

PART 2

BETWEEN THE EVENINGS— THE LEGAL TIME TO SLAY THE PASSOVER

Some of the confusion as to whether the Last Supper was the Passover or not comes from the English translations of the original Hebrew words meaning “between the evenings.” The Jewish sources are clear that this period—the time to slay the Passovers—was to be in the afternoon of the 14th day. However many English translators and commentators, believing that Jesus ate the Passover at the Last Supper (and that he also died at the proper time for the Passover sacrifice), portray the period of “between the evenings” as either evening or twilight, which can imply after sunset.

This notion does not fit with Jewish history, which shows the legally allowed time for the Passover sacrifice to be between noon and sunset. Famous Jewish commentator Alfred Edersheim agrees with this, writing:

The period designated as ‘between the two evenings’ when the Paschal lamb was to be slain, was past. **There can be no question** that, in the time of Christ, it was understood to refer to the interval between the **commencement of the sun’s decline** and what was reckoned as the hour of his final disappearance (about 6 p.m.).³³⁹

The Jewish Encyclopedia verifies this same time frame:

The time “between the two evenings” (“ben ha-’arbaim”) was construed to mean “**after noon and until nightfall**”³⁴⁰

The chart below illustrates the sun ascending (from 6 AM to noon) and descending (from noon to 6 PM, around sunset). If you picture the sun in relation to the vertical line and the horizontal line in the chart below, this line is “even” with the horizon at noon, and is again “even” with the horizon at sunset. Thus, between the evenings is the time between noon and sunset, as both Edersheim and *The Jewish Encyclopedia* noted.

339 Edersheim, *Life and Times*, p. 490.

340 *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 9, p. 553, s.v. “Passover/Paschal Lamb.”

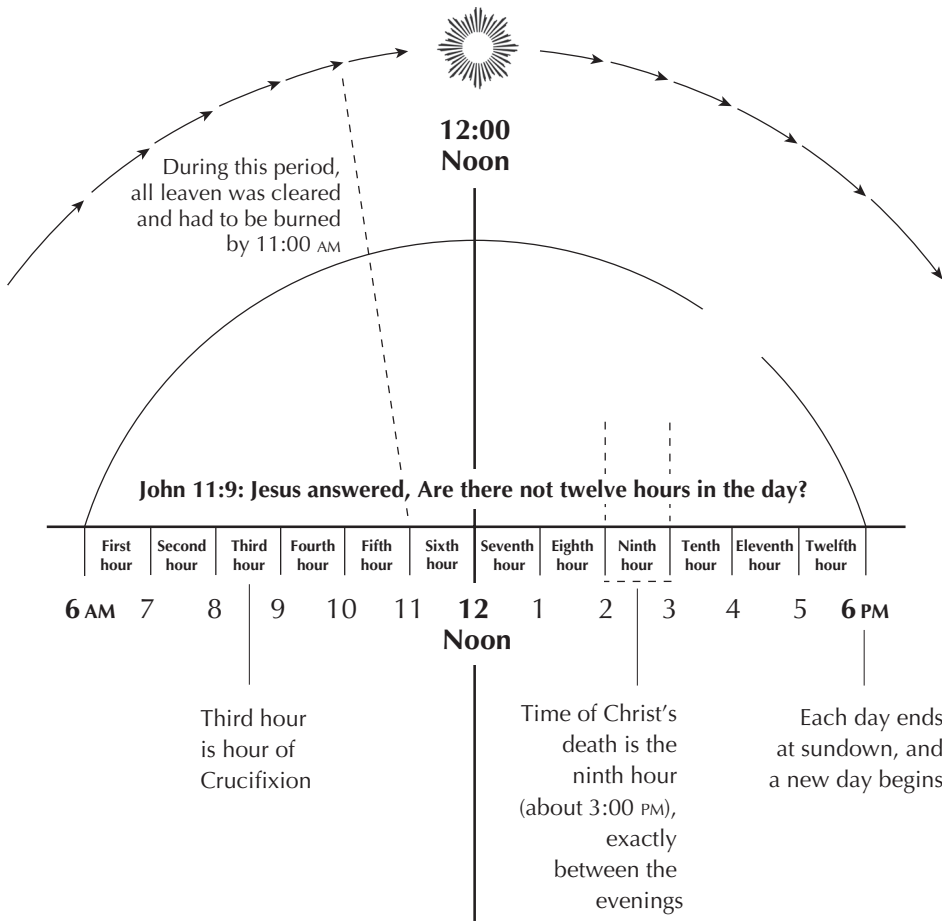


Figure 9. Between the evenings.

Part of the confusion as to whether the Last Supper was the Passover comes from the flexible meaning of the English word “evening,” for which most dictionaries include a definition of the “early part of the night.” Notice how the six English translations below give six variations (in boldface) of what began as the Hebrew phrase meaning “between the evenings”:

^{KJV} Exodus 12:6 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**.

^{NAS} Exodus 12:6 ‘And you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it **at twilight**.

^{LXE} Exodus 12:6 And it shall be kept by you till the fourteenth of this month, and all the multitude of the congregation of the children of Israel shall kill it **toward evening**.

^{YLT} Exodus 12:6 'And it hath become a charge to you, until the fourteenth day of this month, and the whole assembly of the company of Israel have slaughtered it **between the evenings**;

^{NAB} Exodus 12:6 You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present, it shall be slaughtered **during the evening twilight**.

^{JPS} Exodus 12:6 and ye shall keep it unto the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it **at dusk**.

We must understand how the Jews understood this Hebrew phrase and how they passed it down to successive generations, while of course giving the strongest weight to the original God-anointed Hebrew and Greek scriptures of the Bible.

Overlaying our English understanding of “evening” with its various shades of meaning onto the Hebrew and Greek scriptures can cause problems. We see this, for instance, on the day of the Crucifixion when the 15th-day high Sabbath is soon coming—the following English verse says that evening had already come (although the body of Jesus was not yet moved to the tomb):

^{NAS} Mark 15:42 And when **evening had already come**, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,

^{GNT} Mark 15:42 Καὶ ἤδη **ὀψίας** γενομένης, ἐπεὶ ἦν παρασκευὴ ὅ ἐστιν προσάββατον,

^{NAS} Mark 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.

If we think of verse 42 as being correct and interpret “evening” as occurring after sundown, it would mean that prominent Jews like Joseph of Arimathea (a member of the Sanhedrin) publicly broke the Sabbath by carrying the Messiah’s body to the tomb after the 15th-day Sabbath had set in. In this particular verse the solution is

easy, for the Greek word ὀψίας, translated as “evening,” means “late”; it clearly refers to “late in the Jewish day” (which ended at sunset).

This is just one example of how the time to sacrifice the Passover became confused among commentators since Roman times. When they tried to reconcile the longstanding tradition of Jesus somehow eating the 14th-day Passover at the Last Supper, then fulfilling the 14th-day Passover at the Crucifixion the following day, this idea of sacrificing the Passover in the evening gained acceptance among some. Most Jewish sources correctly state that the Passovers were sacrificed in the afternoon and not after sunset.

The Jewish word for “eve” refers to the part of the day after noon and before sunset, as we saw in the subsection “The 14th-Day True Passover” in the chapter “The Temple Challenge.” The irrefutable history as detailed below will show that the legal time to slay the Passover was indeed between noon and sunset. We will first consider the historical statements from the Talmud, then look at other Jewish sources (such as Josephus and Philo) to see that the Old Testament evidence perfectly aligns with these other sources. Then we will see that the New Testament scriptural evidence also harmonizes perfectly with these other Jewish writings.

What the Talmud Says

Although as believers in the God-anointed scriptures, we do not get doctrine from the Talmud, it does contain a wealth of accurate information concerning the festivals that the Jewish scholars wanted to preserve and pass down to future generations. Granted, one has to sometimes weed out certain subjects where there was an ax to grind (the Talmud written by the descendants of the Pharisees, who despised the Sadducees and also the Messiah), but there is still much of value regarding the festivals.

First of all, a reminder that the scriptures show unequivocally that the Passover was on the 14th day, and that the seven-day Festival started as the 15th day began (at sundown of the 14th day) and lasted seven days:

^{JPS} Numbers 28:16 And in the first month, **on the fourteenth day** of the month, is the LORD’S **passover**.

^{YLT} Numbers 28:17 and **in the fifteenth day** of this month *is* a festival, **seven days unleavened** food is eaten;

Now let’s turn to the Talmudic discussion concerning the time for the Jews to throw away the leaven, which gives us a major point of demarcation as to the legal time to slay the Passover (since it could not be sacrificed on the 14th day until all leaven was burned in Israel):

GEMARA: We see thus, that at the **commencement of the sixth hour**, all agree, Chometz must be burned. Whence do we adduce this? Said Abayi: From two passages, viz. [Exod. xii. 19]: “Seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses,” and [ibid. 15]: “But on the first day ye shall have put away leaven out of your houses.” According to this, then, on the first day there would still be leaven in the house and this would be contrary to the ordinance of the first passage? Hence we must say, that by “the first day” is meant **the day preceding the festival. Then why say the sixth hour?** Say that already early in the morning of the day preceding the festival (leaven should be burned). The word “but” with which the passage commences divides the day into two parts, so that in the morning leavened bread may be eaten while in the afternoon it must not.

The disciples of R. Ishmael taught: The reason **that Chometz must be removed on the 14th (of Nissan)** (the eve of Passover) is because that day is referred to as the first day (of the festival) in the passage [Exod. xii. 18]: “In the first, on the fourteenth day of the month, at evening shall ye eat unleavened bread,” etc.

Rabha said: “The reason may be inferred from the passage [Exod. xxxiv. 25]: **‘Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven;** neither shall be left unto the morning the sacrifice of the feast of the passover,’ which signifies, that the Passover sacrifice must not be offered up as long as there is yet leaven.” If that be the case, then it might be said that the leaven should be burned by each man immediately before offering his passover sacrifice; **why designate the sixth hour?** The passage means to state, that **when the time for the Passover sacrifice arrives, there must no longer be any leaven on hand.**³⁴¹

There are two particularly important points to take from this passage above. First, these writers understood Exodus 34:25 to mean that leaven (or “Chometz” above, meaning that which is leavened) must be removed by the sixth hour (which commences at 11 AM and ends at noon) since God commanded to not sacrifice the Passover with leaven (meaning while leaven still remained among the people). The *legal* time to slay the Passover was *after* noon, so all leaven had to be removed prior to this time.

The second important point these writers make is that the “first day” (in Exodus 12:15) refers to the 14th day on which the Passover is sacrificed. They reason that if

341 Babylonian Talmud, Book 3, Tract Pesachim, ch. 1, pp. 19–20,
<http://sacred-texts.com/jud/t03/psc05.htm>.

no leaven is to be in the land for the whole seven-day Festival (the 15th through the 21st), and if the “first day” of the Festival meant the 15th day of Nisan, then they would have already broken the law by still having leaven to remove during the 15th day.

The Hebrew word can mean either “first” or “previous/preceding,” as can the Greek word used here in the Septuagint. They correctly say, therefore, that in this case it means the day *preceding* the Festival (i.e., the 14th day), and they add that Exodus 12:18 calls the 14th day the “first day” as more proof. This was the common Jewish understanding, which fits perfectly with the Gospels, where in the Greek the 14th day is referred to as the “first of the unleavened” (the original Greek of Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:12).³⁴²

Remember, God had said that not bringing the Passover in its appointed time would cause one to be *cut off* from Israel. God had given the Israelites a set time for a legal Passover sacrifice, and this time never confused them:

^{NAS} Numbers 9:13 ‘But the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and yet neglects to observe the Passover, that person shall then be cut off from his people, for **he did not** present the offering of the LORD **at its appointed time. That man shall bear his sin.**

Would Jesus really have gone against the laws of God and the Temple to somehow sacrifice a Passover outside of its appointed time and thus “bear his sin”?



The following passage from the Talmud goes a step further in defining the time for an acceptable Passover sacrifice, saying that one brought before noon would *not be valid*:

MISHNA: If the paschal lamb be slaughtered **before noon, it is not valid**, because it is written [Exod. xii. 6]: “Toward the evening.”³⁴³

This passage is interesting because it does not quote the Hebrew “between the evenings” but rather the Greek Septuagint, which reads “toward evening”:

342 The 14th day, being the first of the eight unleavened days, is covered in the subsection “The 13th-Day Question” in the chapter “The Temple Challenge” and also in the chapter “The Three Major Greek Keys That Unlock the Gospels.”

343 Babylonian Talmud, Book 3, Tract Pesachim, ch. 5, p. 113, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/t03/psc09.htm>.

^{LXE} Exodus 12:6 And it shall be kept by you till the fourteenth of this month, and all the multitude of the congregation of the children of Israel shall kill it **toward evening**.

^{LXT} Exodus 12:6 καὶ ἔσται ὑμῖν διατετηρημένον ἕως τῆς τεσσαρεσκαίδεκάτης τοῦ μηνὸς τούτου καὶ σφάζουσιν αὐτὸ πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος συναγωγῆς υἱῶν Ἰσραηλ **πρὸς ἑσπέραν**

The two words boldfaced in the Greek above are literally “toward evening.” In marked contrast to the Greek Septuagint, the English King James translation below says “*in* the evening”:

^{KJV} Exodus 12:6 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**.

You can see from the Talmudic quotes above that their writers understood this time to sacrifice the Passover differently than the translators of the King James Version, which gives the false impression that the Passover is to be sacrificed “*in the evening*.” This would not be a problem if “evening” were understood in the first-century Jewish sense—when the sun was moving down in the sky *toward even-ing* with the horizon—but the English translations usually convey a different sense.

A big difference can exist between “in” and “toward,” for if Daniel (in Babylon) prayed toward Jerusalem, that doesn’t mean the same thing as him praying in Jerusalem. These Jewish Talmudic scholars who quoted from the Septuagint understood “toward the evening” (in Greek) to have the same meaning as “between the evenings” (in Hebrew), beginning after noon “when the sun commences to move towards the west.”

Young’s Literal Translation gives us the meaning of the Hebrew:

^{YLT} Exodus 12:6 ‘And it hath become a charge to you, until the fourteenth day of this month, and the whole assembly of the company of Israel have slaughtered it **between the evenings**;

The evidence shows that the Jews saw this Greek term “toward evening” to mean the *exact same thing* as the after-noon period, a fact that the Talmudic passage below confirms:

CHAPTER V. REGULATIONS CONCERNING THE SACRIFICE OF THE PASCHAL LAMB.

MISHNA: The continual (daily) offering was slaughtered half an hour after the eighth hour, and sacrificed half an hour after the ninth hour; but on the day before Passover, whether that day happened to be a week-day or a Sabbath, it was slaughtered half an hour after the seventh hour, and sacrificed half an hour after the eighth hour. When the day before the Passover happened to be a Friday, it was slaughtered half an hour **after the sixth hour**, sacrificed half an hour after the seventh hour, **and the Passover sacrifice celebrated (immediately) afterwards.**

GEMARA: Whence do we know all this? Said Rabba: Because it is written [Numbers xxviii. 4], “**toward evening**,” we know that this religious duty must be discharged **when the sun commences to move towards the west (evening)**. Then again, on all ordinary days, in respect to vow and voluntary offerings, as it is written [Lev. vi. 5]: “And he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace-offering.” And the master said that this signifies that all the other offerings must be sacrificed before the daily offering. Hence this latter was slaughtered half an hour after the eighth hour (two and one half hours after noon); but on the **day before Passover, when the paschal lamb had to be slaughtered after the daily offering, the latter was slaughtered an hour sooner**. If the eve of Passover, however, fell on Friday, when the paschal lamb must be roasted before the Sabbath set in, the literal text of the passage in the Scriptures is abided by, and the daily offering is slaughtered **as soon as the sun commences setting towards the west, i.e., half an hour after noon.**³⁴⁴

We see several important facts in the above writing:

Numbers 28:4 is explained as “toward evening” (quoted from the Greek Septuagint) and interpreted as the time “the **sun commences to move towards the west (evening)**.” These Talmudic scholars would also have known that in Hebrew, this verse says “between the evenings.” Therefore, they knew that “toward evening” conveys the same meaning as “between the evenings.”

To be extra careful to stay within the legal time, the Talmudic writers say that when the 14th day fell on a Friday, the daily (even-ing) offering was brought half an hour after noon. God had also commanded the daily evening offering to be brought “between the evenings” (Exodus 29:39), so the Talmudists correctly state that the daily (evening) offering happens during the same time period as the Passovers are brought.

344 Babylonian Talmud, Book 3, Tract Pesachim, ch. 5, p. 106, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/t03/psc09.htm>.

Although the scriptures usually refer to the 14th day as the Passover, the Talmud and other Jewish writings often speak of “Passover” as the 15th-day Sabbath—which commemorates the day God “passed over” and brought the Israelites out of Egypt—and not the 14th day when the Passovers were slain. One reason the 15th day came to be called the Passover is that it was the entrance into the seven-day Festival, which itself was *called* Passover (Luke 22:1). Another reason for this is that after the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, Passover lambs were no longer sacrificed, so the 14th day was less important. Thus, when Talmudic writers speak of the “day before Passover” in this passage above, they mean the 14th day (which they show is the day the Passover was sacrificed).

Therefore, when the Talmudic writers state that “*on the eve of Passover* Yeshu was hanged,”³⁴⁵ they mean that he died as the 14th day was closing. This is much as we use the term “Christmas eve” (the 24th) as the time period before Christmas (the 25th). Such idiomatic changes that occurred over time as well as the use of the term “Passover”—sometimes for different days—have probably greatly contributed to the confusion on the timing of the Passover and the Last Supper.

The Jewish Encyclopedia also concurs with this time to slay the Passover:

In Temple times the paschal lamb was offered **during the afternoon of the eve of Passover**³⁴⁶

Where did the Talmudic writers get the idea that “between the evenings” (Hebrew) and “toward evening” (Greek Septuagint) indicate the same time as “When the sun commences to move towards the west?” The answer is from Deuteronomy 16:6 from the Greek Septuagint, where the God-commanded time to slay the Passover is on the 14th day “toward west sun” (πρὸς δυσμὰς ἡλίου). Notice the English translation of this scripture says, “**in the evening at sunset**”:

^{NAS} Deuteronomy 16:6 but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover **in the evening at sunset**, at the time that you came out of Egypt.

^{LXT} Deuteronomy 16:6 ἀλλ’ ἢ εἰς τὸν τόπον ὃν ἐὰν ἐκλέξεται κύριος ὁ θεός σου ἐπικληθῆναι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκεῖ θύσεις τὸ πασχα ἐσπέρας **πρὸς δυσμὰς ἡλίου** ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ᾧ ἐξῆλθες ἐξ Αἰγύπτου

345 The Soncino Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin, Folio 43a, http://www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_43.html. *Yeshu* is the Hebrew name that is translated into English as “Jesus.”

346 *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, p. 277, s.v. “Eve of Holidays.”

The original Hebrew in the above scripture speaks of the **going in of the sun** (which begins its descent at noon). The Jewish scholars who translated this verse from Hebrew into Greek used a Greek phrase that says “toward west sun,” which is boldfaced on the previous page. The Jewish *ArtScroll* commentary (Stone Edition, the Chumash), agrees with this timing from Deuteronomy 16:6 of “afternoon” when the sun descends:

except at the place that Hashem, your God, will choose to rest His Name, there shall you slaughter the pesach-offering **in the afternoon, when the sun descends**, the appointed time of your departure from Egypt³⁴⁷

Jewish history from the time of Christ is unanimous that the proper time to slay the lambs was from noon until sunset. It is at noon when the sun begins its descent toward the western horizon or, as the Talmudists wrote, “when the sun commences to move towards the west.” This is also why the Talmudic writers were so certain that all leaven had to be removed and burned prior to noon on the 14th day of Nisan, because from noon until sunset was the time in which the Passovers could legally be sacrificed. We saw that a sacrifice brought ***before noon would not be a valid sacrifice***. This history from the Talmud is crucial, as it sheds light on why Jesus could not have sacrificed an early, invalid Passover while leaven was still on hand in Israel, and also why it would have been fine for him to eat bread at the Last Supper.

What Other Jewish Sources Say

The eminent Jewish scholar and historian Josephus, who was born around 7 years after the Crucifixion (AD 37), gives the time when the Passovers were sacrificed in his day:

So these High Priests, upon the coming of that feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, **from the ninth hour until the eleventh**, but so that a company not less than ten belong to every sacrifice, (for it is not lawful for them to feast singly by themselves), and many of us are twenty in a company ...³⁴⁸

Josephus gives us a time that is ***after noon*** for the proper slaying of the Passovers, in clear agreement with the legal time as given in the Talmud. Obviously it was not the

347 Scherman, Nosson. *The Chumash, the Stone Edition*. Brooklyn: Torah Educational Software, 1993. CD-ROM.

348 Whiston, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, “Jewish Wars,” 6.9.3, p. 906.

Jews who were confused on this issue. As we see from the chart near the beginning of this chapter, “from the ninth hour to the eleventh” would mean from around 2 to 5 PM.

God commanded several Temple duties to take place “between the evenings”: Passover, evening offering, incense offering (the time of prayer), and the lighting of the lamps. These were all carried out in the Temple after noon; none of them occurred after sunset.

Let’s look more closely at the *daily evening sacrifice*. Remember that the Jewish day ended at sundown (around 6 PM), and the time translated into English as “evening” actually meant “toward west sun” or “toward evening.” The Jewish scholars who translated the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek Septuagint used the word “*afternoon*” here in Exodus, but first we see two English translations:

^{NIV} Exodus 29:39 Offer one in the morning and the other **at twilight**.

^{YLT} Exodus 29:39 the one lamb thou dost prepare in the morning, and the second lamb thou dost prepare **between the evenings**;

Notice Young’s (YLT above) accurately translates this as “between the evenings,” which is the exact same Hebrew phrase God used in Exodus 12:6 when He commanded the proper time to slay the Passover lambs.

And here is what the Greek Septuagint has:

^{LXT} Exodus 29:39 τὸν ἄμνον τὸν ἕνα ποιήσεις τὸ πρωὶ καὶ τὸν ἄμνον τὸν δεύτερον ποιήσεις τὸ **δειλινόν**

The Greek adjective δειλινόν means “*in the afternoon*,” as defined by *Friberg Greek Lexicon* and *BDAG Lexicon* (as an adverb it means “toward evening”). In the verse from the Septuagint (LXT), the Jewish scholars knew what they were doing when they translated this phrase into Greek as “after-noon.” Notice how the English (NIV above) usually translates it with words such as “twilight,” which is sometimes considered as the time after sunset. The English translations never say *afternoon*, which was the meaning of the Greek word the Septuagint translators used, as well as the meaning of the Hebrew phrase “between the evenings,” which also harmonizes with all of Jewish history.

Sacrificing a Passover “after sunset” of the 13th day would be invalid, because it was brought before noon of the 14th day, and because leaven would still be present in Israel. Sacrificing the Passover “after sunset” of the 14th day would be the next Jewish day (i.e., the 15th) and therefore would also be an invalid Passover.

Josephus, in regard to this daily *evening* sacrifice, wrote of the priests coming to the Temple at noon to begin this sacrificial duty:

... but for the most sacred place, none went in but the high priests, clothed in their special garments. Now there is so great caution used about these offices of religion, that the priests are appointed to go into the temple but at certain hours: for, in the morning, at the opening of the inner temple, those that are to officiate receive the sacrifices, **as they do again at noon**, till the doors are shut.³⁴⁹

He also wrote about the Temple morning and evening daily offerings:

And any one may thus learn how very great piety we exercise towards God, and the observance of his laws, since the priests were not at all hindered from their sacred ministrations by their fear during this siege, but did still twice a day, in the morning **and about the ninth hour**, offer their sacrifices on the altar;³⁵⁰

Thus Josephus shows that this “evening” offering was sacrificed at “about the ninth hour” (around 2 to 3 PM), which was “between the evenings” (as per the Hebrew) and “in the afternoon” (as per the Greek Septuagint). In other words, it was right between the evenings. Josephus does not contradict himself—as some have thought—when he says elsewhere that the incense was offered at “sun-setting”:

... but incense was to be offered twice a-day, both before sun-rising and at **sun-setting**.³⁵¹

Remember that those who translate Josephus into English often have a set theological viewpoint as to when to slay the Passover (because they are sure that the Last Supper was the Passover, and that Jesus was also somehow crucified as the 14th-day Passover). Again we must return to the original Greek to see what Josephus said. His actual words (translated above as “sun-setting”) are πρὸς (toward) and δυσμαίς (west). So Josephus actually said that incense was offered twice each day: before “sun-rising” (probably meaning before the sun had fully risen) and **toward west**. This is essentially the same rendering of Deuteronomy 16:6 from the Septuagint, which speaks of the time to slay the Passover as πρὸς δυσμάς ἡλίου (**toward west sun**).

349 Whiston, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, “Against Apion,” 2.8.105, p. 966.

350 Whiston, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, “Jewish Antiquities,” 14.4.3, p. 459.

351 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 3.8.3, <http://earlyjewishwritings.com/text/josephus/ant3.html>.

These sources all agree with the timing mentioned in the Talmud.

Another famous Jewish writer and biblical philosopher from this time was Philo, who plainly stated that the Jews were to slay their Passovers “beginning at noonday” and “continuing till evening”:

Special laws, II:

THE FOURTH FESTIVAL

XXVII. (145) And after the feast of the new moon comes the fourth festival, that of the **passover**, which the Hebrews call pascha, on which the whole people offer sacrifice, **beginning at noonday** and continuing **till evening**.³⁵²

Philo also writes:

Why is the Passover sacrificed πρὸς ἑσπέραν?³⁵³ Perhaps because good things were about to befall at night. **It was not the custom to offer a sacrifice in darkness**, and for those who were about to experience good things at night it was **not proper to prepare it before the ninth hour**. Therefore it was not at random but knowingly that the prophet set a time between the turning πρὸς ἑσπέραν.³⁵⁴

So Philo completely agrees with the timing we saw earlier in the Talmud, which states “If the Paschal lamb be slaughtered before noon, **it is not valid**, because it is written [Exodus 12:6]: “**Toward the evening**.”³⁵⁵ Philo also agrees with the timing of Josephus, who said the Passovers were sacrificed from the ninth to the eleventh hour (Wars 6.9.3), and he agrees with what we saw from the Jewish translation of the Hebrew into the Greek Septuagint.

The New Testament Agrees

We will also see shortly how these times agree with the New Testament regarding the keeping of the Passover. It is only when we come to the *English translations* that

352 Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus*, “Special Laws II,” 27:145, <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book28.html>.

353 Philo’s two Greek words above are πρὸς (“toward”) and ἑσπέραν (“evening”), hence “toward evening.”

354 Marcus, *Philo Supplement II*, p. 20.

355 Babylonian Talmud, Book 3, Tract Pesachim, ch. 5, p. 113, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/t03/psc09.htm>.

the idea of *after sunset* appears for the time to slay the Passovers. All of the Jewish histories and the scriptures (when correctly translated) contradict such an idea. Remember that the English translations were written by people who came from a centuries-old *tradition* of Jesus eating the Passover at the Last Supper. So they wanted Jesus to both eat the Passover one night and be slain as the Passover the following day, and have both events somehow happen on the legal 14th day.

Part of the confusion over the proper time of “between the evenings” stems from the fact that the Jews *added* a late evening prayer called “Ma’ariv.” *Gateway to Judaism* describes the time for this late “evening” service as “twenty-five minutes after sundown, when three stars are visible.”³⁵⁶ Many Bible commentators incorrectly refer to this time of evening “when three stars are visible” as the time to sacrifice the Passovers. However, *Gateway to Judaism* also makes it clear that “actually, there were only two services in the Temple—morning and afternoon. The late evening prayer was added *after* the destruction of the Second Temple.”³⁵⁷

So those who take the Hebrew phrase “between the evenings” to mean the time “when three stars are visible” are incorrect, because this “late evening” prayer *did not exist in Jesus’s day*. In fact, this late evening (non-Temple) service did not even come into being until many years after Christ was crucified, and therefore it has no bearing whatsoever.

All of this brings us to the New Testament evidence, which tells us the *exact time* of the day when the evening incense offering would follow the daily continual evening sacrificial offering and therefore also shows the proper time to slay the Passovers:

^{YLT} Acts 3:1 And Peter and John were going up at the same time **to the temple**, at the hour of **the prayer, the ninth hour**,

^{GNT} Acts 3:1 Πέτρος δὲ καὶ Ἰωάννης ἀνέβαινον εἰς τὸ ἱερόν ἐπὶ τὴν ὥραν **τῆς προσευχῆς** τὴν ἐνάτην.

In the Greek scriptures, the definite article “the” (τῆς) is in front of the word “prayer” (προσευχῆς), so the exact wording is the hour of *the* prayer (at the ninth hour). This was not just any random prayer; it was the time when many of the Jewish faithful would be gathered together for the prayer that accompanied the daily “even-ing” sacrifice and the Temple incense offering. They would come together in the Temple each day for these morning and evening sacrificial offerings and for *the prayer* at the time of this incense offering. The timing was highly symbolic, as it represented their prayers being acceptable to God (after the sacrifices were offered) and symbolically rising up to Him as the *evening incense offering*. We have an excellent picture of this in Luke:

356 Shulman, *Gateway to Judaism*, vol. 1, p. 331.

357 Shulman, *Gateway to Judaism*, vol. 2, pp. 607–608.

^{NAS} Luke 1:5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

^{NAS} Luke 1:8 Now it came about, while he was performing his priestly service before God in the *appointed* order of his division,

^{NAS} Luke 1:9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to **enter the temple** of the Lord and **burn incense**.

^{NAS} Luke 1:10 And the whole multitude of the people were **in prayer** outside **at the hour of the incense offering**.

^{NAS} Luke 1:11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.

This was the Temple service that Peter and John were going up to, because this was when all the people would be gathered in the Temple. As mentioned, Acts 3:1 gives us this exact time for the even-ing offering of incense in the New Testament (i.e., the ninth hour, about 3 PM, which was of course “between the evenings”):

^{YLT} Acts 3:1 And Peter and John were going up at the same time to the temple, at the hour of **the prayer**, the **ninth hour**.

Josephus agreed with this exact same time specified in scripture, stating that the service of the evening sacrifice was at the **ninth hour** and that even during the siege of the Temple by Roman troops, while soldiers were throwing stones down upon them, the priests were still careful to do everything as God had commanded:

And anyone may thus learn how very great piety we exercise towards God, and the observance of his laws, since the priests were not at all hindered from their sacred ministrations, by their fear during this siege, but did still twice a day, in the morning and **about the ninth hour**, offer their sacrifices on the altar; nor did they omit those sacrifices, if any melancholy accident happened by the stones that were thrown among them;³⁵⁸

358 Whiston, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, “Jewish Antiquities,” 14.4.3, p. 459.

Now we'll turn to the book of Revelation for more New Testament proof that in the time of Jesus, the Temple authorities kept the Passover, the evening offering, the incense offering (the prayer) at this same time—"between the evenings"—as commanded by God. In John's vision, it was after the lamb had been slain (picturing Christ) that the bowls of incense (representing the prayers of the people) were seen as ready to be offered:

^{NAS} Revelation 5:6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders **a Lamb standing, as if slain**, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

^{NAS} Revelation 5:8 And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden **bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints**.

Notice that the bowls of incense represent the prayers of the saints. These reverent Jews were obviously not ignorant of these pictures.

^{NAS} Revelation 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to **the prayers of all the saints** upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

^{NAS} Revelation 8:4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

This picturing of the slain lamb and then the bowls of incense ready to be offered aligns with the timing mentioned in the Talmud:

The rabbis taught: "The daily (evening) offering precedes the Passover-sacrifice, and the Passover-sacrifice precedes the burning of the incense, and the incense precedes the lighting of the candles."³⁵⁹

359 Babylonian Talmud, Book 3, Tract Pesachim, ch. 5, p. 108, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/t03/psc09.htm>.

The Jews were acutely aware that the incense offering, which came after the daily evening sacrifice,³⁶⁰ represented the prayers of the believers being accepted by God as the smoke floated heavenward. This is why they would be gathered in the Temple for the incense offering, at the time of the prayer (Luke 1:10).

King David was also well aware of these meanings:

^{NAS} Psalm 141:2 May **my prayer** be counted as **incense** before Thee; The lifting up of my hands as the **evening offering**.

The scholars who translated the Septuagint show (in the Greek below) that both the evening offering and the incense offering were made every morning and every **afternoon** (**δείλης**), contrary to how the English reads (every “evening”):

^{NIV} 2 Chronicles 13:11 Every morning and **evening** they present burnt offerings and fragrant incense to the LORD.

^{LXT} 2 Chronicles 13:11a θυμιῶσιν τῷ κυρίῳ ὀλοκαυτώματα πρωὶ καὶ **δείλης**³⁶¹

Above, you can see that the Greek word in the Septuagint is “after-noon,” not “evening” (which can imply “night-time” in English). So when we connect all this together, we see that what Acts 3:1 gives is within this same time frame (the ninth hour, around 3 PM) that these three Temple services (Passover, evening offering, and incense offering) were performed. And this is the exact same time given in all the Jewish histories—the after-noon period of the day, centering around **the ninth hour**. It was also, of course, the ninth hour of the 14th day when the Jewish Messiah, “Christ our Passover”—the true Passover—fulfilled the sacrifice at God’s appointed time of “between the evenings”:

^{NAS} Mark 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

^{NAS} Mark 15:37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.

360 Or after the Passover on the 14th day of Nisan each year.

361 Liddell and Scott’s *A Greek-English Lexicon* defines **δείλης** as “**afternoon**” (p. 373).

We saw in “Setting the Table 1” that the Jewish Quartodecimans (Fourteenthers) were derided for their keeping of the 14th day special and for fasting until the ninth hour on this day to honor the Lord’s sacrifice, but the better history shows that their timing was correct.

What Does John Mean by the Sixth Hour?

There is a controversial verse in John that commentators have debated; John pictures the Messiah before Pilate at the sixth hour, with a band of chief priests demanding his crucifixion:

^{YLT} John 19:14 and it was the preparation of the passover, and **as it were the sixth hour**, and he saith to the Jews, ‘Lo, your king!’

^{YLT} John 19:15 and they cried out, ‘Take away, take away, crucify him;’ Pilate saith to them, ‘Your king shall I crucify?’ the chief priests answered, ‘We have no king except Caesar.’

^{YLT} John 19:16 Then, therefore, he delivered him up to them, that he may be crucified, and they took Jesus and led *him* away,

Some have thought verse 14 was a scribal error, for how could Jesus be here with Pilate about noon (the sixth hour) when the other Gospels say he was on the cross at the third hour (9 AM)? Commentators have pointed to a manuscript error since a few weaker manuscripts have “third hour” in the Greek. However, in his *Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament*, Bruce Metzger points out that the manuscripts that change “sixth hour” to “third hour” are “an obvious attempt to harmonize the chronology with that of Mark 15:25.”³⁶² He goes on to say that while some believe the disagreement arose when copyists confused the Greek numerals 3 and 6, the manuscript evidence is “**overwhelmingly in support of**” the Greek word for “*sixth*.”

Some may jump to the conclusion that the scriptures contradict each other and that we should therefore throw our Bibles away and go home.

I believe, however, that the truth lies in the *Jewish idiom* for the sixth hour and what this hour meant to John and the other Jews as it relates to the Passover. From the Talmud, the importance of the sixth hour to Jews becomes clear, for the Passover *had to be selected* by the sixth hour, and from the sixth hour on was the *legal* time to kill the Passover. The other Greek word John used (ὥς), which Young’s properly translates into “as it were” (John 19:14 above), shows its subtle meaning. John used

362 Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 252.

the Jewish natural-to-spiritual idiom³⁶³ to say the “sixth hour” in the natural sense, but he *means* the sixth hour in the spiritual sense by saying “as it were the sixth hour.”

John subtly referred to Christ as the Passover in other ways also, one of them below:

^{NAS} John 19:32 The soldiers therefore came, and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other man who was crucified with Him;

^{NAS} John 19:33 but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs;

^{NAS} John 19:36 For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, “**Not a bone of Him shall be broken.**”

John connects this truth from the scripture (concerning the command for the Passover sacrifice) with something that the Jews would understand from their history and in their idiom:

^{NAS} Exodus 12:46 “It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, **nor are you to break any bone of it.**”

Many have also wondered why there was darkness over the land from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3 PM) on the day of the Crucifixion:

^{NAS} Matthew 27:45 Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.

Some commentators believed it was a solar eclipse, but Edersheim points out that there can be no eclipse at the time of the full moon, when Passover always occurs.³⁶⁴ Some say it was because God could not bear to look upon His son as he suffered, but if this were the true reason, then why did God not cause the darkness right at the third hour (around 9 AM) when Jesus was nailed to the cross, instead of waiting until the sixth hour?

I believe the truth is found in the fact that the sixth hour was the final time for the Passovers to be designated, and the lawful time after which the Passover sacrifice could be killed (as we saw in the earlier quotes from Philo and the Talmud). God’s

³⁶³ As explained in the chapter “Setting the Table 4.”

³⁶⁴ Edersheim, *Life and Times*, Book 5, ch. 15, p. 604.

causing the darkness over the land at *noon* was His way of saying He would no longer look upon or accept the animal sacrificial system. This darkness at noon also fulfilled the scripture given by the prophet Amos:

JPS Amos 8:9 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.

JPS Amos 8:10 And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.

God had now sent His son as a fulfillment of the sacrificial system, and He would no longer accept the sacrifices in the Temple. Thousands of the Jewish faithful would have been making ready (with their lambs already designated) at noon for the daily continual sacrifice to commence (remember Josephus said the doors for this afternoon Temple service open at noon). They would have had their spotless lambs picked out and ready to be sacrificed in the Temple, where their blood would be poured out at the altar before the great Holy of Holies. Some of these people would have had their Passover lambs in tow as they passed by the commotion where Christ was alongside the road on the cross, not far from the Temple. The Passover was the one time of year when the common Israelite could approach this great altar and sacrifice his Passover lamb; all other sacrifices were commanded by God to be performed by the priests.

Jesus said Peter would deny him three times before the cock crows. In fact that early morning “cock crow” (“cock summons” in Greek) was not a rooster, as many suppose, but the calling out to the priests to make ready for the morning sacrifice. There were three callings (summons) that went forth: early, middle, and late. The Talmud shows that there were twelve cocks (similar to faucets) at the laver in the Temple where the priests would first wash their hands and feet to prepare for the sacrifices.³⁶⁵ *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (under Gebini) says this Temple crier’s voice (cock crow) could be heard for miles as he called the priests to prepare for the sacrifice.

So while the priests were being summoned to the Temple to make ready for the morning sacrifice, Christ was being led toward the Crucifixion. The reason the chief priests are pictured at the cross at the time of the Crucifixion but not seen at the time of

365 The mention of the cock crow appears in the Babylonian Talmud, Book 3, Tract Yomah, ch. 1, pp. 27–28, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/t03/yom06.htm>; the reference to the twelve cocks at the laver where the priests would wash appears in Book 3, Tract Yomah, ch 3, pp. 51–53, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/t03/yom08.htm>.

death is that by then they were already back readying for the Passover sacrifice in the Temple (Mark 15:29–33). Those “passing by” (some even reviling the Messiah) were most likely on their way to the Temple, bringing their lamb sacrifice alongside them, all set for the day’s proceedings. They thought they were going to offer their Passover sacrifice, all the while missing the fact that Christ—the true Passover—was fulfilling God’s plan.

However, starting later this day, these lamb sacrifices in the Temple would no longer be accepted by God for atonement. Only by accepting the sacrifice of His son, Christ our Passover, is there forgiveness of sin. When Christ our Passover loudly cried out, “It is finished,” around 3 PM, the darkness fled away. The lamb of God had paid the penalty for our sins, the sacrifice was complete, and the price for our atonement was paid.

God was now going to allow each person to make their own decision as to whether they would accept God’s provision for sin, His own beloved son, the true Passover sacrifice. As the light of the sun again showed forth and the events of the day became widely known, many hearts had to wrestle with a decision. Once the sunlight came back out, there must have been pandemonium in the Temple among the priests and the multitudes who were waiting with their lambs as the darkness went away. The people beheld that the veil before the Holy of Holies was now torn in half and that the venerated place of God’s presence and glory now lay bare and open before them. Not far away at Golgotha, at the foot of the cross, the Roman centurion spoke out, declaring, “truly this was the son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

So when we think back to John’s words about the sixth hour (John 19:14), we must consider that there may be another truth being shown, before we take the position that the scriptures contradict themselves.

God’s plan of redemption for humanity was fulfilled. Just as Joseph had comforted his brethren and told them that his being sold into Egypt was all part of God’s plan from the beginning **to preserve many people alive**, so would the Lord speak similar words of comfort to all today.

^{NAS} Genesis 50:20 “And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* **God meant it for good** in order to bring about this present result, **to preserve many people alive**.”

The Nation of Israel, too, will see these things, as given in the following prophecy by Zechariah:

^{NAS} Zechariah 12:10 “And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.”

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