

Jesus and the Passover

(A follow-up to “What Day Did Jesus Die?”)
Revised and Expanded, May 2016

Introduction

In response to the debate about what day of the week Jesus died, further argument for a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion has been made in light of the Passover and its chronological relation to the events recorded in the Gospels. Some have argued that the “Preparation of the Passover” referred to in John 19:14 is the day before the first day of Passover, as discussed in the previous article. However there is no Scripture that demands this, nor any other Scripture that calls the first day of Passover a Sabbath.

Also in light of this, it is argued that the Wave Offering referred to in Leviticus 23 was done on the second day of Passover (the day following the so-called Sabbath that begins the feast), as opposed to the day following the weekly Sabbath.

Others have attempted to calculate the date of the Passover in the year Jesus died, in order to determine what day of the week it fell on, and thus what day Jesus died on.

Still others have questioned whether or not Jesus kept the Passover, arguing that rather than observing it, Jesus was the Passover, and so his death had to coincide with the killing of the Passover lambs.

These arguments tie in with what day of the week he died on. But does the day he died make a difference in his fulfilling prophecies?

The First Day of Passover

It is commonly claimed that the first day of Passover is also called a Sabbath, and that it is this yearly Sabbath rather than the weekly Sabbath that is referred to in John 19:14. However, as noted in the previous article, this would make the crucifixion and the events leading up to it occur **before** the Passover, which would contradict the Synoptic Gospel records of Jesus eating the Passover with his disciples, and the crucifixion taking place **after** that (see below).

Contrary to the commonly held theory, there is nothing in Scripture that demands an equating of the first day of Passover with the word Sabbath. While the first day of the Passover is called a “day of holy convocation,” it is not specifically called a Sabbath. The Hebrew word for convocation is *miqra*, which means a public meeting or assembly. Such convocations were held on the first and last days of Passover (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:5-8), and on the Feast of Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-21) but they are not specifically called Sabbaths in those verses. The other times that holy convocations were held include the weekly Sabbath, as well as the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the first and last days of the Feast of Tabernacles. These are called Sabbaths, but the others are not.

Now verse 24 of Leviticus 23 could be seen as implying that the words “convocation” and “Sabbath” are interchangeable (“In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation”). This is referring to the Feast of Trumpets. However, the first and last days of Passover (as well as the Feast of Pentecost) are not specifically called Sabbaths, but holy convocations, here in Leviticus (as well as the reference to the Passover in Exodus

12). And outside of the books of Moses, **none** of these yearly feasts is called a Sabbath (except the year-long land Sabbath in II Chronicles 36:21).

These are the feasts outlined in Leviticus 23:

- Weekly Sabbath (vs. 1-3) – Every seventh day (v. 3).
- Passover (vs. 4-5) – Fourteenth day of the first month (v. 5). [Not called a Sabbath.]
- Feast of Unleavened Bread (vs. 6-8) – Fifteenth through twenty-first days of the first month (v. 6). [1st and 7th days are called holy convocations, but not Sabbaths, vs. 7-8]
- Wave offering (vs. 9-14) – The day after the Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (v. 11).
- Pentecost (vs. 15-22) – The day after the seventh Sabbath (v.16). [Called a holy convocation, but not a Sabbath, vs. 21]
- Feast of Trumpets (vs. 23-25) – First day of the seventh month (v. 24). [Called a Sabbath, v. 24.]
- Day of Atonement (vs. 26-32) – Tenth day of the seventh month (v. 27). [Called a Sabbath, v. 32.]
- Feast of Tabernacles (vs. 33-44) – Fifteenth through twenty-second days of the seventh month (vs. 34-36) [1st & 8th days are called holy convocations in vs. 35-36, and Sabbaths in v. 39]

While the Passover itself and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are separate observances in Leviticus, by New Testament times the terms were used interchangeably (see Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:1; Luke 22:1,7 and “Did Jesus Keep the Passover?” below). The days of holy convocation at the beginning and ending of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (also called the week of Passover in New Testament times) are not specifically called Sabbaths. The most likely reason is to avoid confusion with the weekly Sabbath that occurs **during** the weeklong Passover feast. That Sabbath, which John calls a “high day” (John 19:31), is more significant¹ than a normal weekly Sabbath because both the Wave Offering and the counting of seven Sabbaths to Pentecost begin the day following that Sabbath. This is apparently why the Feast of Pentecost, being the day after the seventh Sabbath, is also called a holy convocation but not a Sabbath in Leviticus 23, while the last three feasts in the chapter are called Sabbaths.

The Wave Offering

The Wave Offering is connected with the Passover according to Leviticus 23.

Leviticus 23:

4 These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.

5 In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD’S passover.

6 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.

7 In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

8 But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

9 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest:

¹ In the article, “What Day Did Jesus Die?” it was pointed out that whether he meant the weekly Sabbath or the first day of Passover, it would have been obvious to his readers that the Sabbath was a high day. Why did John make a point of saying that? In this case, “that Sabbath” was the weekly Sabbath that fell during Passover, making it even more significant than a regular weekly Sabbath, and thus, “a high day.”

11 And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: **on the morrow after the sabbath** the priest shall wave it.

If one starts with the assumption that the first “holy convocation” mentioned in verse 7 is called “the Sabbath” in verse 11, then it could be concluded that the Wave Offering was to be done on the day after that special Sabbath, in other words, it was to be done on the second day of Passover. However, we saw above and in the previous article that there is no Scripture that refers to the convocation on the first day of Passover as a Sabbath. In addition, further clarification is given in verses 15-17.

Leviticus 23:

15 And ye shall count unto you from **the morrow after the sabbath**, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; **seven sabbaths** shall be complete:

16 Even unto **the morrow after the seventh sabbath** shall ye number **fifty days**; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.

17 Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD.

The statement that “the morrow after the seventh Sabbath” is the fiftieth day, in verse 16, shows that weekly Sabbaths are referred to, so any reference to the holy convocation on the first day of Passover as a Sabbath would be confusing, and thus the first day of Passover is not called a Sabbath in these verses, or anywhere else for that matter.

If the Wave Offering were done on the day after the first day of Passover, it would fall on different days of the week each year, and the fiftieth day would not necessarily work out to be the day after the seventh Sabbath. But the Wave Offering was done the day after the weekly Sabbath, regardless of what day of the week Passover started. The chart below shows the counting from the weekly Sabbath (XX), the next day being the 1st of the fifty days, the 7th day is the first Sabbath, etc. This is how Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks, was determined.

S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
						XX	<-Sabbath of the Passover Week
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<-1st Sabbath of counting
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	<-2nd Sabbath of counting
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	<-3rd Sabbath of counting
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	<-4th Sabbath of counting
29	30	31	32	33	34	35	<-5th Sabbath of counting
36	37	38	39	40	41	42	<-6th Sabbath of counting
43	44	45	46	47	48	49	<-7th Sabbath of counting
50	<-The Morrow after the Seventh Sabbath; fiftieth day.						

In contrast, if the first day of Passover is the “Sabbath” referred to in Leviticus 23:11 and 13, then the second day of Passover is the day of the Wave Offering, and the day the counting would begin, and it would not always fall on the same day of the week. For example, in a year when Passover began on a Thursday, the next day, Friday, would be the Wave Offering and the beginning of the counting. The weekly Sabbath would be the second day of counting (the third day of Passover), and so on. This would end up making the seventh Sabbath the 44th day of counting, and the fiftieth day would fall on the following Friday, as the chart below shows.

S	M	T	W	T	F	S	X = 1st day of Passover
				X	1	2	<-1st Sabbath of counting
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	<-2nd Sabbath of counting
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	<-3rd Sabbath of counting
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	<-4th Sabbath of counting
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	<-5th Sabbath of counting
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	<-6th Sabbath of counting
38	39	40	41	42	43	44	<-7th Sabbath of counting
45	46	47	48	49	50		

But Leviticus 23:16 specifically said that the day after the seventh Sabbath was to be the fiftieth day. The only way for that to work is to start counting the day after the weekly Sabbath, as shown in the first chart.

The Pharisees and Sadducees had a similar disagreement over how to reckon the day of Pentecost. *The New Bible Dictionary* describes how the meaning of Sabbath in this case became changed.

The Sadducees celebrated [Pentecost] on the 50th day (inclusive reckoning) from the first Sunday after Passover (taking the 'sabbath' of Lv. 23:15 to be the weekly sabbath); their reckoning regulated the public observance so long as the Temple stood, and the church is therefore justified in commemorating the first Christian Pentecost on a Sunday (Whit Sunday). The Pharisees, however, interpreted the 'sabbath' of Lv. 23:15 as the Festival of Unleavened Bread (cf. Lv. 23:7), and their reckoning became normative in Judaism after AD 70, so that in the Jewish calendar Pentecost now falls on various days of the week. (*New Bible Dictionary*, "Pentecost")

But even though the Pharisees' interpretation was the norm after AD 70, the meaning at the time of Christ was still the weekly Sabbath that fell during the week of Passover, making the "preparation of the Passover" the day before the weekly Sabbath during Passover. This fits with all the other Biblical evidence supporting a Friday crucifixion.

It has also been suggested that the Book of Joshua provides evidence that the Sabbath referred to in connection with Passover is the first day of Passover itself. Leviticus 23:14 says that they were not to eat "bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears" until after the Wave Offering was performed. Yet we read in Joshua 5:10-11 that "the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho. And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day." It is therefore concluded that since they ate of the grain that day they must have previously performed the Wave Offering, and thus the Wave Offering was done on the "morrow after the Passover" not the morrow after the weekly Sabbath.

It must be understood, however, that the command about the Wave Offering in Leviticus is prefaced by the statement, "When ye be **come into the land** which I give unto you, and shall **reap the harvest thereof**, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of **your harvest** unto the priest" (Leviticus 23:10). It was for the purpose of giving God thanks for **their** harvest. At the Passover in Gilgal in Joshua 5, they had just crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, and were still encamped. They had not yet settled and planted their own crops. That is why there is **no mention** of the Wave Offering in Joshua 5, and

why they ate grain the day after the Passover (which was “the old corn of the land” – grain that was there already, not their own harvest).

The “morrow after the Sabbath” in Leviticus 23 must be referring to the weekly Sabbath that falls during the Passover week, as indicated by the above-mentioned facts: that they counted seven Sabbaths from then (certainly not seven yearly convocations!), and that the first day of Passover is not specifically called a Sabbath anywhere in the Bible.

The evidence shows that the weekly Sabbath which fell during the Passover week had special significance, and thus the “Preparation of the Passover” in John 19:14, 31, & 42, as well as the Sabbath mentioned in John 19:31, are related to the weekly Sabbath, not the first day of Passover.

Further, the waving of the sheaf was a celebration of the firstfruits of the harvest. When Jesus rose on “the morrow after the Sabbath” that year, he was the “firstfruits of them that slept” (I Corinthians 15:20), so the wave offering foreshadowed his resurrection!

The Date of the Passover

Some have argued that the date of the Passover makes it impossible for Jesus to have died on Friday of that week. Different sources have claimed various days for the start of Passover, each with the conclusion that Jesus could not have been crucified on the Friday of that week. The variations are due to the fact that there are a number of variables involved in calculating the start of Passover in a given historical year.

The first variable is the year in which Jesus was crucified. The Bible tells us that Jesus started his ministry when he “began to be about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23). But does “thirty years of age” mean what our culture defines it as - having passed his thirtieth birthday - or does it refer to the year before? Many cultures refer to a person as “one year of age” when they literally mean “in their first year” up until their first birthday, and then they are “in their second year,” and so on; whereas as in our culture we mean they are “one year old” after the first birthday, and “two years old” after the second, etc. Also, does this verse mean he was **actually** thirty, or does the use of the word “about” mean he was **around** that age, but not exactly?

There is also the question of the year of his birth. The Bible doesn't say what year he was born, and many theories exist about it. So the year he turned thirty will vary depending on what year he is assumed to have been born. (Ernest Martin² made a good case for Jesus having been born in 3BC, but it is not 100% established.)

It is usually assumed that his ministry lasted around three years, based on the feasts mentioned in the Gospel of John, but there are a number of varying theories involving that timing as well. So the year Jesus was crucified will vary depending on when he was born, how old he was when he began his ministry, and how long his ministry lasted.

But even if we were to assume any given year, there is no way to know exactly what date in that year the Passover fell. It is argued that the U.S. Naval Observatory calculations can determine when the new moon occurred in any month in history. But these calculations are based on our Western calendars (either Julian or Gregorian, depending on what year in history you are considering), and not the Hebrew calendar. The Hebrew calendar calculated things less accurately.

² <http://www.askelm.com/star/index.asp>

According to BeingJewish.com³, all the holy days of a month were determined from the first day of the month, which is the New Moon. The New Moon, in turn, was determined by observation.

Nowadays we use a set calendar to tell us when the New Moon is celebrated, and thus when all the other days of that month will occur. It was not always like that, and it will not always be like that.

In order for the new month to begin, the Sanhedrin (highest Jewish Court) must declare “Rosh Chodesh.” (The Sanhedrin does not exist today, for technical reasons, but someday it will be reinstated, either after the Messiah comes, or just before the Messiah comes.) Rosh Chodesh literally means “Head of the Month.” This refers to the minor holiday of the first day (or the first two days, depending) of the new month.

When the Sanhedrin declared the new month, that day was Rosh Chodesh, and it was therefore a minor Holiday, with specific levels of holiness attached to it. The Talmud therefore refers to that process as “Sanctifying the New Moon.”

Rosh Chodesh was declared only after two witnesses came to the Sanhedrin and testified that they had seen the new moon (a little piece of the moon beginning to show) during the previous night. If no witnesses showed up by the thirtieth day of the month, Rosh Chodesh was declared on the thirty-first day (the previous month will therefore have thirty days), and all the dates of the coming month were thus set.

Furthermore, according to another site, Judaism 101⁴, in ancient times the length of a month would vary between 29 and 30 days, depending on the observation of the new moon. In addition, because a year did not equal an even number of months, an extra month was added every so often. This too was determined by observation of crops, not by any kind of mathematical formula.

Not until the 4th century did Rabbi Hillel II establish a fixed Jewish calendar based on mathematical and astronomical calculations. This calendar, still in use, standardized the length of months and the addition of months over the course of a 19 year cycle, so that the lunar calendar realigns with the solar years. But even in that calendar, the calculated beginning of a month does not necessarily correspond precisely to the astronomical new moon. (See further detail about the Jewish calendar on another page of the same web site⁵.)

This means that, especially for the years before the 4th century, while computers can calculate when the new moon occurred, there is no way of knowing when the Sanhedrin declared Rosh Chodesh, and therefore it is impossible to calculate with precision the exact day on which any feast days fell. That fact, combined with the varying opinions about what year Jesus was crucified, means that attempts to prove what day Jesus died by calculating what day the Passover started that year are impossible to verify. Would it not be preferable just to accept the simple statements from Scripture that he died on Preparation Day and rose on the third day?

Did Jesus Keep the Passover?

Often people will (rightly) ask, what difference does it make what day he died on? And I wholly concur. The important thing is that he died and rose again. The day of the week makes very little difference. But

³ <http://www.beingjewish.com/yomtov/chodesh/newmoon.html>

⁴ <http://www.jewfaq.org/calendar.htm>

⁵ <http://www.jewfaq.org/calendr2.htm>

many of the proponents of the Wednesday crucifixion theory argue that it mattered because Jesus had to be the Passover lamb and die at the exact time that the lamb was being sacrificed for Passover. This brings up another point that has been argued and debated for centuries: Did Jesus keep the Passover in the year that he died?

The Synoptic Gospels give us clear accounts of Jesus keeping the Passover with his disciples.

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?**

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.

19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and **they made ready the passover.**

20 Now **when the even was come**, he sat down with the twelve.

21 And **as they did eat**, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

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?**

13 And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him.

14 And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where **I shall eat the passover with my disciples?**

15 And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.

16 And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they **made ready the passover.**

17 And **in the evening** he cometh with the twelve.

18 And **as they sat and did eat**, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.

Luke 22:

7 **Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed.**

8 And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and **prepare us the passover, that we may eat.**

9 And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare?

10 And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in.

11 And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where **I shall eat the passover with my disciples?**

12 And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready.

13 And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and **they made ready the passover.**

14 And **when the hour was come**, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him.

15 And he said unto them, **With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you** before I suffer:

16 For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

The Synoptics tell of Jesus sending his disciples out to prepare a place to eat the Passover, and the texts naturally flow through the records of them preparing the Passover, and then sitting down to eat it that evening, “when the hour was come.” I remember hearing it taught that Luke 22:15 actually should read, “With desire I **had** desired to eat this (approaching) Passover” implying that he did not get to do so. But there is nothing in the Greek that supports such a reading. There is also no indication in any of the Synoptics that he did not get to eat the Passover as he had hoped, or that he was referring to an approaching Passover rather than the meal they were eating at the time. Besides, Luke 22:7 and Mark 14:12 specify it as the day when the Passover lamb was to be killed.

The only problem with this understanding comes when we read the Gospel of John. Chapter 13 starts off, “Before the feast of the Passover” (John 13:1), and then describes the events of the Last Supper. Judas is told by Jesus to do quickly what he was going to do, after which Judas leaves. We are told that the other disciples assume Judas was going to buy things they needed for the feast (John 13:29). Why would he be doing that if they were currently **having** the feast? In chapter 18, the priests' servants who led Jesus from Caiaphas to the judgment hall, didn't enter the hall, “lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover” (John 18:28). This was after the Last Supper which the Synoptics clearly describe as the Passover meal. Then in verse 39, Pilate says, “But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?” And finally, in John 19:14, it refers to the day as “the Preparation of the Passover.”

The first thing we must remember is that all the Scriptures dealing with a subject must be in harmony and not contradict each other. These passages in John, if viewed alone, could be seen as implying that the Last Supper took place before the Passover. But that would contradict the clear references to them keeping the Passover in the Synoptic Gospels. However, there is no contradiction when you understand that the word “Passover” can refer to either the lamb itself, or to the meal that was eaten on the 14th of Nisan, or to the entire festival, including the seven days of unleavened bread. Originally in Exodus, the Passover was differentiated from the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But the New Testament shows evidence that the terms had become interchangeable by then.

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?

Mark 14:

1 After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread...

Luke 22:

1 Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover.

7 Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed.

In the verses in question, the disciples would have thought that Judas was buying something for the week-long feast; the priests' servants would have been wanting to keep ritually clean for the entire feast, not necessarily just the first day's meal; and Pilate released a prisoner during the week-long feast.

In addition, several other English versions render John 13:1 to read that “before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.” It would thus be referring to when Jesus knew his hour was come, not when the Last Supper took place.

It has been suggested by some that the priests ate their Passover lamb later, because they were busy with the arrest and mock trial of Jesus. This is also a possibility. But either way it doesn't prove that Jesus and his disciples did not keep the Passover the normal way. Some others have suggested that Jesus and his

disciples ate the Passover a day early just so he could be the Passover lamb the next day. While not impossible, this would be hard to reconcile with the records in the Synoptic Gospels. (For more about the various possible explanations, see the blog called *Uncommon Musings*⁶, or the article from the *Christian Courier*⁷.)

The simplest explanation seems to be to understand “Passover” as referring to the entire feast in those verses in question. In addition, we saw that the word for “Preparation” most likely refers to the day before the weekly Sabbath. In this way, there is no contradiction between John and the Synoptics.

Christ Our Passover

Some that hold to a Wednesday crucifixion and/or a belief that the Last Supper was not the Passover, do so because they believe Jesus had to die at the very time the lamb was being slain, in order to fulfill the Passover. But this conclusion doesn't take into account that Jesus fulfilled all the other sacrificial laws as well. The whole sacrificial system was meant to be a shadow of the ultimate sacrifice, as the epistle to the Hebrews describes in detail. The scapegoat that bore the sins of Israel when it was sent into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement was as much a type of Jesus as the Passover Lamb. There is no way the timing of his death could match the timing of all of the sacrifices and offerings. So why is it assumed that the timing of the crucifixion must exactly coincide with the time the Passover lamb was killed? Besides the fact that it happened at the time of the Passover, probably the main reason for this assumption is because of the verse in I Corinthians.

I Corinthians 5:

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.
For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

This is the only verse in the Bible that uses the phrase, “Christ our Passover.” But is it referring to the fact that he fulfilled every detail of the law regarding how and when the sacrifices were to be made? Let's examine the context.

I Corinthians 5:

1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,

4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.

For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

⁶ Part 1, <http://livinguncommon.blogspot.com/2008/10/john-13-did-jesus-eat-passover-supper.html>; part 2, <http://livinguncommon.blogspot.com/2008/10/john-13-part-2.html>.

⁷ <http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/390-did-jesus-eat-the-passover-supper>.

The point Paul is making here is that allowing sin to remain unchecked could be harmful to the church. That was the purpose of the symbolism of getting rid of leaven for the feast of unleavened bread. Paul exhorts them to “keep the feast” (literally, “be keeping the feast”) with the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” He was not talking about Christ fulfilling every detail, including the timing, of the laws concerning the Passover lamb. He was talking about the significance and true meaning behind the purging of leaven during the Passover feast (or Feast of Unleavened Bread), with the exhortation of what it means to us and how we should live in light of it.

There is nothing in the Scriptures that demands that Jesus die at the same time as the literal Passover lamb. Therefore there is no reason for not taking at face value the records in the Synoptic Gospels of Jesus and his disciples eating the Passover.

In addition, there is significance to the fact that as they kept the Passover, Jesus instituted a new custom which he commanded his disciples to follow from then on, in place of the Passover. He taught them to use bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, in remembrance of him and his sacrifice. He commanded them to do this in remembrance of him, as often as they ate it (not just once a year). And the first observance of Communion coincided with his last observance of Passover.

While Passover, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was an important festival in the Jewish calendar, it is only part of the whole system of sacrifices which foreshadowed what Jesus accomplished for us. He shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins, providing access to God and ultimately a place in the coming Kingdom. To focus on details such as the timing of his death and resurrection, and make them a point of contention and division, is to miss the whole point of what our Lord did for us. Let us strive to maintain unity and avoid contentions that are unprofitable and gender strife (II Timothy 2:23; Titus 3:9).