

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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The Discerner
A Christian Apologetics & counter-
cult Ministry

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WITH THIS ISSUE

Our first article in this issue is by our Canadian Friend Bary Guadrealt on the United Church of God in Canada, a break-off group of the Worldwide Church of God, and which continues to advocate for the false teachings of the founder of the Worldwide Church of God, one Herbert W. Armstrong. It is the first part of a two part article.

Our second article is a response to skeptics and critical scholars who attack the inerrancy of Scripture, particularly by claiming contradictions between the New Testament gospels concerning the chronology of the Last Supper and its relationship to the observance of the Passover.

As always, we have our Quiz, this time on Jewish Feasts, Festivals & Holidays.

We are sorry to relay the news that our friend in ministry Jay Howard passed away on January 17. Jay lived in Ohio and was the director of “The Religious Research Project: A Research Organization Investigating Cults, The Occult and Christian Apologetics.” Visit his website for a wealth of great information in defense of the faith and exposing the lies of cults and false teachers:

<http://ittsy.com/focusonthefaulty.com/about-us/>

Please pray for his wife Melanie and all those that were touched by Jay’s service to the Lord.

Thanks to Barbara Beard for her message sharing her good memories of our past office manager Ewald Eisele, and his service in behalf of Religion Analysis Service exposing cults.

Steve Lagoon

President, Religion Analysis Service

21 BIBLICAL REASONS WHY I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT THE UNITED CHURCH OF GOD IS A CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION, PART 1

by Bary Guadrealt

INTRODUCTION

The United Church of God (UCG) claims to have brought back the original Apostolic teachings that were almost wiped out of existence at the end of the Apostolic era. They claim that the Christian Church became saturated with non-Biblical truths regarding God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, humanity, salvation, last things, and other key doctrines of the Christian faith. Do the United Church of God's teachings match up with the teachings of the Apostolic Church? Let us turn to the unchanging, eternal Word of God and find out the real truth. All Biblical quotes are taken from the Ryrie Study Bible, *New American Standard*, 1978.

I. THE BIBLE

Are the Bible's teachings understandable to all Christians or are its teachings reserved to the interpretation of an "Elite group [The United Church of God] in these latter days?"

A. Bible: The Christian has always been taught by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine; and shall disclose it to you." John 16:13-14 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." John 14:26.

B. UCG: The Bible is a coded book that can only truly be interpreted (at this present time of the end) by the leadership of the United Church of God.

"The Holy Bible is unique among all books ever written. The very fact that its truths are revealed here a little, there a little, means that it is a coded book, *not to be understood until our present time of the end* explained elsewhere in this volume. Those who have tried to read

the Bible directly and continuously from the beginning have been bewildered. Many people have simply thrown up their hands and said, as I myself did once, as ‘I just can’t understand the Bible.’ . . . As I have explained elsewhere the Bible is like a jigsaw puzzle. Until the various pieces of the puzzle are put properly together, the true picture does not emerge.” Herbert W. Armstrong. *Mystery Of The Ages*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985, p. 100.

II. THE GODHEAD

How many persons are there in the Godhead, three, two, or billions of God persons who will eventually form the Godhead at the resurrection?

A. Bible: There are and always will be three members in the Godhead.

“And after being baptized, Jesus when up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:16–17 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, . . .” Matthew 28:19. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” John 14:26 “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father , He will bear witness of Me.” John 15:26 “ . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: may grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.” 1 Peter 1:2.

B. UCG: Presently there are only two persons in the Godhead (the Father and the Son).

In the future all ‘spiritually born again’ believers will be members in the Godhead, the God Family. “Scripture reveals two separate, distinct persons, both spirit, yet one in unity, belief, direction and purpose – members of the same God family. “I and My Father are one,” said Jesus (John 10:30). When we understand what the Bible teaches, we see that there is only one God, just as there is only one human race—one extended family descended from Adam of nearly 7 billion individuals. Just the same, the one divine family—the family of God—is open to an unlimited number of members.” *Who Is God?* Published

by The United Church Of God, an International Association. 2010. p. 20.

III. GOD THE FATHER

Is God the Father present everywhere at once or is He limited to a spirit body?

A. Bible: God the Father is present everywhere (as well as the Son).

“But who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him? So whom am I, that I should build a house for Him, except to burn incense before Him?” 2 Chronicles 2:6 “Am I a God who is near,” declares the LORD, “And not a God far off? Can a man hide himself in hiding places, So I do not see him?” declares the LORD. “Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” Declares the LORD.” Jeremiah 23:23–24 The Son is present everywhere: “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.” Matthew 18:20 “. . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:20

B. UCG: God is only omnipresent through the Holy Spirit, His force.

“Indeed, it is through His Holy Spirit that God is able to be present everywhere at once throughout the universe and affect it at will.” Who Is God? Published by The United Church of God, an International Association. 2010. p.43.

IV. GOD

Does God have the same form and shape of a man?

A. Bible: God in his essence is a spirit being.

“But who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him? So who am I, that I should build a house for Him, except to burn incense before Him?” 2 Chron 2:6 “So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of fire, lest you act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, . . .” Deuteronomy 4:15–16 “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” John 1:18 “Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.” John 6:46 “Professing to be wise, they

became fools, and *exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man . . .*” Romans 1:22–23.

B. UCG: God has the same characteristics that men have.

“In various parts of the Bible, it is revealed that God has a face, eyes, a nose, mouth and ears. He has hair on his head. It is revealed that God has arms and legs. And God has hands and fingers. If you know what a man looks like, you know what is the form and shape of God, for God made man in his image, after his very likeness! . . . So we know God has the same form and shape as a man.” Herbert W. Armstrong, *Mystery of the Ages*. New York: Dodd: Mead & Company, 1985, pp. 46–47.

V. JESUS CHRIST

Did Jesus give up His divine attributes when He became man?

A. Bible: Christ always possessed His divine attributes even when clothed in humanity.

He is immutable (unchanging): “And as a mantle Thou wilt roll them up; as a garment they will also be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end.” Hebrews 1:12 “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.” Hebrews 13:8 He is eternal: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6 *He is omnipresent (present everywhere):* “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst” Matthew 18:20 “ . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:20. *He is omniscient (all knowing):* “But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man.” John 2:24–25 “He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.” John 21:17 He is the omnipotent Creator (all powerful): “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” John 1:3 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come , the Almighty.” Revelation 1:8

B. UCG: Christ gave up all His divine attributes when He became a man.

“As a spirit being, prior to His human birth, He was infinite in knowledge, power and presence. As God He would know everything and had unlimited power to act on any object anywhere. But if He was human, He could not do anything. He would be limited to the normal abilities any normal human being would have. *He could not have been both infinite and finite simultaneously.*” *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. Published by The United Church Of God, an International Association. 2008. p. 57.

VI. JESUS CHRIST: Was He the Savior or did He need to achieve Salvation for Himself?

A. Bible: He is the savior of the world.

“And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21 “The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16

B. UCG: Jesus needed to achieve salvation Himself.

“He, if He were to again have eternal life, He would now have to obtain it as a human being, in the same way you and I would achieve salvation-through submission to the father and the resurrection from the dead. Hebrews 5:9 explains that Jesus became “the author of eternal salvation” by experiencing the process of salvation as a human being-with one exception. Jesus didn’t have to repent. But He did have to remain sinless.” *Jesus Christ, The Real Story*. Published by The United Church of God, an International Association. 2010, p. 64.

VII. JESUS CHRIST: When Jesus died (being God), did God then die?

A. Bible: Having the divine attributes of God such as being eternal and unchanging, He could not have died. He died only a physical death.

He is eternal. “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us, And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, *Eternal Father*, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6 “But as for you Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to

be Ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, *From the days of eternity.*” Micah 5:2 *He is unchanging.* “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.” Hebrews 13:8 *He came and died regarding His humanity—not His Deity.* “Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, “Sacrifice and offering thou has not desired, but a body thou hast prepared for me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said behold, I have come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, o God.” Hebrews 10:5–7 “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been *put to death in the flesh*, but made alive in the spirit” 1 Peter 3:18 *He came in the flesh as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world.* “The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him, and said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29 [Brackets added for clarity].

B. UCG: “Could God Die? When talking about God, some people don’t like to consider the possibility that God could die. How could God cease to exist? As an infinite, immortal spirit Being, He couldn’t. But if He volunteered to become a human being and to possesses all the attributes of human nature and a physical existence, then He could die. And indeed He did die—and when He died, He was really dead. *Jesus: The Real Story.* Published by The United Church Of God, an International Association. 2010. p. 65.

VIII. JESUS CHRIST: Was Jesus physically resurrected? Or was He resurrected a spirit person?

A. Bible: Jesus Christ was physically resurrected in the same body which He died in, but now glorified.

“The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, seeing that you do these things?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews therefore said, “It took forty six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body.” John 2:18–21 “And well they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst. But they were startled and frightened and thought they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” Luke 24:37–39”

B. UCG : Jesus Christ was resurrected not physically but rather as a spirit person, the first among many to follow Him.

“As previously explained, the God family from the beginning comprised two divine Beings—God and the Word, the latter becoming flesh 2,000 years ago as the Son of God, Jesus Christ. After Jesus’ human life and death He was resurrected *as divine spirit existence* as the “firstborn from the dead” and “firstborn among many brethren”. Thus *Jesus was spiritually born in the resurrection* as the first of many “brethren” or children to follow later.” *Is God a Trinity?* Published by The United Church of God. 2011. p. 79.

IX. THE HOLY SPIRIT

Is the Holy Spirit God/Lord or a mere force that goes out from God?

A. Bible: *The Holy Spirit is God, not an impersonal force.*

“But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart *to lie to the Holy Spirit*, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” Acts 5:3–4

The Holy Spirit is Lord, not a force. “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” 2 Corinthians 3:17 Can a force convict? “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment.” John 16:8 Can a force send people on a mission? “And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” Acts 13:2.

Can a force intercede? “And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words . . .” Romans 8:26 Can a force teach? “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” John 14:26

Can a force bear witness of someone? “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Romans 8:16 *Can a force be insulted?* “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” Hebrews 10:29

Can a force be grieved? “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Ephesians 4:30 *Can a force be lied to?* “But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price

of the land?" Acts 5:3 *Can a force be blasphemed?* "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven." Matthew 12:31

B. UCG: "Rather than describing the Holy Spirit as a distinct person or entity, The Bible most often refers to as and connects it with God's divine power. . . . Jewish scholars, examining the references to it in the Old Testament scriptures, have never defined the Holy Spirit as anything but the power of God." *Is God a Trinity?* Published by The United Church of God, an International Association. 2011. p. 53.

X. SHEOL/HADES

Are they two distinct things or are they one and the same thing?

A. Bible Sheol/Hades are two distinct things.

"For Thou wilt not *abandon my soul to Sheol*; Neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to *undergo decay* [the grave]." [Brackets Added]. Psalm 16:10 "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which where in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death [the grave] and Hades [where the souls of the unrepentant were held] were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire." Revelation 20:13–14

B. UCG: Sheol/Hades are one and the same thing as the grave.

"Both sheol and hades refer simply to the grave (p. 21)."

"Many scriptures that use the term hell in the King James Version are simply talking about the grave, the place where everyone, whether good or evil, goes at death (p. 22)." *Heaven & Hell*. Published by The United Church of God, an International Association. 2009. pp. 21, 22.

XI. THE SOUL AND THE BODY

Are they two distinct things or are they one and the same?

A. THE BIBLE: The soul and body are two different aspects that make up man's nature.

"And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Matthew 10:28 "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved

complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23

B. UCG: Man does not have a soul.

“So is man an immortal soul? No. Does he have an immortal soul? No. The Bible declares plainly that man is temporary, of the dust of the earth. There is no immortal quality about man at all-unless and until he receives it from God through the resurrection, which means being brought back to life in a body, raised from the dead as Jesus was. . . . Nor does man have some spiritual soul with conscious awareness independent of the physical body.” *Heaven & Hell*. Published by The United Church of God, an International Association. 2009. p. 14.

XII. DOES THE SOUL LEAVE THE BODY AT THE TIME OF DEATH?

A. Bible: The soul indeed leaves the body at the time of death.

“And it came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin.” Genesis 35:18 “Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD, and said, “O LORD my God, I pray Thee, let this child’s life [literally soul] return to him.” And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life [literally soul] of the child returned to him and he revived.” [Brackets added]. 1 Kings 17:21–22 “. . . we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 5:8 “But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.” Philippians 1:23–24

B. UCG: The soul does not leave the body at the time of death.

“No conscious immortal soul leaves the body at the moment of death to go to dwell in bliss in heaven or to suffer unending torment in hellfire.” *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*. Published by The United Church Of God, an International Association. 2009. p. 58.

End of part 1

THE LAST SUPPER, THE PASSOVER, AND THE DAY CHRIST DIED

by Steve Lagoon

This article is a response to critics who claim there are contradictions in the New Testament's chronology of Christ's Last Supper, the Passover, and His crucifixion. Yet, this is not the first time such questions have arisen. After relating details of the Easter controversy that rocked the second century church, historian Henry Chadwick commented:

There had been sharp controversy in Asia Minor about [AD] 170 on the related question whether the Last Supper was the Passover meal.¹

Times have certainly changed, yet this question remains controversial even today.

How Should Christians Handle Apparent Biblical Problems?

Before responding to the specific questions raised by Bible critics, we should momentarily consider the wider question of how to respond to allegations of biblical contradictions in general.

Unlike liberal scholars who reject the true inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, and who readily assume errors in the Bible, conservative Christians approach the Scriptures more cautiously. They give more credit to the human authors of the Scriptures, especially in light of evidence that the words they wrote were inspired by the Holy Spirit (Romans 3:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21).

Therefore, when encountering apparent discrepancies, they approach the situation like an investigator at a crime scene, or like one trying to reconstruct the events of an accident. No doubt, experienced investigators learn that what may seem to be an apparent contradiction in eyewitness testimony at the beginning may well turn out to be correct in the light of further investigation.

Alleged Problems related to the Chronology of Christ's Death

Our goal is to clarify two key questions. First, we want to understand the nature of the Last Supper, and particularly whether it was a Passover observance. Second, and more importantly, we want to know

1 Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Baltimore MD (Penguin Books, 1967) 85.

whether Jesus ate the Last Supper with His disciples on Nisan 15 (the traditional time for the Passover meal), or a day earlier on Nisan 14 as some suppose?

We will consider proposed attempts to answer these questions and understanding the chronology of the gospels concerning key events in Christ's Passion Week. This is important, not only as an attempt to resolve an apparent chronological problem in the gospels, but because, as we shall see, this problem is regularly appealed to as a key proof against the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

The Claims of the Critics

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* presents the problem with some guarded caution:

As to the important question whether the Last Supper was a Passover meal the Gospels do not give consistent information. The Synoptists say that it was (Mk. 14:12–16 and par.; Lk. 22:15), but Jn. Seems to place the Last Supper on the night of 13th–14th Nisan, 18:28, cf. 19:14.²

Critical scholars are usually more direct in their criticism. For example, noted New Testament scholar Bart D. Ehrman stated:

The point is that many of the earliest Christians appear to have been willing to change a historical fact to make a theological point. The illustration I have chosen concerns a small detail with profound implications—the day and time of Jesus' death, which are all described differently in the gospels.³

The radical critics openly attack the veracity of the Scriptures. For instance, John Shelby Spong stated bluntly:

Was the last supper the Passover meal as Matthew (Matt. 26:17ff), Mark (Mark 14:12ff), and Luke (Luke 22:17ff) prefer, or a preparation for the Passover as the Fourth Gospel believes (John 13:1–9, 12–16)? These are but a few of the contradictory references in the biblical text itself that resist reconciliation and that make difficult to impossible a literal, inerrant approach to Scripture . . . John disagreed with Matthew, Mark, and Luke about whether the Last Supper was the Passover meal. For John it was a preparation meal eaten on the eve of the Passover.⁴

2 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Edited by Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey Bromiley, Volume 5, Grand Rapids MI (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967) 899.

3 Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, Second Edition, Oxford (Oxford University Press, 2000) 49.

4 John Shelby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture*, New York (Harper-Collins Publishers, 1991) 85, 187.

Note the shot across the bow at biblical inerrancy. Helms leveled a similar assault questioning the very historicity of the accounts:

It was Mark who first presented, for theological purposes, the fiction that the Last Supper was a Passover meal; Matthew and Luke follow his lead in this, but John makes it quite clear that, in his view, the Last Supper was not a Passover meal, rather it happened the night before Passover (see John 13:1; 18:28; 19:14) . . . We cannot, in other words, know when Jesus died—the afternoon before Passover or the afternoon after—because the accounts are theological fiction.⁵

Representing the so-called New School of biblical scholars, Elaine Pagels stated:

Mark actually writes the Passover feast into the narrative, declaring that Jesus' last supper with his disciples was a Passover feast—one that Jesus had carefully, even miraculously, directed his disciples to prepare [Mark 14:12–16] . . . The author of the Gospel of John gives a *different* chronology . . . John writes that '*before* the feast of Passover [John 13:1] Jesus shared a meal with his disciples for the last time, a meal that obviously could not have celebrated Passover.'⁶

Conservative Approaches to Harmonize the Last Supper and the Passover

How have conservative Bible-believing Christians responded to these serious charges against the veracity of the gospels?

Typically, they have attempted to harmonize the gospel accounts either by accepting the apparent teaching of the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) that the Last Supper was a normal Passover meal and accordingly attempt to explain away any evidence in John's gospel that seemed contrary, or vice-versa.

D. A. Carson explained:

Historically, this reckoning [Gospel of John] introduces such a jarring contradiction with the Synoptics that most commentators have felt it necessary either to approve one scheme while condemning the other, or to propose some kind of resolution.⁷

5 Randel Helms, *Gospel Fictions*, Amherst NY (Prometheus Books, 1988) 106, 107, 108.

6 Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, New York (Vintage Books, 2003) 22–23.

7 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids MI (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991) 455.

Robert Stein agreed:

The cardinal question regarding the date of the last supper involves whether it was in fact associated with a Passover meal. This would appear to be certain from Matthew 26:17–19; Mark 14:12–16 and Luke 22:7–15. But John 13:1, 29; 18:28; 19:31 give the impression that the trial and crucifixion took place before the Passover. Thus from John it appears that the Last Supper must have taken place on or before the 14th of Nisan. There have been numerous attempts to explain this. Some of them are:

- (1) The Synoptic Gospels are correct . . . (2) John is correct . . .
- (3) Both the Synoptic Gospels and John's Gospel are correct because the Passover was celebrated that year on two separate days.⁸

Proposed Solutions

Carson alluded to two possible solutions often advanced by scholars to harmonize the gospel accounts of the Last Supper. The first leans heavily on John's gospel and suggests that the Last Supper was *not* the typical or regular Passover meal (observed on the evening of Nisan 15), but was in fact observed one day earlier (on the evening of Nisan 14) than the Jewish population in general.

In contrast, leaning heavily on the Synoptic gospels, the *second* view affirms that the last supper was a true Passover meal observed at the regular time (evening of Nisan 15).

Another important proposal is the claim that there were in fact two calendars operative in first century Jerusalem, some Jews following one, some another with the result that the Passover was eaten on successive days explaining the apparent contradiction.

Grant Osborne assessed the situation as follows:

Some critics insist the difference between the Synoptics and John cannot be harmonized. Yet as we will see below, they can be harmonized."⁹

Author's Position

Having considered these various proposals, I find the view that 'the Last Supper was indeed a Passover celebration observed at the

8 Robert H. Stein, *Last Supper*, article in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green & Scot McKnight Editors, Downers Grove IL (Inter Varsity Press, 1992) 445–446.

9 Grant R. Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Matthew*, Clinton E. Arnold General Editor, Grand Rapids MI (Zondervan, 2010) 961.

traditional time' the most compelling interpretation of the biblical narrative, and such will be the view defended forthwith.

Some Historical Considerations

Before examining the biblical evidence, it will be good to consider some historical and biblical background.

The book of Exodus directs that the Passover be celebrated annually in commemoration of the Israelites escape from slavery in Egypt. The Jews were to slaughter the sacrificial lamb on Nisan 14 (Nisan is also known as Abib) at twilight (Exodus 12:6), which was in the afternoon before sundown. Thomas and Gundry provided the details:

Once the sun set beginning Nisan 15, the Jewish families were to gather for the Passover meal. The Passover was normally eaten on the evening marking the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth (Lev. 23:5).¹⁰

It is important to keep in view the distinction between the *day of Passover* on Nisan 14 (on which the Passover lamb was slain and prepared) and the *Passover meal* observance on Nisan 15 (just after sundown ending Nisan 14). It may seem confusing, but scholarly sources are clear that the Passover meal was not eaten or observed on the day of Passover (Nisan 14), but rather a few hours later after the sunset beginning Nisan 15.

Gemerén explained:

Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread (Pesah, Massot). This was held on the fourteenth through the twenty-first of Abib (Nisan). The Torah differentiates between the Passover as the first day of the celebration and the feast of unleavened bread as the seven days which follow . . . The first and the seventh days were 'holy convocations,' and no work could be performed (Lev. 23:7–8).¹¹

Chronologist Frank Klassen agreed:

15th to 21st was the feast of the Passover. The first and last days of the feast, the 15th and 21st, were Sabbath days, holy convocations, when no manner of work was to be done.¹²

10 Robert L. Thomas & Stanley N. Gundry, *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels with Explanations and Essays*, New York (HarperCollins Publishers, 1988) 312.

11 W. A. Van Gemeren, *Feasts and Festivals, Old Testament*, article in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, Editor, Grand Rapids MI (Baker Book House, 1984, 1991) 410.

12 Frank R. Klassen, *The Chronology of the Bible*, Nashville TN (Regal Publishers, Inc., 1975) 23.

It should be clear, then, that Nisan 14—the day of Passover—was not a Sabbath day:

The first celebration, though is not a day of holy convocation, is the Passover.”¹³

We shall find this background information most useful as we proceed.

Was the Last Supper ‘A Passover meal observed a day early’?

As we examine key passages in the gospels, let us keep before our minds the argument that the Last Supper was indeed a Passover meal, as observed by Jesus and His disciples a day early (Nisan 14) in the face of His impending crucifixion preventing the typical Nisan 15 celebration.

Robert Gundry explained key aspects of the theory:

An alternative explanation reconciles John and the Synoptics by supposing Jesus and the Twelve ate the Passover meal earlier than most of the Jews did. Thus the Synoptics are correct in stating the Last Supper was a Passover meal, and John is correct in implying that the other Jews did not eat the Passover meal till evening of Good Friday . . . Jesus may have arranged for an early Passover meal because He foresaw His death before the regular meal.¹⁴

As we proceed, we shall find that although there is much that is attractive about this view, yet ultimately it does not hold up well under biblical scrutiny.

Evidence in the Synoptics Gospels

We move now to consider the evidence supplied by the Synoptic Gospels.

What we will find is that the Synoptics strongly suggest that the Last Supper was indeed a Passover observance. For instance, Matthew’s gospel described preparations for the Last Supper:

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make *preparations for you to eat the Passover?*” He replied, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, “The Teacher

13 Nathaniel Mcklem, *The Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, Volume 2, New York (Abingdon Press, 1953) 111.

14 Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, Revised Edition, Grand Rapids MI (Zondervan Publishing House, 1981) 183–184.

says: My appointed time is near. *I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.*” So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the *Passover*. When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve (Matthew 26:17–20).

See also Mark 14:12–16 and Luke 22:7–16.

Let’s begin by noting Matthew’s statement that the disciples made Passover preparations “on the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread.” This phrase cannot be taken strictly at face value since it would require that the Last Supper was observed on Nisan 16, a day after the Passover observance.

It should be noted that it was normal for first century Jews to refer to the entire 8-day period (including the Passover) as the Feast of Unleavened Bread and or the Passover. A. T Robertson supplied important historical details:

Passover is used in the general sense of the feast of unleavened bread . . . the one term was used to include the other. The Passover was expanded to mean the entire feast that followed, and *vice versa* . . . Now, the first day of unleavened bread was the 14th Nisan. There is no question about this. Josephus speaks of the feast lasting eight days.¹⁵

Therefore, it is likely that Matthew was referring to Nisan 14, by Jewish reckoning, as the day the disciples were preparing the Passover meal to be observed a few hours later as sundown marked the beginning of Nisan 15.

However, it should be noted that Matthew’s detail that the disciples were preparing for the Passover meal “on the first day of Unleavened Bread” is not just problematic for those that suggest that the Last Supper was observed a day earlier than the typical observation (Nisan 13 rather than Nisan 14), but is in fact detrimental to it since there is no way to make “the first day of Unleavened Bread” refer to Nisan 13 as would be required if the Last Supper occurred on Nisan 14 (a day early).

Let it also be noted that whereas Mark says that the Last Supper was celebrated “when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb” (Mark 14:12), Luke’s description is even more decisive: “Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb *had to be sacrificed*” (Luke 22:7).

15 A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ*, New York (Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922) 280, 281.

This evidence so strongly indicates that the Last Supper was a typical Nisan 15 Passover meal that A. T. Robertson could comment:

The testimony of the Synoptists, Mark, Matthew, and Luke. The evidence they give is abundant and explicit to the effect that Jesus ate the regular Paschal Supper on the evening *after* the 14th Nisan.¹⁶

There can be little doubt that the Synoptic gospels affirm that the Last Supper was a typical Passover observance.

The Evidence in John's Gospel

As we weigh the evidence in John's gospel, we shall find that John is in essential agreement with the Synoptics; that the passages that seem to suggest that the Passover celebration was still to come following the Last Supper are well-explained within first century Jewish cultural traditions and practices, and needn't be interpreted as in conflict with the testimony of the Synoptics.

We can be sure that John, writing later than the Synoptics, would have sought to clear up any misunderstanding that had arisen from the Synoptic gospels. That is, if the Last Supper was not a typical Nisan 15 Passover meal, John would have made that unmistakably clear.

Yet, such is not the case. True, there are several passages that seem upon first blush to suggest that the Passover was still future at the time of Christ's crucifixion. But such vague references in John pale in comparison to the very clear teachings of the Synoptics affirming that the Last Supper was a typical Passover celebration.

John 18:28

Let us begin with John 18:28 in which because of their anticipation of eating "*the Passover*" the Jewish leaders were reluctant to become ceremonially unclean by going into Pilate:

Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, *because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.* (John 18:28)

¹⁶ A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ*, New York (Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922) 280.

It is quite understandable that some take John to be referring to the Passover celebration typically observed on the evening of Nisan 15. But is there any reason to question this assumption?

D. A. Carson explained that at the time of Jesus, the expression “*the Passover*” rightly referred to more than just the Passover celebration proper:

There is ample evidence that ‘the Passover’ could refer to the combined feast of the paschal meal itself plus the ensuing Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover . . . The Jews wanted to continue to participate in the entire feast; they wanted to eat the Passover.¹⁷

Michael Wilkins was in agreement with Carson’s view:

Another promising view suggests that the passages in John that seem to indicate that the Passover had not yet occurred when Jesus celebrated the Passover (e.g., John 18:28; 19:14, 31) all use the term ‘Passover’ to point to the week-long series of events, not just the official Passover meal itself. In that case, Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover on Thursday, the beginning of Nisan 15 and the week-long feast, at the same time as the rest of those assembled in Jerusalem.¹⁸

Grant Osborne further elaborated on the view:

“It is best to follow those who point out that the ‘day of preparation’ on which Christ was crucified was oriented to the ‘special Sabbath,’ namely, the Sabbath (Saturday) of Passover week, rather than Friday. *So the meal talked about in John 18:28 is not the Passover meal itself* (which was done the previous day) but the *hagigah* meal of the following day, beginning the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was also called a Passover celebration¹⁹

But this interpretation raises an interesting historical question. As we have seen, Nisan 15 is also, strictly speaking, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. If the Last Supper was the typical Passover celebration, it follows that Christ was crucified yet on Nisan

17 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids MI (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991) 589–590. Gleason Archer, in his *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Grand Rapids MI (Zondervan Publishing House, 1982) 375–376, agrees with the position of D. A. Carson that the Last Supper was a normal Passover meal.

18 Michael Wilkins, *The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible: The Gospel and Acts*, General Editor Jeremy Royal Howard, Nashville TN (Holman Reference, 2013) 163.

19 Grant R. Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Matthew*, Clinton E. Arnold General Editor, Grand Rapids MI (Zondervan, 2010) 962.

15. The problem then is that Nisan 15 is a special Sabbath, whereas the gospels unanimously agree that the day Christ was crucified was a day of preparation for the Sabbath that would begin at sundown (hence the urgency of Christ's burial).

The answer lies in the practice of first century Judaism in which the Nisan 15 special Sabbath was loosely observed. The real focus was upon the weekly Sabbath.

The Jewish scholar Dr. J. H. Hertz showed that there was indeed such a distinction between the intensity in which the weekly Sabbath was observed in contrast to the special festal Sabbaths:

Servile work, lit. 'work of labour', the usual work which one does on an ordinary week day. *It implies a less strict abstinence from labour than was demanded for the Sabbath* (v. 3) and the Day of Atonement (v. 28), and does not include the prohibition of preparing food.²⁰

John 19:14

Let us now consider another important text in John's gospel. While describing the scene of Christ's judgment by the Roman Governor Pilate, John stated: "And it was the preparation of the Passover" (John 19:14, KJV)

Again, does this indicate that the Passover celebration was yet future on the day Christ died? Does the "the day of the preparation for the Passover" necessarily indicate that Christ was crucified on Nisan 14?

That was the view of Philip Comfort:

Since this was the day of the preparation for the Passover (the day in which people prepared for the Passover meal), Jesus was being crucified (as the Lamb of God) at the same time the Passover lambs were being slaughtered.²¹

It seems better to understand John as referring to the entire festive week including not only the Passover proper, but to the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed in the coming week.

20 Dr. J. H. Hertz, C.H. Late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs: Hebrew Text English Translation and Commentary*, Second Edition, London (Soncino Press, 1965) 0521.

21 Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary: Commentary on the Variant Readings of the Ancient New Testament Manuscripts and How They Relate to the Major English Translations*, Carol Stream IL (Tyndale House Publishers, 2008) 317.

Indeed, the *New International Version* captures this idea with its somewhat interpretive translation: “It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week.”

This was the view of Kostenberger:

Some argue that the ‘day of Preparation’ refers to the day preceding the *Passover*, that is, the day on which preparations for Passover are made . . . The Synoptists, however, clearly portray Jesus and his disciples as celebrating the Passover the night prior to the crucifixion. Moreover, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Josephus alike use ‘Preparation Day’ to refer to the day preceding the Sabbath (Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; Ant. 16.6.2§§ 163–64). The term used here should therefore be taken to refer to the day of preparation for the Sabbath . . . If this is accurate, *tou pascha* means not ‘of the Passover’ but ‘of Passover Week.’²²

Grant Osborne added:

So the ‘day of Preparation’ of John 19:14 was also Friday, meaning that John and the Synoptics are in agreement.²³

John 19:31

Let us consider another relevant passage in John:

“Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down” (John 19:31)

Some draw attention to John’s note that the day beginning at sundown following Christ’s crucifixion was a “special Sabbath.” It is suggested that this must refer to Nisan 15, the formal first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and so it follows that the Last Supper must have been observed a day early, on Nisan 14.

But it is equally acceptable to interpret John’s reference to the “special Sabbath” as indicative of the weekly Sabbath intensified as it was by its occurrence during the great Passover Festival.

22 Andreas J. Kostenberger, John, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, Clinton E. Arnold, General Editor, Volume 2, Grand Rapids MI (Zondervan, 2002) 173.

23 Grant R. Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Matthew*, Clinton E. Arnold General Editor, Grand Rapids MI (Zondervan, 2010) 961–962

John 13:1

John Franklin Carter makes reference to an interpretation of John 13:1 (which he himself does not support) that should be noted in our discussion:

They say that the phrase, ‘*before the feast of the Passover*,’ in John 13:1 indicates that the incidents related in that chapter [i.e. the Last Supper] occurred in connection with a meal before the Passover.²⁴

In line with this view, reference is made to John’s statement calling the Last Supper merely “*the evening meal*” (John 13:2), a seemingly strange way to describe the Passover meal.

However, “Just before the Passover Feast” in John 13:1 more reasonably refers to the time just before the meal than it does to the day before. Likewise, the “evening meal” seems entirely proper to a meal (of whatever kind) that occurs in the evening.

Was the Last Supper a Traditional Passover Meal?

Some have also tried to settle the chronological questions involved by suggesting that the Last Supper could not have been the traditional Nisan 15 Passover observance because of the differences between the traditional ceremony and that which was observed by Jesus and His disciples.

Indeed, there are some differences. Some have noted, for instance, the lack of mention of a sacrificial lamb at the meal. J. R. Porter’s comments are well taken:

None of the gospels explicitly mention the consumption of the lamb at the last supper, but they do refer to other rites that were, and remain, a part of the Passover meal . . . The gospel writers mention only those elements of Passover ritual to which Jesus’ words gave a new and distinctive interpretation.²⁵

The clear assertion of the gospels is that Jesus did, in fact, observe the Passover:

“In the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover? He replied, ‘Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. *I am going to celebrate the Passover with*

24 John Franklin Carter, *A Layman’s Harmony of the Gospels*, Nashville TN (Broadman Press, 1961) 281.

25 J. R. Porter, *Jesus Christ: The Jesus of History, the Christ of Faith*, Oxford New York (Oxford University Press, 1999) 113.

my disciples at your house. So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.” (Matthew 26:17–20; see also Mark 14:12–18)

So despite the omission of certain details of the traditional Passover observance, the Synoptic Gospels are overwhelmingly clear that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. Luke’s gospel adds the detail of Jesus’ decisive comments during the Last Supper:

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’ (Luke 22:14–15)

What more could be necessary beyond Jesus’ own testimony during the Last Supper that it was a Passover meal?

As to possible differences between the Last Supper and traditional Passover observations, these can be accounted for by the fact that Christ was bringing new meaning to the old observance, in accordance with His divine authority.

It seems best, then, to view the Last Supper as a typical Passover meal, but nevertheless a unique event in which Christ gave new meaning to the Passover (representing the Old Covenant) by transforming it into the institution of the Lord’s Supper or Communion (representing the New Covenant).

The *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* made this interesting observation:

The lack of mention of a lamb is probably significant. Jesus was presenting himself as the sacrificial lamb of the New Covenant, and the mention of the literal lamb would have been a misleading distraction in the narrative.²⁶

So while there may well have been a typical Passover lamb at the Last Supper, yet the focus of the Gospels is to present Christ as the Passover lamb of the New Covenant. Jesus Himself would be “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). The Old Covenant gave way to the New covenant in the blood of Christ (Luke 22:20).

²⁶ *The Last Supper and the Passover*, article in the *NIV Archaeological Study Bible: An Illustrated Walk Through Biblical History*, Grand Rapids MI (Zondervan, 2005) 1611.

The Quartodeciman Controversy

An interesting historical consideration is provided by the Quartodeciman controversy in early Church history. This was a debate among early Christians as to the proper time to celebrate Christ's death and resurrection.

The Quartodecimans argued that since Christ died on Nisan 14, the celebration of His death and resurrection should be tied to that date, rather than always being observed on a Sunday. R.K Bishop provides some historical details:

The early development of the celebration of Easter and the attendant calendar disputes were largely a result of Christianity's attempt to emancipate itself from Judaism. Sunday had already replaced the Jewish Sabbath early in the second century, and despite efforts in Asia Minor to maintain *the Jewish Passover date of 14 Nisan for Easter (hence the name Quartodecimans)*, the Council of Nicaea adopted the annual Sunday following the full moon after the vernal equinox.²⁷

What is important for our purposes here is to note the very early belief that Christ's death occurred on Nisan 14, and hence the Quartodeciman advocates came to be known as "fourteenthers." Schaff refers to "Claudius Apoloinarius (Apollinaris), bishop of Hierapolis, in Phrygia"²⁸ as stating:

*The fourteenth is the true Passover of the Lord, the great sacrifice, the Son of God in the place of the lamb . . . who was lifted up upon the horns of the unicorn . . . And who was buried on the day of the Passover [Nisan 14], the stone having been placed upon his tomb.*²⁹

Jack Finegan added:

Since the date of *Nisan 14 for the death of Jesus* depends largely upon the Gospel according to John, it is to be noted that early tradition connects John the apostle, often considered the author of the Gospel, with Asia and in particular with Ephesus, and that it was in the churches of Asia Minor that the '*quartodecimans*' insisted upon maintaining the date of *Nisan 14 for the annual observance*, whereas in Rome and elsewhere

27 R. K. Bishop, *Easter*, article in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, Editor, Grand Rapids MI (Baker Book House, 1984) 339.

28 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume II, Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100–325*, Grand Rapids MI (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910) 214.

29 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume II, Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100–325*, Grand Rapids MI (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910) 215.

the commemoration of the Passion was on a Friday and the Resurrection on a Sunday.³⁰

Finegan showed that the Quartodecimans, primarily in Asia Minor, and under the influence of the Apostle John, believed that Christ Jesus died on Nisan 14 and annually observed or commemorated His death on that same date, in distinction from rest of the Church.

Kinzig, however, showed that the Quartodeciman evidence is not so unanimous or decisive:

“Quartodeciman practice followed the Johannine chronology, placing Jesus’ Crucifixion on Nisan 14 and thus giving Passover a Christological interpretation . . . The basis of the calendrical calculation varied from group to group, especially since some also followed the synoptic chronology (crucifixion on Nisan 15).³¹

So while there are some early Christian sources that have affirmed a Nisan 14 date for Christ’s Last Supper and crucifixion, this was not universally held, even among the Quartodecimans themselves. Therefore, appeal to the Quartodeciman controversy cannot settle the question of the biblical chronology related to the Last Supper and the Passover.

Two calendars and Two Passovers?

At this point we will consider an increasingly popular solution to the relationship between the Last Supper and the Passover as recorded in the gospels. This proposal suggests that at the time of Jesus, the Passover was celebrated on two consecutive days based on alternative calendars. For instance, Michael Wilkins explained:

One compelling view suggests that Jesus and his disciples celebrated Passover according to a solar calendar known from Jubilees that was possibly used by the Qumran community (Jaubert 1965; Morris 1992. 654). This view rests on the position that the Synoptic Gospels followed the method of the Galileans and the Pharisees, by whose reckoning the day was measured from sunrise to sunrise while John’s gospel followed the method of the Judeans, especially the Jerusalem Sadducees . . . Thus for the Synoptics, Jesus and his disciples had their paschal lamb slaughtered in the late afternoon on Thursday, Nisan 14, and ate the Passover later that evening, while for John the Judean

30 Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, Revised Edition, Peabody MA (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998) 368.

31 Wolfran Kinzig, *Religion Past and Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, Volume 10, Boston (Brill, 2011) 578.

Jews had the paschal lamb slaughtered in the late afternoon of Friday Nisan 14, and at the Passover with the unleavened bread that night, which by then had become Nisan 15. Thus Jesus had eaten the Passover meal when his enemies, who had yet celebrated the Passover, arrested him.³²

After an extensive examination of the question, Harold Hoehner also favored the two-calendar proposal:

It was concluded that Jesus ate the Passover . . . It is generally accepted that different calendars for reckoning the Passover were used by various groups and regions . . . It was felt that the most tenable solution is to recognize that the Galileans, and with them Jesus and His disciples, reckoned from sunrise-to-sunrise, while the Judeans reckoned from sunset-to-sunset.³³

While I do not reject the possibility of the two-calendars proposal, it seems an unnecessary hypothesis since the Synoptic Gospels can quite reasonably be harmonized with John's gospel.

Putting it all together

Since the historical record is incomplete, it is impossible to conclusively determine with precision the chronology of those last majestic days of Christ's life before His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. There can be no doubt that continued research will shed new light on the historical considerations involved, and as has happened so often in the past, the Scriptures will be fully vindicated.

Conclusion

What is important for the purposes of our present investigation is that the criticisms of biblical skeptics concerning the nature of the Last Supper and its relationship to the Passover are premature and unfair.

It is easy for the biblical critic to cast aspersions on the Bible. But history is littered with critics who mocked the Bible only to have the spade and shovel of the archaeologist prove them wrong. Humility, then, is in order for all who love the Truth.

32 Michael Wilkins, *The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible: The Gospel and Acts*, General Editor Jeremy Royal Howard, Nashville TN (Holman Reference, 2013) 162–163. See also p. 586–587.

33 Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, Grand Rapids MI (Zondervan Publishing Company, 1977) 90. See the whole discussion on pages 81–90.

QUIZ: JEWISH HOLY DAYS, FEASTS & FESTIVALS

1. This holiday commemorates God's action in setting Israel free from slavery in Egypt.
 - a. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - b. The Festival of Freedom and Worship
 - c. From the Red Sea to the Dead Sea Festival
 - d. Independence Day

2. This holiday commemorates the cleansing of The Temple after it had been desecrated by Syrian King Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 168 BC.
 - a. The Feast of Maccabees
 - b. The Miracle of the Eight
 - c. Purification (Feast of Cleansing Waters)
 - d. Chanukah (Feast of Lights)

3. The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) commemorates:
 - a. The Jewish Tabernacle Choir
 - b. The annual gifts raised by Jewish pilgrims moving the toll booths into Jerusalem
 - c. The 40 years of wandering by the Jews following their exodus from Egypt
 - d. The period of the Jewish exile in Babylon following the 586 BC destruction of the temple

4. The Feast of Pentecost (Feast of Weeks):
 - a. Commemorates the Jewish adoption of the Greek numbering system
 - b. Was the time when devout Jews contemplated the cost of pentes
 - c. Was observed every 50 days in the Jewish calendar
 - d. Was observed 50 days after the Passover

5. Feast of Purim:

- a. Commemorated Israel's escape from genocide through the faithfulness of Esther and Mordecai
- b. A special time of ritual purification in Israel
- c. Commemorated Israel's conquest of the Promised Land under the heroic leadership of Joshua
- d. Commemorated the casting of lots that decided the territorial boundaries for the twelve tribes of Israel after the conquest

6. The 9th of Ab (Tisha B' Av)

- a. Regularly fell between the 8th and the 10th of Ab to commemorate the 11th of Ab
- b. A solemn commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem's temple in 586 BC. by the Babylonians and in 70 AD by the Romans
- c. A joyous celebration of David's victory over the giant Goliath and the Philistines on the 9th of Ab
- d. Commemorate the rebuilding of the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 515–516 BC

7. Which is not true of the weekly Sabbath?

- a. Begins at sundown on Friday evening
- b. Instituted to provide rest for man and beasts of burden
- c. Is a day of fasting under Mosaic law
- d. Is one of the 10 Commandments

8. Which is not true of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)?

- a. Occasion of the annual High Priest Lutfisk dinner
- b. Only day of the year High Priest entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple
- c. Nation's sins were symbolically laid upon a goat, and the goat was then sent out into the wilderness (scapegoat)
- d. Special Sabbath marked by fasting

9. Which is not true of Rosh Hashanah (Feast of Trumpets)?

- a. Jewish New Year
- b. Only day of year Jewish priests shaved their beards
- c. Observed with the blowing of the trumpets
- d. A special Sabbath

10. Which is not true of the Jubilees Holy Day?

- a. Began with the blowing of the Horn
- b. Observed every 50 years
- c. Indentured slaves were set free
- d. Occasion of the annual "Jubilees Music Festival" in Israel attracting visitors from throughout the Middle East

Answers:

1. a; 2. d; 3. c; 4. d; 5. a; 6. b; 7. c; 8. a; 9. b; 10. d.

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