

Did Jesus eat the Passover?

The Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke) all tell us that Jesus ate the regular Passover meal on the evening after 14th Nisan. If we assume Jesus did not eat the regular Passover or ate a meal a day early, we have to explain the clear testimony of the synoptics that he ate the regular Passover meal on the evening of Thursday. Jewish day started/ended at sunset. So 14th Nisan ended at sunset Thursday. 15th Nisan started at sunset our Thursday evening.

Background:

The lambs were slain on the afternoon of 14th Nisan. Passover was eaten after sunset 15th Nisan.

Matt. 26:17,18,19	}	Crucifixion occurred Friday. Meal eaten evening before (our Thursday). All synoptics say Christ ate the Passover.
Mark 14:12-18		
Luke 22:7-15		

Passover was eaten the evening of 14/15 Nisan, our Thursday.

Then the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a week long feast, followed directly after.

Passover is used by the gospel writers to refer both to the paschal meal/and the week of unleavened bread.

Some say Jesus ate a meal a day before the regular Passover. Jesus could not have eaten the Passover a day early; the lambs were killed at the temple. The authorities would not have killed a lamb early. This is especially true of one to whom they were hostile.

The testimony of John:

There are five verses in John which appear to contradict the synoptics as to when Jesus ate the meal:

A. John 13:1 – Now before the Feast of the Passover

It is alleged a distinct statement is made that this supper was before the Passover and therefore 24 hours before. The inference of 24 hours before is taken for granted.

"the Feast of the Passover" means the paschal meal and not the entire festival of unleavened bread. Revised/NAS not supper being ended but During supper.

13:4 - riseth from supper

13:12 - set down again

13:23 – There was at the table reclining in Jesus' bosom.

So the natural meaning is that just before the meal began Jesus purposed to show his love for his own by a practical illustration. It is useless to argue that the meal of John 13 and the meal of the synoptics are different. The points of similarity are too great.

B. John 13:27 – "That thou doest, do quickly."

Objection – If this was the paschal meal why would Jesus say do it quickly to provide for the meal?
If it were a day early why the haste? Plenty of time on morrow.
Jesus meant the Feast of Unleavened Bread, not the Passover meal.

C. John 18:28 – They themselves entered not...but they might eat the Passover.

This was after the feast of 13:2 had taken place.

This seems on its face to be a clear contradiction between John/synoptics. But what's the problem if we appear to see a contradiction in God's Word?

God's Word is perfect; it can't contradict itself.

The alleged contradiction is either a problem with our understanding of the text or a problem with the transmission of the text to us.

We don't always have all the pieces of the puzzle—

Can we find a way to reconcile John and the synoptic writers?

The phrase eat the passover is critical to our understanding of the problem. Five times the synoptics use this phrase to mean the paschal supper.

The word Passover is used in three senses in NT:

1. The paschal meal
2. The paschal lamb
3. The paschal festival (weeklong)

John uses the word eight other times and always means the Passover festival—the weeklong festival. So John's usage should determine his meaning in 18:28. He is speaking of the Passover festival and the days remaining after the paschal meal.

2 Chronicles 30:22 - Then Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good insight *in the things* of the LORD. So they ate for the appointed seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD God of their fathers.

Impurity contacted early in morning would not affect eating of supper in evening.

The impurities passed away at evening.

If they wished to participate in the offerings of that day—(Feast of Unleavened Bread). They would have to avoid the uncleanness.

D. John 19:14 - And it was the preparation of the passover

Claim – The day preceding the Passover festival. So Christ was crucified a day early—Preparation was used as the name of the day before the Sabbath (our Friday).

The term "preparation of the Passover" is used to describe the day before the Sabbath. See:

Mark 15:42	}	All used to describe the day before Sabbath.
Matt 27:62		
Luke 23:54		
John 19:31, 42		

It was the Friday of Passover week which agrees with synoptics and was the day before the Sabbath.

E. John 19:31 – The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away.

So it is claimed the first day of this Passover coincided with the weekly Sabbath. Jesus ate the meal before this. The regular Passover would have been Saturday—day of preparation Friday—Passover Saturday.

Both the first day of the feast...
...the last day of the feast...
...the Sabbath of the feast...
...were all called high days in the gospel accounts.
John uses it in this sense in 7:37.

A fair interpretation of the passages not only removes contradiction between John and the synoptics, but favors the view that they have the same date for the Passover meal, and that Jesus ate the Passover at the regular hour and was crucified on Friday 15th Nisan.

Of course out of the Passover our Lord instituted the Lord's Supper which we observe today. I believe he observed the regular Passover and then went on to establish the Lord's Supper.