

The question considered, whether our Lord ate the Passover with his disciples before he suffered?

Every candid person must allow that there are great difficulties relative to the time in which our Lord ate the last Passover with his disciples. In the Introduction to my Discourse on the nature and design of the Holy Communion, I have examined this subject at large, and considered the four following opinions, viz. I. Our Lord did not eat the Passover on the last year of his ministry. II. Our Lord did eat it that year; and at the same time with the Jews. III. He did eat it that year, but not at the same time with the Jews. IV. He did eat a Passover of his own instituting, but widely differing from that eaten by the Jews. The two first opinions do not appear to be solidly supported. The two last are of the most importance, are the most likely, and may be harmonized. I shall introduce a few observations on each in this place. And I. On the opinion that "our Lord did eat the Passover this year, but not at the same time with the Jews."

Dr. Cudworth, who of all others has handled this subject best, has proved from the Talmud, Mishna, and some of the most reputable of the Jewish rabbins, that the ancient Jews, about our Saviour's time, often solemnized as well the Passovers as the other feasts, upon the ferias next before and after the Sabbaths. And, that as the Jews in ancient times reckoned the new moons, not according to astronomical exactness, but according to the fasiv, or moon's appearance: and, as this appearance might happen a day later than the real time, consequently there might be a whole day of difference in the time of celebrating one of these feasts, which depended on a particular day of the month; the days of the month being counted from the fasiv, or appearance of the new moon. As he describes the whole manner of doing this, both from the Babylonish Talmud, and from Maimonides, I shall give an extract from this part of his work, that the readers may have the whole argument before them.

"In the great or outer court there was a house called Beth Yazek, where the senate sat all the 30th day of every month, to receive the witnesses of the moon's appearance, and to examine them. If there came approved witnesses on the 30th day, who could state they had seen the new moon, the chief man of the senate stood up, and cried *vdqm mekuddash*, it is sanctified; and the people standing by caught the word from him, and cried, *Mekuddash! mekuddash!* But if, when the consistory had sat all the day, and there came no approved witnesses of the phasis, or appearance of the new moon, then they made an intercalation of one day in the former month, and decreed the following one and thirtieth day to be the calends. But if, after the fourth or fifth day, or even before the end of the month, respectable witnesses came from far, and testified they had seen the new moon in its due time, the senate were bound to alter the beginning of the month, and reckon it a day sooner, viz. from the thirtieth day.

"As the senate were very unwilling to be at the trouble of a second consecration, when they had even fixed on a wrong day, and therefore received very reluctantly the testimony of such witnesses as those last mentioned, they afterwards made a statute to this effect-That whatsoever time the senate should conclude on for the calends of the month, though it were certain they were in the wrong, yet all were bound to order their feasts according to it." This, Dr. Cudworth supposes, actually took place in the time of our Lord; and "as it is not likely that our Lord would submit to this perversion of the original custom, and that following the true fasiv, or appearance of the new moon, confirmed by sufficient witnesses, he and his disciples ate the Passover on that day; but the Jews, following the pertinacious decree of the Sanhedrin, did not eat it till

the day following." Dr. C. farther shows from Epiphanius, that there was a contention, yorubov, a tumult, among the Jews about the Passover, that very year. Hence it is likely that what was the real paschal day to our Lord, his disciples, and many other pious Jews who adopted the true fasiv phasis, was only the preparation or antecedent evening to others, who acted on the decree of the senate. Besides, it is worthy of note, that not only the Karaites, who do not acknowledge the authority of the Sanhedrin, but also the rabbins themselves grant that, where the case is doubtful, the Passover should be celebrated with the same ceremonies, two days together; and it was always doubtful, when the appearance of the new moon could not be fully ascertained.

Bishop Pearce supposes that it was lawful for the Jews to eat the paschal lamb at any time between the evening of Thursday, and that of Friday; and that this permission was necessary, because of the immense number of lambs which were to be killed for that purpose: as, in one year there were not fewer than 256,500 lambs offered. See Josephus, War, b. vii. c. 9. sect. 3. In Mt 26:17, it is said, Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, (th de prwth twn azumwn,) the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover? As the feast of unleavened bread did not begin till the day after the Passover, the fifteenth day of the month, Le 23:5,6; Nu 28:16,17, this could not have been properly the first day of that feast; but, as the Jews began to eat unleavened bread on the fourteenth day, Ex 12:18, this day was often termed the first of unleavened bread. Now it appears that the evangelists use it in this sense, and call even the paschal day by this name, see Mr 14:12; Lu 22:7.

At first view, this third opinion, which states that Christ did eat the Passover with his disciples that year, but not in the same hour with the Jews; and that he expired on the cross the same hour in which the paschal lamb was killed, seems the most probable. For it appears, from what has already been remarked, that our Lord and his disciples ate the Passover some hours before the Jews ate theirs; for they, according to custom, ate theirs at the end of the fourteenth day, but Christ appears to have eaten his the preceding evening, which was the beginning of the same sixth day of the week, or Friday, for the Jews began their day at sun-setting; we at midnight. Thus Christ ate the Passover the same day with the Jews, but not on the same hour. Christ, therefore, kept this Passover the beginning of the fourteenth day, the precise day in which the Jews had eaten their first Passover in Egypt: see Ex 12:6-19. And in the same part of the same day in which they had sacrificed their first paschal lamb, viz. between the two evenings, i, e, between the sun's declining west and his setting, Jesus, our Passover was sacrificed for us. For it was the third hour, in the course of between 9 and 12, Mr 15:25, that Christ was nailed to the cross: and in the course of the ninth hour, between 12 and 3 in the afternoon, Mt 27:46; Mr 15:34, Jesus, knowing that the antetype had accomplished every thing shadowed forth by the type, said, "It is FINISHED," tetelestai, completed, perfected, and, having thus said, he bowed his head, and dismissed his spirit. See on Joh 19:14,30.

Probably there is but one objection of any force that lies against the opinion, that our Lord ate his Passover some hours before the Jews in general ate theirs; which is that, if our Lord did eat the Passover the evening before the Jews in general ate theirs, it could not have been sacrificed according to the law; nor is it at all likely that the blood was sprinkled at the foot of the altar. If, therefore, the blood was not thus sprinkled by one of the priests, that which constituted the very essence of the rite, as ordained by God, was lacking in that celebrated by our Lord.

To this it is answered:-First, we have already seen that, in consequence of the immense number of sacrifices to be offered on the paschal solemnity, it is highly probable the Jews were obliged to employ two days for this work. It is not at all likely that the blood of 256,500 lambs could be shed and sprinkled at one altar, in the course of one day, by all the priests in Jerusalem, or indeed in the Holy Land; since they had but that one altar where they could legally sprinkle the blood of the victims.

Secondly, we have also seen that, in cases of doubt relative to the time of the appearance of the new moon, the Jews were permitted to hold the Passover both days; and that it is probable such a dubious case existed at the time in question. In any of these cases the lamb might have been killed and its blood sprinkled according to the rules and ceremonies of the Jewish Church.

Thirdly, as our Lord was the true paschal lamb, who was, in a few hours after this time, to bear away the sin of the world, he might dispense with this part of the ceremony, and act as Lord of his own institution in this, as he had done before in the case of the Sabbath. At any rate, as it seems probable that he ate the Passover at this time, and that he died about the time the Jews offered theirs, it may be fully presumed that he left nothing undone towards a due performance of the rite which the present necessity required, or the law of God could demand.

The objection that our Lord and his disciples appear to have sat or reclined at table all the time they ate what is supposed above to have been the Passover, contrary to the paschal institution, which required them to eat it standing, with their staves in their hands, their loins girded, and their shoes on, cannot be considered as having any great weight in it; for, though the terms *aneketo*, Mt 26:20, and *anepese*, Lu 22:14, are used in reference to their eating that evening, and these words signify reclining at table, or on a couch, as is the custom of the orientals, it does not follow that they must necessarily be restrained to that meaning; nor does it appear that this part of the ceremony was much attended to, perhaps not at all, in the latter days of the Jewish Church.

The second opinion which we have to examine is this: Our Lord did eat a Passover of his own instituting, but widely different from that eaten by the Jews.

Mr. Toinard, in his Greek Harmony of the Gospels, strongly contends that our Lord did not eat what is commonly called the Passover this year, but another, of a mystical kind. His chief arguments are the following:-

It is indubitably evident, from the text of St. John, that the night on the beginning of which our Lord supped with his disciples, and instituted the holy sacrament, was not that on which the Jews celebrated the Passover; but the preceding evening, on which the Passover could not be legally offered. The conclusion is evident from the following passages: Joh 13:1. Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing, &c. Joh 13:2. And supper, (not the paschal, but an ordinary supper,) being ended, &c. Joh 13:27. That thou doest, do quickly. Joh 13:28. Now no one at the table knew for what intent he spake this. Joh 13:29. For some thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy what we have need of against the feast, &c. Joh 18:28. Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas to the hall of judgment, and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they

might eat the Passover. Joh 19:14. And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. Now as it appears that at this time the disciples thought our Lord had ordered Judas to go and bring what was necessary for the Passover, and they were then supping together, it is evident that it was not the paschal lamb on which they were supping; and it is as evident, from the unwillingness of the Jews to go into the hall of judgment, that they had not as yet eaten the Passover. These words are plain, and can be taken in no other sense, without offering them the greatest violence.

Mr. Toinard, having found that our Lord was crucified the sixth day of the week, (Friday,) during the paschal solemnity, in the thirty-third year of the vulgar aera, and that the paschal moon of that year was not in conjunction with the sun till the afternoon of Thursday the 19th of March, and that the new moon could not be seen in Judea until the following day, (Friday,) concluded that the intelligence of the fasiv, or appearance of the new moon, could not be made by the witnesses to the beth din, or senate, sooner than Saturday morning, the 21st of March. That the first day of the first Jewish month, Nisan, could not continence that thirty-third year sooner than the setting of the sun on Friday, March 20th; and, consequently, that Friday, April 3d, on which Christ died, was the 14th of Nisan, (not the 15th,) the day appointed by the law for the celebration of the Passover. All these points he took care to have ascertained by the nicest astronomical calculations, in which he was assisted by a very eminent astronomer and mathematician, Bullialdus. (Mr. Bouilleau.)

These two last opinions, apparently contradictory, and which alone, of all those offered on the subject, deserve consideration, may be brought to harmonize. That Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples the evening before the Jews ate theirs, seems pretty clearly proved from the text of St. Luke, and the arguments founded on that text.

All that is assumed there, to make the whole consistent, is, that the Jews that year held the Passover both on the 13th and 14th of Nisan, because of the reasons already assigned: and that therefore Peter and John, who were employed on this business, might have got the blood legally sprinkled by the hands of a priest, which was all that was necessary to the legality of the rite.

But, secondly, should it appear improbable that such double celebration took place at this time, and that our Lord could not have eaten the Passover that year with his disciples, as he died on the very hour on which the paschal lamb was slain, and consequently before he could legally eat the Passover, how then can the text of St. Luke be reconciled with this fact? I answer, with the utmost ease; by substituting a Passover for the Passover, and simply assuming that our Lord at this time instituted the holy communion, in place of the PASCHAL LAMB: and thus it will appear he ate a Passover with his disciples the evening before his death, viz. the mystical Passover, or sacrament of his body and blood; and that this was the Passover which he so ardently longed to eat with his disciples before he suffered. This is the opinion of Mr. Toinard, and, if granted, solves every difficulty. Thus the whole controversy is brought into a very narrow compass: Our Lord did eat a Passover with his disciples some short time before he died:-the question is, What Passover did he eat-the regular legal Passover, or a mystical one? That he ate a Passover is, I think, demonstrated: but whether the literal or mystical one, is a matter of doubt. On this point, good and learned men may innocently hesitate and differ: but on either hypothesis, the text of the evangelists is unimpeachable, and all shadow of contradiction done away: for the question then rests on the peculiar meaning of names and words. On this hypothesis, the preparation of

the Passover must be considered as implying no more than-1. Providing a convenient room. 2. Bringing water for the baking on the following day, because on that day the bringing of the water would have been unlawful. 3. Making inquisition for the leaven, that every thing of this kind might be removed from the house where the Passover was to be eaten, according to the very strict and awful command of God, Ex 12:15-20; 23:15; 34:25. These, it is probable, were the acts of preparation which the disciples were commanded to perform, Mt 26:17; Mr 14:13,14; Lu 22:8-11, and which, on their arrival at the city, they punctually executed. See Mt 26:19; Mr 14:16; Lu 22:13. Thus every thing was prepared, and the holy sacrament instituted, which should, in the Christian Church, take place of the Jewish Passover, and continue to be a memorial of the sacrifice which Christ was about to make by his death on the cross: for as the paschal lamb had showed forth his death till he came, this death fulfilled the design of the rite, and sealed up the vision and prophecy.

All preparations for the true paschal sacrifice being now made, Jesus was immediately betrayed, shortly after apprehended, and in a few hours expired upon the cross. It is therefore very likely that he did not literally eat the Passover this year; and may I not add, that it is more than probable that the Passover was not eaten in the whole land of Judea on this occasion? The rending of the vail of the temple, Mt 27:51; Mr 15:38; Lu 23:45, the terrible earthquake, Mt 27:51-54; the dismal and unnatural darkness, which was over the whole land of Judea, from the sixth hour, (twelve o'clock,) to the ninth hour (i.e. three o'clock in the afternoon,) with all the other prodigies which took place on this awful occasion, we may naturally conclude, were more than sufficient to terrify and appal this guilty nation, and totally to prevent the celebration of the paschal ceremonies. Indeed, the time in which killing the sacrifices, and sprinkling the blood of the lambs, should have been performed, was wholly occupied with these most dreadful portents; and it would be absurd to suppose that, under such terrible evidences of the Divine indignation, any religious ordinances or festive preparations could possibly have taken place.

Readers will probably be surprised to see the preceding opinions so dissentient among themselves, and the plausible reasons by which they are respectively supported, where each seems by turns to prevail. When I took up the question, I had no suspicion that it was encumbered with so many difficulties. These I now feel and acknowledge; nevertheless, I think the plan of reconciling the texts of the evangelists, particularly St. Luke and St. John, which I have adopted above, is natural, and, I am in hopes, will not appear altogether unsatisfactory to my readers. On the subject, circumstanced as it is, hypothesis alone can prevail; for indubitable evidence and certainty cannot be obtained. The morning of the resurrection is probably the nearest period in which accurate information on this point can be expected. *Je suis trompe, says Bouilleau, si cete question peut etre jamais bien eclaircie.* "If I be not mistaken, this question will never be thoroughly understood." It would be presumptuous to say, Christ did eat the Passover this last year of his ministry: it would be as hazardous to say he did not eat it. The middle way is the safest; and it is that which is adopted above. One thing is sufficiently evident, that Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed for us; and that he has instituted the holy eucharist, to be a perpetual memorial of that his precious death until his coming again: and they who, with a sincere heart, and true faith in his passion and death, partake of it, shall be made partakers of his most blessed body and blood. Reader, praise God for the atonement, and rest not without an application of it to thy own soul.

Everything happened according to the Sanctuary Plan

Ex 12:5, 6:

*“Your lamb shall be **without blemish**, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall **KILL IT IN THE EVENING**”*

In the evening] "BETWEEN THE TWO EVENINGS" The Jews divided the day into morning and evening: till the sun passed the meridian all was morning or fore-noon; after that, all was afternoon or evening. Their first evening began just after twelve o'clock, and continued till sunset; their second evening began at sunset and continued till night, i.e., during the whole time of twilight; between twelve o'clock, therefore, and the termination of twilight, the Passover was to be offered. Bear in mind we are talking about the killing and not the confirmation of the lamb and its bringing forth to be killed. There is a vast difference between the lamb being identified, through interrogation by Pilate, giving it over for crucifixion, crucifixion and the death of the lamb.

The day among the Jews had twelve hours, John 11:9. Their first hour was about six o'clock in the morning with us. Their sixth hour was our noon. Their ninth hour answered to our three o'clock in the afternoon. By this we may understand that the time in which Christ was crucified began at the third hour, that is, at nine o'clock in the morning, the ordinary time for the daily morning sacrifice, and ended at the ninth hour, that is, three o'clock in the afternoon, the time of the evening sacrifice, Mark 15:25, 33, 34, 37. Wherefore their ninth hour was their hour of prayer, when they used to go into the temple at the daily evening sacrifice, Ac 3:1; and this was the ordinary time for the Passover. It is worthy of remark that God sets no particular hour for the killing of the Passover: any time between the two evenings, 12-6pm [sixth hour-twelfth hour] i.e., between twelve o'clock in the day and the termination of twilight, was lawful. The daily sacrifice (Exodus 29:38, 39) was offered in the morning between 6-9 and the evening between 12-3. Jesus death then as the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world and the Passover lamb could happen between 9am-3pm and still be lawful. So how then do we solve the discrepancy of Mark and John?

Dividing the day into four quarters, three hours to each quarter, it was in the third of them, wherein they crucified him.

6-9 = First Hour

9-12 = Third Hour

12 - 3 = Sixth Hour

3 - 6 = Ninth Hour

Mark says, [Mar 15:25](#), that it was the third hour. As in ancient times all the numbers were written in the manuscripts not at large but in numeral letters, it was easy for Γ three, to be mistaken for Σ six.

As observed, the Jews divided their night into four watches, of three hours each. Christ having been nailed to the cross a little about mid-day, [Joh 19:14-16](#), [Joh 19:17](#), and having expired about three o'clock, [Mar 15:34](#), the whole business of the crucifixion was finished within the space of this third division of the day, which Mark calls here the third hour. Commentators and critics have found it very difficult to

reconcile this third hour of Mark, with the sixth hour of John, [Joh 19:14](#). It is supposed that the true reading, in [Joh 19:14](#), should be τριτη, the third, instead of ἕκτη the sixth; a mistake which might have readily taken place in ancient times, when the character γ gamma, which was put for τριτη, three, might have been mistaken for C episema, or sigma tau, which signifies six. And τριτη, the third, instead of ἕκτη, the sixth, is the reading of some very eminent MSS. in the place in question, [Joh 19:14](#).

It was the third hour, and they crucified him.

And it was now the third hour of the day, or nine o'clock in the morning, when they thus brought him to Mount Calvary; and there, when all things were made ready, about the sixth hour, they nailed his hands and his feet to the cross, and crucified him. Why should this transaction take such long and some seeming contradictions? The rulers must have been very early and active in their proceedings to have got through so much business, and to have surmounted so many difficulties, by that hour. It would be better to look at what other synopsis have to say.

Matthew 27:45; Luke 23:44;

Matthew 27:45: Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

Luke 23:44: And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

The last examination before the Jewish rulers took place at daybreak, three hours intervened, during which occurred the examinations before Pilate and Herod. The accounts of Matthew and Luke accord with that of Mark in regard to the time of the darkness, and thus support the accuracy of Mark and reconcile with John. About the sixth hour ([Joh 19:14](#)) this was the final effort of Pilate to release Jesus. So Christ was crucified in the third hour, between 9-12. About the sixth hour is between the third and the sixth [9-12] hence removing the discrepancy. Then, when it reached the sixth hour [12], darkness occurred. About the events of such a day these two men *could not make a mistake*. With memories so correct about such minute details, they could not possibly forget *precisely when Christ was crucified*. There was no collusion between the two writers.

Mark agrees with the other evangelists about the darkness which was at the sixth hour, the time of Christ's crucifixion, [Mar 15:33](#) and it is to be remarked, that he does not say that it was the third hour "when" they crucified him, or that they crucified him at the third hour; but it was the third hour, "and" they crucified him, It was the time of day, in the divisions of time, and they crucified him.

Blessings.