

# The Last Supper: Passover? or Not?

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The Last Supper has raised questions in the minds of many people. Was it the Passover meal? Or was it just a regular meal at which the Saviour instituted communion as the memorial of His death?

The Gospel of John appears to place the Last Supper on the day *before* the Passover:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when . . . [Yahushua] knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended . . . [Yahushua] began to wash the disciples' feet . . . ." (John 13:1, 2, 5, NKJV)

On the other hand, certain texts in Matthew, Mark and Luke appear to place the Last Supper *on* the Passover:

Now on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to . . . [Yahushua], saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" (Matthew 26:17)

After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (Mark 14:1)

Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He said to Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat." (Luke 22:7, 8)<sup>1</sup>

One reason it has been assumed that the Last Supper was the Passover meal, is the long-held belief that the Hebrew day began at sunset, rather than dawn. Because Scripture reveals that Yahushua was crucified on the Passover, the day before the Sabbath (see John 19:31 and Mark 15:42) if the "day" begins at sunset, then the Last Supper was eaten on the Passover and it was the traditional Passover/Seder meal.

However, if the Last Supper were indeed the Passover meal, numerous problems arise.

First of all, the repeated use of the word "Preparation" in Scripture to apply to the day of the crucifixion indicates that the evening-time Passover meal (for which preparation must be made) had *not yet been eaten*. (See Matthew 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54,

John 19:31.) Many people today refer to the sixth day of the Biblical week as the “Preparation Day” – the day on which one prepares for the Sabbath. In Scripture, though, the use is recorded only for the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib or the Passover. The Passover meal took place in the evening, so the day *before* the meal was referred to as the “Preparation.”

The whole reason for getting the bodies off of the crosses so quickly was because that day was the “Preparation” for the evening Passover meal as well as the *next* day, which was the first day of Feast of Unleavened Bread, a High Sabbath. The Last Supper was eaten the day before Yahushua was crucified. If the Last Supper had actually been the Passover meal, the *next* day would not have been repeatedly referred to as the “Preparation.”

Secondly, if the Last Supper were the actual, official Passover meal, the harmonic symbolism of Yahushua as the “Lamb of Yah that takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29) would have been destroyed. The beautiful symbolism of the blood of Yahushua being the blood of the Passover Lamb by whose blood we are *passed-over* is destroyed if He did not die at the time of the evening sacrifice *on* the day of Passover.

A careful and meticulous search of Scripture reveals that the Last Supper did *not*, in fact, take place on the Passover. It was therefore not the Passover meal. It is not within the scope of this article to explain the supposedly contradictory accounts of the timing of the Last Supper as given in the Gospels. Such an account has been provided in *The Passover Puzzle*. This article will study additional evidence that the Last Supper was not the traditional Passover meal.



John 13 clearly indicates that at the time of the Last Supper, the “feast” (as the Passover meal was commonly referred to) *had not yet been eaten*. At the supper table, Yahushua announced that one of the twelve disciples would betray Him. This threw the disciples into great consternation. When John quietly asked, “Who is it?” Yahushua replied:

“It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. (John 13:26, NKJV)

By this time, Judas had fully determined to betray the Saviour. Scripture tells us that Satan completely controlled Judas, at which point Yahushua said something to Judas the other disciples did not understand. It is this misunderstanding on the part of the disciples that reveals the Last Supper was not, in fact, the Passover meal.

Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then . . . [Yahushua] said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that . . . [Yahushua] had said to him, “*Buy those things we need for the feast,*” or that he should give something to the poor. (John 13:27-29, NKJV, emphasis supplied.)

The **King James Version** renders verse 29 as: “For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that . . . [Yahushua] had said unto him, *Buy those things that we have need of against the feast . . .*”

The **New American Standard Bible** translates the verse: “For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, ‘*Buy the things we have need of for the feast*’ . . . .”

The **Complete Jewish Bible** states: “Some thought that since Y'hudah was in charge of the common purse, Yeshua was telling him, ‘*Buy what we need for the festival . . .*’ ”

Clearly, if Yahushua and His disciples had just finished eating the Passover, the disciples would not have misinterpreted His comment to Judas to mean that Judas was



to purchase something *for* the Passover.

Even more compelling evidence is found in the actual words used to refer to the bread that Yahushua broke as a symbol of His body.

In the Hebrew economy, yeast (or leavening) was a symbol of sin. It only takes a small amount of yeast to

entirely transform a large bowl of dough. Thus, it was an apt symbol of how even a small sin, cherished in the heart, can transform and destroy the soul. This symbolism was used by Yahushua when He warned the disciples: “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:6, NKJV)

This illustration should have been readily understood by the disciples, but it was not at first:

They reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have taken no bread.” But . . . [Yahushua], being aware of it, said to them, . . . “How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? – but to beware of the leavening of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leavening of *bread*, but of *the doctrine* of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matthew 16:7, 8, 11, 12, NKJV, emphasis supplied.)

Yahushua was using leavening as a symbol of the sinful “doctrine of men” which the prideful Pharisees and Sadducees preferred above the law of Yahuwah. Wrongful “doctrines of men” still influence many belief systems today. The creeds, dogmas and traditions of organized religion need to be carefully studied that error is not ignorantly accepted as truth. Simply because a belief has been held for hundreds of years is not proof of its validity or Scriptural basis. All who desire to know the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth will carefully study each of their beliefs in light of Scripture.



By the command of Yahuwah, not only was no yeast eaten, but *all* yeast and any other leavening agent was to be removed from the home during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Because the first day of the feast began on the seventh-day Sabbath, the work of removing the yeast was part of the “preparation” work performed on the Preparation (the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib).

The Passover meal was always eaten with unleavened bread. It was a beautiful symbol of Yahushua, the Bread of Life, who knew no sin. Consequently, if the Last Supper were the official Passover meal, it would have been eaten with *unleavened* bread.

In Hebrew, there is only one word that describes the English phrase “leavened bread.” The English phrase “unleavened bread” also comes from a single Hebrew word. In order to convey the idea of *leavened* or *unleavened* bread, an extra word has to be added in English. In Hebrew, however, the concept is covered in a single word. The same is true in Aramaic and Greek as well.<sup>2</sup>

## HEBREW

Unleavened bread = *matzah* (or *matzot* for more than one.)

Leavened bread = *lechem* (or *lechemim* for more than one.)

## ARAMAIC

Unleavened bread = *patireh*

Leavened bread = *lakhma*

## GREEK

Unleavened bread = *azumos* (or *azumon* or *azuma* for more than one.)

Leavened bread = *artos* (or *arton* for more than one.)

In speaking of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, always and without exception, Scripture uses the word for *unleavened bread* – bread that has no yeast.

Exodus 12:18 refers to eating unleavened bread on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month.

Exodus 23:15 again refers to the Feast of Unleavened Bread using the word for *yeast-free* bread.

Leviticus 23:6 commands the eating of yeast-free bread during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Numbers 28:17 states that unleavened bread is to be eaten during the seven day feast.

Without exception, each reference to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, uses the word *matzot* to refer to the



yeast-free bread eaten during that feast, beginning with the Passover meal the evening of the 14th.

By contrast, Leviticus 23:17 refers to two loaves of bread that were to be presented to Yahuwah at Pentecost. The verse explicitly states: “They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with *leaven*.” In this instance, the Hebrew word used is *lechem* because it was yeast bread, raised with leavening.

In the New Testament, the Scriptural account is consistent, whether the Aramaic or the Greek is used.

**Matthew 26:17** – “Now on the first *day of the Feast* of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to . . . [Yahushua], saying to Him, ‘Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?’ ”

This text is a bit misleading, as explained in *The Passover Puzzle*, the italicized words (above) were added by translators and do not belong in the original. Also, the word “first” actually means “before.” So the text more accurately states: “Now before Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Yahushua.” The words used here, whether in Aramaic or Greek, refer to the yeast-free bread used for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

**Mark 14:1 and 12** – “After two days it was the Passover and *the Feast* of Unleavened Bread. . . . Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover *lamb*, His disciples said to Him, “Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?”<sup>3</sup>

Again, the Greek and Aramaic both agree that the words used refer to bread baked without yeast, to UNleavened bread.

**Luke 22:1 and 7** – “Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover . . . Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed.”

The Greek and Aramaic words again agree: these texts refer to yeast-free, unleavened bread.

If the Last Supper had been the Passover, then the Hebrew and Aramaic words referring to the “bread” which the Saviour broke and gave to the disciples would be the same words as used above for *unleavened* bread.



A careful review of the Gospel references to the Last Supper reveals a startling word choice: the bread used was *leavened* bread! Bread with *yeast*!

**Matthew 26:26** – “And as they were eating, . . . [Yahushua] took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ ”

The word here used for “bread” indicates that *leavened* bread was used. Both the Aramaic and the Greek use the word for ordinary yeast bread.

**Mark 14:22** – “And as they were eating, . . . [Yahushua] took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, ‘Take, eat, this is My body.’ ”

The Aramaic and the Greek words agree that the bread was regular bread, baked with leavening.

**Luke 22:19** – “And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ ”

Again, the Aramaic and Greek are in agreement in their word choice that the bread used was regular bread, not unleavened bread.

The Gospel of John does not refer to the bread, but instead tells of the footwashing. The writings of Paul, however, say more about the Last Supper.



**1 Corinthians 11:23** – “For I received from . . . [Yahuwah] that which I also delivered to you: that the . . . [Saviour, Yahushua] on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ ”

Paul’s account agrees with the word choice of the Gospels: the bread used was *leavened* bread!

**1 Corinthians 11:26** – “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim . . . [Yahushua’s] death till He comes.”

Yet again, both the Aramaic and the Greek are in agreement that the bread here referenced is leavened bread.

**1 Corinthians 11:27** – “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of . . . [Yahushua] in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of . . . [Yahushua].”

The Aramaic and Greek agree: the word used is for regular, leavened bread.

**1 Corinthians 11:28** – “But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”

The Aramaic and Greek again agree: the word used is for regular, leavened bread.

There is no way that the Last Supper could have been the national festival of the Passover or else the bread used would have been *unleavened* bread. Clearly, the Last Supper took place the day *before* the Passover.

Yahushua knew that He would be dead when the Passover meal came. The Last Supper was His final meal before He was crucified as the Lamb of Yah. His death on the Passover at the very time of the evening sacrifice was a perfect fulfillment, the great anti-type, of all the lambs which had been slain since Adam and Eve first turned their weary steps away from Eden.

The beauty of this symbolism was expounded upon by Paul when he warned the Corinthians:

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? [A little sin damages the whole man.]

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed . . . [Yahushua], our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:6-9, NKJV)

The communion service, instituted by Yahushua at the Last Supper, is a commemoration of His death. It is not necessary to use leavened bread when participating in communion simply because Yahushua used leavened bread. Using the unleavened bread and pure grape juice<sup>4</sup> of the Passover is the very essence of both ceremonies.

Yahushua was the perfect, sinless Son of Yahuwah. As the Bread of Life, unleavened bread is the perfect symbol of Him. He could certainly have asked that unleavened bread be provided for the last meal He had with His disciples. The fact that He chose to use regular bread baked with leavening as a symbol of His body, broken for us, can be understood by the fact that He is our *substitute*.

[Yahuwah] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of . . . [Yahuwah] in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21, NKJV)



Yahushua gave leavened bread to His disciples and said: "This is My body which is given for you." (Luke 22:19) Yahushua was holy and sinless. But as our substitute, He *took on* our sin. The result is that all who believe in Him may be saved. His spotless righteousness is freely given to all who will accept by faith His sacrifice on our behalf. This is symbolized by the use

of unleavened bread in communion. We are safely *passed-over* and the demands of the broken law are met by His blood shed on our behalf.

When we eat the unleavened bread in remembrance of Yahushua, we proclaim His death until He comes. We memorialize the greatest gift ever given to man: the Lamb of Yah who takes away the sins of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Luke 22:11, 13 and 15.

<sup>2</sup> The additional words are simply different tenses of the same word, i.e., singular versus plural forms of the same word.

<sup>3</sup> Italicized words were added by translators. New King James Version used.

<sup>4</sup> The "wine" drunk at Passover was pure, unfermented grape juice. There were strict prohibitions against imbibing alcohol when worshipping before Yahuwah. Certain people, such as those bound by Nazerite vows, were forbidden from ever drinking alcohol. Yahushua, who even refused a pain killer when mingled with wine at the crucifixion (see Matthew 27:34) would not have defiled Himself with fermented wine just when He was to fulfill His mission as the sacrificial Lamb.