the Passover, which would begin just after sunset, at the beginning of Abib 14. With these alleged contradictions answered, we see that the Gospels do not support the idea that Passover falls on the first day of Unleavened Bread.

- David C. Grabbe

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Unleavened Bread and Hope](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Action must accompany hope. After we purge the corruption from our lives, we must replace it with the anti-leaven of truth and sincerity, or our last state will be worse than the first. God promised both the ancient Israelites and the Israel of God that He would help them continuously. We can not allow our hope to become overwhelmed by impatience and present trials. Israel never purged its slave mentality—the leavening of Egypt. Paul suggests that godly faith and hope are guarantors of our entrance into God,s Kingdom. God has thrown out to us a metaphorical life preserver, and if we hang on tenaciously with faith and hope, God will rescue us and give us our inheritance. We will do this if our vision of our hope is vivid and real to us.

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## From the Archives: Featured Article

## [What Sin Is](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Over the last half-century, sin has gone out of vogue. In the secular public's mind, it is a religious matter and not something of much consequence. But it matters a great deal to God because it is not only the cause of all the misery in the world but also the reason humanity is so far from Him. John Ritenbaugh explains the basics of sin and what God wants us to do about it.

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