

What is the Meaning of the Phrase, “Between the Evenings”?

How the phrase “between the evenings” is interpreted will determine the timing of the Passover observance. The children of Israel were told to keep their Passover sacrifices up until the fourteenth day of the first month, “...and kill it at twilight [lit. *between the evenings*]” (Exodus 12:6). Twilight is the period between sunset and dark. Since Biblical days begin and end at sunset, then “between the evenings” is interpreted as the beginning of the fourteenth day. Thus the Passover observance would be held on the night of the fourteenth.

Is twilight the correct interpretation? *Strong’s* 5399, *nesheph*, is a word that means twilight. It is used twelve times for the evening or morning twilight periods. If twilight is what was intended in Exodus 12:6, then why wasn’t *nesheph* used? Instead of having opinions about the meaning of “between the evenings,” we are going to examine the eleven times that it is used in the Bible, and let the scriptures interpret its meaning.

Can Evening Mean the Afternoon?

The word evening is not limited to a period of time after sunset. It can also mean the afternoon. “Prepare you war against her; arise and let us go up at **noon**. Woe to us! For the day goes away, for the shadows of the **evening** are stretched out” (Jeremiah 6:4). The shadows begin to lengthen when the sun crosses its zenith at solar noon, and they continue to lengthen until the sun sets. Evening, as used in verse 4, means the afternoon.

Another example is after the death of Jesus: “When the **even** was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph...He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus...” (Matthew 27:57, 58). Joseph took Jesus’ body, “...wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulcher...And that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on [2020, *to be near commencing*]” (Luke 23:53, 54). The Sabbath had not yet begun, which means the sun had not yet set. The evening that is mentioned in verse 57 means the afternoon.

There are other examples, but these should suffice. Now we are going to see how the phrase “between the evenings” is used. This will give us its true meaning, and then we can determine when the Passover ceremony was held.

The Daily Offering of the Two Lambs

“Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar; **two lambs** of the first year day by day continually. The one [259, *first*] lamb you shall offer **in the morning**; and the other [8145, *second, double, again*] lamb you shall offer **at even** [lit. *between the evenings*]; and with the one [259, *first*] lamb a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of a hin of wine for a drink

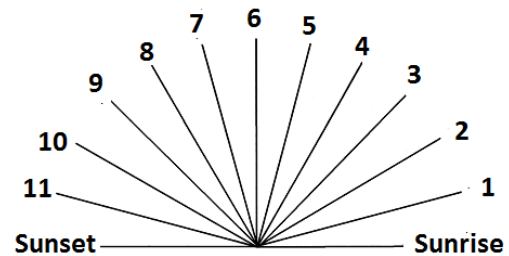
offering. And the other [8145, *second*] lamb you shall offer **at even** [lit. *between the evenings*], and shall do thereto according to the grain offering of the morning, and according to the drink offering thereof, for a sweet savor, an offering made by fire to the LORD” (Exodus 29:38-41). The same sequence is repeated in Numbers 28:3-8. Four times the phrase “between the evenings” is used following the offering of the first lamb in the morning.

Two lambs were to be offered each day. The first lamb was offered in the morning. In order for the second lamb to be offered **on the same day, as commanded by God**, it would have to be offered **prior to the end of the day at sunset**. The only time that the second lamb could have been offered was the afternoon prior to sunset.

The daily offering is a type of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The crucifixion of Jesus began in the morning. “And it was the **third hour**, and they crucified Him” (Mark 15:25). The third hour is approximately 9:00 A.M. Jesus died at the ninth hour (Matthew 27:46-50; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:44-49). The ninth hour is approximately 3:00 P.M.

If between the evenings corresponds to the ninth hour, then that would mean that Jesus died at the same time of day that they began killing the Passover sacrifices in Egypt. Thus “Christ our Passover” fulfilled the Passover sacrifice perfectly. Why is that fact so hard for people to accept? Of course Jesus fulfilled it perfectly.

Hebrew days were divided into twelve equal hours from sunrise to sunset. The third hour of the day is the midpoint between sunrise and noon. The ninth hour is the midpoint between noon and sunset. The first evening begins as the sun crosses its zenith at noon. The second evening begins at sunset. Between the evenings is the midpoint between noon and sunset.



The Incense Offering

The incense offering will also give us the exact time of “between the evenings,” thus we will have two witnesses. “And you shall make an altar to burn incense upon....And you shall put it before the veil that is by the Ark of the Covenant, before the mercy seat....And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresses the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps **at even** [lit. *between the evenings*], he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations” (Exodus 30:1, 6-8).

What does the incense symbolize? “And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense

with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand" (Revelation 8:3, 4). The incense symbolizes the prayers of the saints.

Zacharias was a priest. "According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people **were praying without at the time of the incense**" (Luke 1:9, 10). The incense offerings became known as the hours of prayer. "Now Peter and John went together into the temple **at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour**" (Acts 3:1). Once again we see that "between the evenings" corresponds to the ninth hour.

Another example is that of Cornelius, "A devout man, and one that feared God...and prayed to God always. He saw in a vision evidently about the **ninth hour of the day** an angel coming to him...And he said to him, Your **prayers** and your alms are come for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:2-4). When Cornelius recounted to Peter what had happened, he said, "...Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and **at the ninth hour I prayed in my house...**" (v. 30).

The second lamb of the daily offering and the incense offering were performed at the same time of day, i.e. "between the evenings." David wrote, "LORD, I cry to You: make haste to me; give ear to my voice, when I cry to You. Let my prayer be set forth before You **as incense**; and the lifting up of my hands as **the evening sacrifice**" (Psalm 141:1, 2). We see that David combined the two offerings in his prayer.

Killing the Passover

"These are the feasts of the LORD, **holy convocations**, which you shall proclaim in their seasons. In the fourteenth day of the first month **at even** [lit. *between the evenings*] is the LORD'S Passover" (Leviticus 23:4, 5). Verse 5 has often been used as a "proof text" that Passover is to be observed on the fourteenth. Does it prove it?

What was to be done on the fourteenth day "between the evenings"? They were to take a lamb "...without blemish, a male of the first year...And you shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the [*first*] month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it **in the evening** [lit. *between the evenings*]" (Exodus 12:5, 6).

Leviticus 23:5 has to do with the killing and preparing of the Passover. The lamb had to be killed, bled out, skinned, cleaned, and thoroughly roasted whole with its entrails. You shall "...roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the entrails thereof" (v. 9). The entire process would take at least four to five hours to complete, which would be well past sunset into the night of the fifteenth.

"And they shall eat the flesh **in that night**, roast with fire, and **unleavened bread**; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it" (v. 8). After sunset the fifteenth day of the first month began. "And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread to the LORD: seven days

you must eat unleavened bread. In the first day you shall have a holy convocation..." (Leviticus 23:6, 7).

The Passover was to be eaten with unleavened bread, and the fifteenth is a day of unleavened bread, but the fourteenth is not. The fifteenth is a holy convocation, but the fourteenth is not. What is a holy convocation?

"A 'convocation' is an assembly of the people where their presence is commanded, under power and authority. A 'holy convocation' is a religious assembly for purposes of worship. The weekly Sabbath is a holy convocation. So is Abib 15th. Our presence is commanded under God's power and authority."¹ The Passover ceremony is an assembly that is commanded by God for purposes of worship; therefore it is a holy convocation.

The Second Passover

"And the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Let the children of Israel also **keep** [6213, *to prepare, to make, to produce*] the Passover at his appointed season. In the fourteenth day of this month, **at even** [lit. *between the evenings*], you shall **keep** [6213, *prepare*] it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall you **keep** [6213, *prepare*] it" (Numbers 9:1-3).

Notice that the word translated as keep means to prepare. The fourteenth is "...the **preparation** [3904, *a making ready*] of the Passover..." (John 19:14). The preparations for the Passover were to begin "between the evenings," i.e. midafternoon on the fourteenth, with the sacrificing of the Passover lambs.

"And Moses spoke to the children of Israel, that they should **keep** [6213, *prepare*] the Passover. And they **kept** [6213, *prepared*] the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month **at even** [lit. *between the evenings*]...according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel" (Numbers 9:4, 5).

As we have seen, the preparations for the Passover began with the killing of the Passover at midafternoon on the fourteenth, but they could not be completed until the night of the fifteenth.

If someone was unable to observe the Passover in the first month because they were "...unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall **keep** [6213, *prepare*] the Passover to the LORD. The fourteenth day of the second month **at even** [lit. *between the evenings*] they shall **keep** [6213, *prepare*] it, and eat it with **unleavened bread and bitter herbs**. They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break any bone of it: according to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall **keep** [6213, *prepare*] it" (vv. 10-12).

¹ Herbert W. Armstrong, *Pagan Holidays—or God's Holy Days—Which?*, Ambassador College Press © 1974, p.18.

The instructions for the Passover in the second month are the same as they are for the first month. The preparations began “between the evenings” on the fourteenth day, and the Passover was eaten in that night “with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.”

Quail and Manna

The eleventh and final usage of “between the evenings” is found in Exodus 16. “[T]he children of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin...on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt” (v. 1). The children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, “...you have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (v. 3).

Moses told the people, “...the LORD hears your murmurings which you murmur against Him: and what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD” (v. 8). The people were sinning against the Eternal.

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak to them, saying, **At even** [lit. *between the evenings*] you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread...And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered [3680, *to cover, conceal, hide*] the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host” (vv. 12, 13).

When the children of Israel began killing the quail there would have been blood throughout the camp. The shed blood was a type of the Passover sacrifice, symbolizing the covering over of their sins by blood. God chose to bring them up “between the evenings” because that is the time of day that the Passover sacrifices were killed.

The manna began on the morning of the 16th day of the second month. The sixteenth was the first day that they gathered the manna. They were to gather it every morning, “And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much...” (v. 22). The sixth day would have been the 21st day of the month.

Moses said, “...Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath to the LORD...” (v. 23). The 22nd day of the month is the Sabbath. This is the first time that the word Sabbath is used in the Bible. The children of Israel had forgotten any knowledge that they had of the Sabbath, because of their previous generations being in bondage in Egypt. God chose this period of time to begin to teach them about the Sabbath.

The 15th would have been the seventh day of the week, but up to, and including the 15th the children of Israel had never kept the Sabbath day. Counting back from the 15th day, the 8th and 1st days of the second month were seventh days, as were the 24th and 17th days of the first month. Israel did not keep a single one of those seventh days holy, because God had not yet taught them to keep the seventh day holy.

The argument that “between the evenings,” as used in verse 12, had to mean twilight because God would not have had them killing quail on the Sabbath, does not hold water, especially in light of its ten other usages.

Conclusion: By allowing the scriptures to interpret the meaning of “between the evenings,” we have been shown that it corresponds to the ninth hour (about 3:00 P.M.) in the New Testament. Once we see its Biblical interpretation, then everything about Passover falls into place. We see that “Christ our Passover” died at the same time that the Passover lambs were to be slain “between the evenings” in the Old Testament. The Passover was to be eaten “in that night, roast with fire, and **unleavened bread**; and bitter herbs...” (Exodus 12:8). That night was the 15th, which is the first day of unleavened bread. The 15th is the first of God’s seven annual holy convocations; therefore if you have ever wondered why Passover is not a holy convocation, you need not wonder any longer, because **it is!**