

Torah Observant “SHOMER MITZVOT”

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוֹת

A Series on Practical Messianic Living And Apologetics (halakhah)
Compiled and Edited by Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

Yeshua and Unleavened Bread An Examination of an Event

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

*Updated: February 22, 2006

In August of 2001 Wayne Jackson and Christian Courier published an article entitled “*Did Jesus Eat the Passover Supper?*”¹ in an effort to address an enigmatic, seeming discrepancy of the Synoptic Gospels. With their permission, I have taken liberties with his article by reprinting much of it here for our examination. His thoughts and my thoughts flow out of one another, with my conclusions and expansions forming the closing for the article. It is my aim to bring furthering credibility to the Apostolic Scriptures and the stories of Yeshua contained therein.

We know that Yeshua is the Passover lamb, as foreshadowed in the TaNaKH. But did Yeshua “keep” the Passover? How could he have “eaten the Passover meal” while at the same time “represent the lamb being slain as the sacrifice?” The question often asked that must first be answered is: Did Yeshua and his disciples keep the Passover at the appointed time?

First, it appears clear that Yeshua and his disciples did eat the Passover supper. Two things make this apparent.

The LORD promised the disciples that he would “keep the Passover” (Mt. 26:18), which appears to be the equivalent of “eat the Passover” (Mk. 14:14), a theory we shall test shortly. He appointed the place for that event and gave instructions for the preparation (Mk. 14:12ff). The Synoptic texts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) then harmoniously flow toward the evening of that very day, and depict Yeshua as “eating” with the disciples (Mt. 26:21; Mk. 14:18).

The Torah of Moses is binding for all time, and the LORD was very careful to do all that the law commanded (Mt. 5:17-18; Jn. 8:29). Since the Passover was a

¹ <http://www.christiancourier.com/questions/passoverMealQuestion.htm>

part of the law's requirement, the LORD obviously partook of this feast. The testimony of the Synoptics is clear and decisive that Yeshua and his disciples observed the Passover.

Does “Keep the Passover” Mean To “Eat the Passover”?

Surely there can be no doubt that the Passover should be kept on the fourteenth of Abib, as Num. 9:1-5 makes clear:

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, 2 Let the children of Israel also keep the Passover at his appointed season. 3 In the fourteenth day of this month, at even (*beyn ha'arbayim*), ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it. 4 And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, that they should keep the Passover. 5 And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even (*beyn ha'arbayim*) in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel. Num. 9:1-5.

Does this instruction mean that the Passover lamb was to be both sacrificed and eaten on the fourteenth or just sacrificed on the fourteenth. Does “keep” mean “sacrifice and eat” or just “sacrifice”? If “keep” means “sacrifice and eat” then it poses a major problem to those chronologies which have the Torah Passover occurring at the end of the fourteenth (for had the Israelites sacrificed the Passover lamb at the end of the fourteenth then by the time they had roasted it they would have eaten it well into the fifteenth). However, if “keep” means just “sacrifice” then it poses no problems to any of the chronologies. There does seem to be a very strong indication in two Scriptures, Ex. 12:48 and Matt. 26:17-18, that to keep the Passover means to eat the Passover:

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. Ex. 12:48.

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? 18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples. Matt. 26:17-18.

If Messiah did not eat a Passover lamb at the Last Supper then the reference in Matthew may have little relevance; however, Ex. 12:48 and Num. 9:2-5 appear to clearly indicate that the TaNaKH Passover occurred at the beginning of the

fourteenth.

The Problem

While John 18:25 seems to be problematic, there are possible solutions which relieve the narrative of conflict. The passage reads as follows:

“Then they led Yeshua from the house of Caiaphas to the praetorium. It was early. They themselves did not enter the praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover.”

On the surface, this seems to suggest that the Passover had not been celebrated as yet. What shall be said of this confusing situation?

Possible Solutions

Respectable scholars have proposed several solutions to this problem.

First, some have contended that the meal Yeshua ate with the disciples, commonly called the “last supper” was another sort of meal, but not the Passover. Burton Coffman, based upon his view of John 18:28, says there is “no way” this could have been the Passover.² Unfortunately, this view conflicts with the testimony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (see above). As one prominent scholar has observed, “hardly a single Bible expositor of note today” agrees with this opinion.³

Second, some have argued that Yeshua ate the Passover supper a day earlier than the Jews normally did. Sadler contends, for example, that Christ had the authority to do this because he was “greater than” the Law, the Sabbath, and the Temple.⁴ Moreover, there was TaNaKH (Old Testament) authority for changing the Passover time under appropriate circumstances. The feast could be observed on the 14th day of the *second* month (instead of the first) by those who had been away on a trip, or those who had been ceremonially unclean, at the regular time.⁵ The problem with this view, however, is that it appears to conflict with other explicit New Testament information that indicates the LORD and his disciples ate the Passover on the *first* day of unleavened bread (Mt. 26:17; Mk. 14:12), the normal day for the supper.

Third, it is possible that the Jews at large had eaten the Passover meal already (i.e., on the assigned day), but that these Hebrew leaders (Jn. 18:12), due to

² Burton Coffman, *Commentary on John* (ACU Press, 1974), p. 425.

³ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Eerdmans, 1951), p. 654.

⁴ M.F. Sadler, *The Gospel of Matthew* (George Bell & Sons, 1908), p. 400.

⁵ Numbers 9:9-12.

their frenzied activity in attempting to deal with Yeshua, had postponed eating the supper. William Hendriksen seems inclined to this view, and he believes that H. Mulder has argued the case in convincing fashion.⁶

Fourth, a few scholars have contended that John's record, versus that of the Synoptics, reflects the use of two slightly different calendars. Leon Morris sees this as the most likely solution to the enigma. He writes:

“The most natural reading of the Synoptics shows the meal there to be the Passover. The most natural reading of John shows Yeshua as crucified at the very time the Passover victims were slain in the temple. While it is undoubtedly possible so to interpret the evidence as to make both tell the same story it seems preferable to see them as following different calendars. According to the calendar Yeshua was following the meal was the Passover. But the temple authorities followed another, according to which the sacrificial victims were slain the next day”.⁷

This theory appears to have few supporters. (Yet see: Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, Zondervan, 1977, pp. 76-90. For a contrary statement, see: Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Zondervan, 1982, p. 376, and Geldenhuys, pp. 654ff.)

Fifth, the Greek word for Passover is *pascha*. The term is used in three different senses in the Bible. Sometimes the word stands for the Passover sacrifice, the lamb itself (Mk. 14:12; Lk. 22:7; 1 Cor. 5:7). On other occasions *pascha* can denote the meal that was eaten on the 14th of Nisan, the first month of the Hebrew calendar (Mt. 26:18-19; Lk. 22:8, 13; Heb. 11:28).

But it is also the case that the term *pascha* can refer to the entire eight-day period which included the feast of unleavened bread – thus from the 14th of Nisan to the 21st). Note this passage:

“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten” (Ezek: 45:21; cf. Lk. 22:1, 7; Acts 12:3-4).

F.W. Danker notes: “Popular usage merged the two festivals and treated them as a unity, as they were for all practical purposes.”⁸

Is the Passover in John's Gospel the *Chagigah*?

There were several “feasts” during this period (see 2 Chron. 30:22); the one

⁶ Hendriksen, *Commentary on John* (Baker, 1953, II), p. 403.

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1971), p. 785.

⁸ F.W. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon* (University of Chicago, 2000), p. 784.

mentioned in John 18:28 may have been on the day following the main Passover supper. It was called the *Chagigah* (sacrificial meal). Many respectable scholars, e.g., Lenski and Edersheim, defend this view. Edward Robinson has a clear and detailed explanation of this position that is worthy of serious consideration, and, in this writer's judgment, this argument carries the greatest weight of evidence.⁹

As mentioned above, some scholars hold that the Passover coincided with the Last Supper and interpret John's gospel in such a way as to be consistent with this. Such an interpretation makes two claims: The first claim is that the Passover in John 18:28 refers not to the Passover but to the *chagigah* (festival sacrifice), which was eaten joyfully on the afternoon the day after the Passover sacrifice.

I do not believe that John's Gospel reports a different date for the crucifixion from the Synoptics; rather, the meal of John 13:1 was the *Seder*, and it took place on Thursday night; but "the *Pesach*" in this verse refers to other food eaten during *Pesach*, specifically the *chagigah* (festival sacrifice) which was consumed with great joy and celebration on the afternoon following the *Seder*. This is the *Pesach* meal which the Judeans gathered outside the Pilate's palace would have been unable to eat had they entered, because their defilement would have lasted till sundown. If "the *Pesach*" meant the Passover lamb, defilement in the morning might not have been a problem, since the *Seder* meal took place after sundown.¹⁰

More plausibly, "to eat the Passover" in John 18:28 may refer, not to the Passover meal itself, but to the continuing feast, and in particular to the *chagigah*, the feast-offering offered on the morning of the first full paschal day (cf. Num. 28:18-19). This could explain the Jews' concern: ritual purification could be regained by nightfall, but not by the morning *Chagigah*.¹¹

The second claim is that the preparation of the Passover in John 19:14 refers to the preparation day of the first day of unleavened bread in the Passover season, John 19:31, which is of course an annual Sabbath or Holy Day.

This particular Preparation Day was also the first day of *Pesach*.¹²

⁹ *Harmony of the Gospels* (Religious Tract Society, 1879), pp. 135ff; see also Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Klock & Klock, n.d.), pp. 296-98; Geldenhuys, pp. 656ff

¹⁰ David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), pp. 206-207.

¹¹ D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelein (Zondervan, 1984, Vol. 8), p. 531.

¹² David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 209.

This interpretation of John's gospel is proposed by those who believe that there was no disagreement amongst the Jews over when the Passover should be kept and that the Last Supper coincided with this. (This tends to be those who believe in a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection.) Of course, this would place the Last Supper at the end of the fourteenth. But it has already been established that the Last Supper occurred at the beginning of the fourteenth so this issue does not affect any of the chronologies.

In conclusion we must say that we may not be able to determine the precise situation alluded to in John 18:28. Nonetheless, there are sufficient possibilities to establish the fact that no insuperable difficulty exists to challenge our confidence in the sacred text.¹³

Passover Bread: Leavened or Unleavened?

Did Yeshua eat bread with leaven? As "ridiculous" a question as this sounds to Jewish ears, it actually shows up in non-Jewish discussions on this topic. Let us see what Strong's concordance has to say about the word "bread" in Mark 14:1:

Mark 14:1

After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death.

ἦν δὲ τὸ πάσχα καὶ τὰ ἄζυμα μετὰ δύο ἡμέρας. καὶ ἐζήτουν οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς πῶς αὐτὸν ἐν δόλῳ κρατήσαντες ἀποκτείνωσιν:

Strong's Number: 106

Original Word Word Origin

ἄζυμος
From (1) (as a negative particle) and (2219)

Transliterated Word TDNT Entry

Azumos
2:902,302

¹³ I am indebted to Wayne Jackson and Christian Courier for their invaluable research in the opening part of this article.

Phonetic Spelling
Parts of Speech

ad'-zoo-mos
Adjective

Definition

1. unfermented, free from leaven or yeast
 - a. of the unleavened loaves used in the paschal feast of the Jews
 - b. metaph. free from faults or the "leaven of iniquity"

Now let's examine the "bread" of Mark 14:22:

Mark 14:22

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.

Καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐλογήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς καὶ εἶπεν, Λάβετε, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου.

Strong's Number: 740

Original Word
Word Origin

ἄρτος
From (142)

Transliterated Word
TDNT Entry

Artos
1:477,80

Phonetic Spelling
Parts of Speech

ar'-tos
Noun Masculine

Definition

1. food composed of flour mixed with water and baked

- a. the Israelites made it in the form of an oblong or round cake, as thick as one's thumb, and as large as a plate or platter hence it was not to be cut but broken
- b. loaves were consecrated to the LORD
- c. of the bread used at the love-feasts and at the LORD's Table

2. food of any kind

As we can see the two Greek words for bread are indeed different. It seems as if Yeshua did indeed violate Torah by eating leavened bread with his disciples if we take these verses at face value.

But if we dig deeper we will see the larger picture.

The term “bread”, as symbolized by the Greek word in the second passage (artos) is not limited to what we would consider a leavened loaf of baked grains and water. To be sure, the Greek word “artos” is a noun. By contrast, the Greek word “azumos” as found in the Mark 14:1 passage is an adjective!

Bread (a noun in every normal usage of this word) in the Jewish mindset also simply means food. Any kind of food for that matter (as the Strong's note on #2 above shows). The context of how this very same Greek word is used all throughout the book of Acts shows that it cannot be limited to a proverbial loaf of bread as such. Observe:

Ac 2:42

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of **bread**, and in prayers.

Ac 2:46

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking **bread** from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Ac 20:7

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break **bread**, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

Ac 20:11

When he therefore was come up again, and had broken **bread**, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.

Ac 27:35

And when he had thus spoken, he took **bread**, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

All of these references use the same Greek word as translated in the Mark 14:22 verse. In fact, the idiomatic phrase “break bread” simply means to eat a meal.

Conclusion:

Yeshua may have simply given his disciples some other food to eat besides the matzah (unleavened [adjective] bread) that must have been present during that meal. This other food (referred to as “bread”, but may be any kosher food) most certainly did not contain leaven. How do we know that leaven could not have been present? Instead of accusing the Scriptures of error by looking at it through Gentiles eyes, lets look closer at this through Jewish eyes.

In ancient Isra'el, as during Passover in Isra'el today, when the week of Unleavened Bread is approaching, the Torah expressly commands observant Jews to rid their homes of leavening agent. The Messiah was Jewish, from a Jewish family. The disciples were Jewish. Who in their right Jewish mind would have leavened bread during the week of Unleavened Bread? And if by some crazy chance of foolishness one of those Jewish men did have leavened bread during their Jewish Passover feast, where did they get it? Did they bake it themselves? Did they buy it from some Gentile merchant? Why would a Gentile merchant wish to sell leavening agent to an observant Jewish person during the week of Unleavened Bread? And what foolish Jewish person would be seen buying leaven from a Gentile during that week of Unleavened Bread?

You see, if you work it out logically it just doesn't make any sense at all, especially since the New Testament Scriptures were written about Isra'el, by Israelites, during the time of Isra'el, set in the language of Hebrew and Aramaic, with its central figure being a Jewish man who just happens to be the Messiah of Isra'el.

No, Yeshua could not have risked his authenticity among Jewish people expecting a Torah-observant Messiah by accidentally eating leavened bread at the most important Passover that he would ever celebrate in his 30 years of living as a Jew in 1st century Isra'el.

Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy yeshua613@hotmail.com