

The Mystery of *Ben Ha Arbayim* --

When Was the Passover Killed?

What is the meaning of the Hebrew expression "between the two evenings" -- or *ben ha arbayim*? Great controversy has arisen over this expression. Does it mean after the sun has set? Or could it mean the hours before sunset? How did the Jews use the expression? What does the Bible say about it? Since the Passover was to be killed "between the two evenings," this expression takes on major importance. It is very important that we know and understand the truth!

William F. Dankenbring

In Exodus 12:6, God commands Israel, "And you shall keep it [the Passover lamb] up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it *in the evening*." Many have been perplexed by this expression, "in the evening." The margin of my National Bible says, "from the ninth to the eleventh hour." In Israel, the day had twelve hours, beginning around 6:00 AM our time as the first hour. Therefore, the ninth to the eleventh hour would have been from 3:00 PM in the afternoon till 5:00 PM.

However, another Bible I have has a marginal rendering of this expression, saying, "Hebrew, *between the two evenings*." The question is, does this period of time refer to the afternoon of Nisan 14, especially from 3:00-5:00 PM? Or does it refer to the BEGINNING of Nisan 14, which begins about 6:00 PM the previous evening, from the time the sun sets until dark sets in -- a period of about forty minutes or so?

Some who observe "Passover" at the beginning hours of Nisan 14, shortly after sunset, claim this expression means twilight, between sunset and dark. Is this really true?

In his book entitled *The Christian Passover*, Fred R. Coulter, former minister of the Worldwide Church of God, asserts that this expression is "the vital key to understanding." He claims that the Scriptural meaning of *ben ha arbayim* is the period of time after sunset,

normally referred to as dusk or twilight -- definitely NOT "late afternoon"! Coulter simply rejects out of hand Jewish explanations and exegesis on this expression, as well as the studies of most scholars. Coulter claims that the traditional Jewish explanation of this term, such as that of Rabbi Rashi, a renowned scholar of the Torah, simply contradicts Exodus 12:8, which, he says, shows that the entire Passover was to be kept on the 14th of Nisan, and the Passover lambs were to be eaten on the night of the 14th, not the 15th!

These are very strong words. Coulter claims that Exodus 16 is the KEY PROOF that he is right, and all the rabbis and scholars are wrong. He accuses various scholars, including Robert Kuhn and Lester L. Grabbe, formerly with the Worldwide Church of God, of "either ignoring or overlooking the plain commands of God which were given in the original Passover and which have been preserved in His Word" (p.28, *The Christian Passover*).

What is this "proof" which he refers to?

The Mystery of the Word "Evening"

Asserts Fred Coulter, the Hebrew term generally translated "evening," or "even" -- *ba erev* -- means "sunset." Therefore, according to him, *all the common Bible translations are in error, as well as Strong's Concordance and every Hebrew lexicon in existence!* Coulter does not bother to "prove" that *ba erev* should be translated "sunset." He simply asserts it is so, saying so dogmatically, without providing any evidence whatsoever. Coulter declares that "the meaning of *ba erev* is *without controversy*," and further says it means "*sunset*."

But is this really true?

The apostle Paul says that we are to "*prove ALL things*" (I Thess.5:21). Otherwise, slick, oily, and imperious deceivers will twist Scripture and have us believing white is black and sweet is sour, truth is error and error is pure truth! Isaiah the prophet warns,

"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" (Isaiah 5:20-21).

The Jews and rabbis most emphatically do NOT agree with Coulter's claim that *ba erev* should be translated "sunset." This is a blatant untruth. Therefore, his assertion that his statement that *ba erev* means "sunset" is "without controversy" is simply amazing, to put it mildly. According to the Jewish rabbis and all scholars, the term *ba erev* simply means "evening," in a general sense. Notice! Here is the proof to back up my statement:

Says the *Gesenius Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament*, of the term *erev*,

"(1) *evening* (m. and fem., I Sam.29:5) . . . *at evening* . . . Dual, *arbayim*, the two evenings; only in the phrase, *ben ha arbayim*, between the two evenings, Exodus 16:12; 30:8, used as marking the space of time during which the paschal lamb was slain, Ex.12:6; Lev.23:5; Num.9:3; and the evening sacrifice was offered, Ex.29:39,

41; Num.28:4 . . ." (p.652).

Gesenius shows that the word *erev* simply means "evening," and makes no mention at all of its meaning "sunset." However, he points out that the expression *ben ha arbayim*, "between the two evenings," is controversial.

". . . according to the opinion of the Karaites and Samaritans . . . the time between sunset and deep twilight. The Pharisees, however (see Josephus Bellum Jud. vi. 9, par30), and the Rabbinites considered the time when the sun began to descend to be called the FIRST EVENING (Arabic 'little evening'; when it begins to draw towards evening); and the SECOND EVENING to be the REAL SUNSET" (p.652, emphasis mine).

Coulter, having asserted that *ba erev* means "sunset," then proceeds to the next step in his explanation: He states that there is a "legitimate, Biblically sound, chronologically defined, Scripturally documented way to prove, beyond any shadow of doubt whatsoever, that *ben ha arbayim* originally meant the time period from sunset to dark" (p.37). He says this "proof" is in Exodus 16. Let's take a look.

The Mystery of the Quail

Coulter quotes Exodus 16:6, "And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, AT EVEN, then shall ye know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt." Coulter inserts in parentheses, after the words "AT EVEN," the following interpolation: "*ba erev*, or sunset-ending that Sabbath on which this message was given" (page 41, *The Christian Passover*). Notice! He defines *ba erev* as "sunset."

Coulter is building a "case." Once he gets the reader to accept this "re-definition" of the expression *ba erev*, he has the reader at his mercy. For he then refers to verse 8 of Exodus 16. Notice, once again: "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, AT EVEN [Heb. *ben ha arbayim*, "between the two evenings"] ye shall eat flesh . . ." (verses 11-12). "And it came to pass, AT EVEN [*ba erev*] the QUAILS came up, and covered the camp" (verse 13).

Coulter says God sent the quail at *ba erev*, which he says is "sunset." Therefore, since the quails came at sunset, and were EATEN at *ben ha arbayim*, "between the two evenings," Coulter reasons that this "proves" that *ben ha arbayim* must refer to the time *after sunset, or dusk!*

The problem with this interpretation is that *ba erev* does not mean "sunset," as a point in time, but means "EVENING"! Therefore, this passage in Exodus 16, which Coulter admits is the "KEY" to the whole question, turns out to be an argument based solely on his own personal definition of *ba erev*. Therefore, Coulter's case falls flat on its face! He has proved nothing.

Says *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*:

"It [the daylight portion of the day] was divided into morning,

noon, and *evening* (Psa.55:17; cf. Dan.6:10)" ("Day," p.214).

This authority adds:

"The festival [Passover] began on the 14th of Abib at EVENING, that is, in the beginning of the 15th day, with the sacrificial meal (Lev.23:5-6). A lamb or kid was slain *between the evenings, that is, TOWARD SUNSET* (Exo.12:6; Deut.16:6; cf. between the 9th and 11th hours . . ." ("Passover," p.705).

In the remainder of this article, we will prove beyond any reasonable doubt that this authority is correct -- and that the Jewish tradition is correct. Rather than be misled by Coulter's definition of "at even," let's see what the Scriptures themselves tell us about this expression. And, afterward, let's see how the Scriptures themselves interpret the expression "between the two evenings."

Letting The Bible Interpret "At Even"

Can the term *ba erev* mean later afternoon? Coulter says it means "sunset." However, if you look in a Bible Concordance such as Strong's, you will find this expression is translated "evening" 49 (7 x7) times in the Old Testament! It is *never* translated "sunset." Let us notice some of the places where it is used, and how it is used.

In Genesis 24, Abraham sends his faithful servant to find a wife for Isaac back in his own original country, so he will not marry a Canaanite woman. When the servant travels back to the land of Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor, he stops. We read:

"And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the *time of the EVENING, even the time that the women go out to draw water*" (Gen.24:11).

What time would women go out to draw water? This would refer to late afternoon, not after sunset when it is getting dark outside. Women would not wait until it is growing dark, or till dusk or twilight, before getting their water from the well. Remember, these were communal wells, and supplied water for the entire community, and would have been used by many women. They would certainly allow themselves plenty of time so that they would not be lined up at the well, in the dark, waiting their turn to draw water.

Let's look at another example. Turn to the story of David and Goliath. Notice:

"And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span . . . And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. . . .

"And the Philistine drew near *morning and evening*, and presented

himself forty days" (I Samuel 17:4-16).

When did Goliath approach the Israelite army, to utter his defiant challenge? Do you think he waited until sunset, or twilight, the period after sunset, to make his boast? Logically, this challenge would have been uttered before the Israelite army mid-morning and mid-afternoon -- long before sunset!

Jeremiah the prophet, however, makes it very plain that the term "evening," or *ba erev* in the Hebrew language, can mean afternoon. Notice his words!

"Prepare ye war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe unto us! for the day goeth away, for the *shadows of the evening are stretched out*" (Jeremiah 6:4).

When are shadows lengthened or stretched out? At high noon, there is no shadow cast. As the sun goes toward the western horizon, the shadows are lengthened out. As the sun nears the horizon, the shadows become their longest. *But after sunset, there are no shadows cast at all -- for it is the sun which casts shadows.* Therefore, here we find proof positive that the term *ba erev* or "evening" refers to the time of late afternoon, *before* sunset!

Now then, with this understanding, notice how this word is used to denote the beginning and ending of a "day."

The Day of Atonement and Passover Week

In Leviticus 23:27 we read: "Also *on the tenth day* of this seventh month there shall be a *day of atonement . . .*" There is no question that the Day of Atonement is the tenth day of Tishri -- nobody argues otherwise. But now notice how God Himself delimits and defines this period of time! Notice how God uses the term "at even" to refer to the *END* of a day rather than the beginning hours!

In Leviticus 23:32 we read, ". . . in the *ninth day of the month AT EVEN*, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath [the Day of Atonement]." The expression "at even" here is obviously used to mean the *ENDING* portion of the ninth day. Thus the Day of Atonement starts after the concluding portion of the ninth of Tishri. It lasts until the concluding portion of the tenth of Tishri. The "evening" of the 9th would be the afternoon, up until sunset; the evening of the 10th would be the afternoon of the 10th, until sunset. A grade school student could see that principle. The Day of Atonement begins at sunset, when the 9th day of Tishri ends, because the Day of Atonement *IS* the "tenth day" of the month!

However, in stating this fact, the Bible says the Day of Atonement, the 10th of Tishri, begins "in the ninth day of the month, *AT EVEN . . .*" Clearly the "AT EVEN" here has to refer to the ending of the ninth day, *NOT ITS BEGINNING!* If this expression referred to the twilight portion of the day, beginning the day right after sunset, then the Day of Atonement would be the 9th day of Tishri!

Another Biblical example of this truth is found in the instructions God gives on when to keep the days of Unleavened Bread. Notice! We read: "In the first month, on the fourteenth

day of the month AT EVEN, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even" (Exodus 12:18). If "at even" here meant the beginning of Nisan 14, then this verse would be saying the 14th of Nisan is the first Day of Unleavened Bread, and we should therefore be observing the Feast from Nisan 14 to Nisan 20 -- not from Nisan 15 to Nisan 21! Obviously, "on the fourteenth . . . AT EVEN," refers to the END of Nisan 14! And the 21st day "at even" refers to the ENDING of the 21st day of the month! Even those who argue that Passover should be observed at the beginning of Nisan 14 admit that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is from Nisan 15 to 21. They admit that the "even" mentioned in Exodus 12:18 refers to the END of the day. Logically, then, the same should be true, in speaking of the Passover (Exodus 12:6)!

Letting the Bible interpret the Bible, then, "on the fourteenth day AT EVEN" plainly means at the END of the fourteenth -- as Exodus 12:18 says. The Bible is consistent. God does not contradict Himself. "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Therefore, the rule of consistency proves that the term "even" or "evening" as used in both Exodus 12:18 and Exodus 12:6 means the same thing in both verses -- that is, the word "even," as used in verse 6, which deals with the slaying of the Passover lambs, also means at the ENDING PART of Nisan 14. However, since the actual expression in Exodus 12:6 is a variation of the term "evening" in Hebrew -- a term which would technically be translated as "between the two evenings," let us see just how this term relates to the term "evening" in the Scriptures.

Evidence from Deuteronomy

When, then, was the Passover to be killed? Before or after sunset? Let's understand!

Notice Deuteronomy 16:4. This verse shows that the Passover is a part of the days of Unleavened Bread, leading right into them. We read: "And there shall be no leavened bread seen with thee in all thy coast seven days; neither shall there any thing of the flesh, which thou sacrificedst *the first day AT EVEN*, remain all night until the morning." Here the 14th of Nisan is called "the first day." That is because it is the late afternoon of the 14th that the Passover was sacrificed, leading right into the First Day of Unleavened Bread that same sunset!

This shows, too, that the "first day" when all leaven was to be put out of the houses of the Israelites was Nisan 14 (Exodus 12:15; compare Deut.16:4 and Exodus 12:18-19). From the end of Nisan 14 they ate unleavened bread until the end of the 21st day of Nisan.

Now, notice verse 6 of this chapter. Here is the solution to the problem! Here Moses is told by God, "But in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover AT EVEN, *at the GOING DOWN of the sun . . .*"

Letting the Bible interpret the Bible, then this expression *ba erev* or "evening" when the Passover was killed, and the expression *ben ha arbayim*, which also denotes the time the Passover lambs were killed, was the same moment or time period described as "*the going down of the sun.*" Literally, the expression "at the going down of the sun" can only mean when the **SUN IS IN THE PROCESS OF DESCENDING IN THE WESTERN SKY!** That is, from the time the sun BEGINS to DESCEND, *at high noon, until SUNSET* -- when it has completed its descent to the point where it is below the western horizon and has disappeared from sight!

Notice! It is the "going down" -- present progressive tense -- showing the action of the sun moving down in the western sky. This period of time must be, has to be, by logical, careful analysis, from the moment after NOON, at the earliest, lasting until the sun disappears behind the horizon, or the actual moment of SUNSET! Once the sun has "set," it is no longer "going down" -- it has, rather, "GONE DOWN"!

The expression "at the going down of the sun" means "as the sun goes down" -- showing it was during the action of the sun moving down in the sky toward the western horizon. In English, this is the present progressive tense. If God had meant to convey the idea that the lambs were to be killed AFTER the sun went down, that is, after sunset, then He would have stated it differently. He would have said, "AFTER the sun goes down," or, "After the sun HAS GONE down." The sun "goes down" *until* it "sets." After it "sets," it has technically "*gone* down." God commanded that the lambs be slain *as the sun sinks* in the western sky -- not after it has already plunged beneath the horizon! The Jews have always faithfully done this, as long as the Passover was sacrificed, throughout their history.

The Septuagint makes it perfectly clear. We read:

"Thou shalt not have power to sacrifice the passover in any of the cities, which the Lord thy God gives thee. But in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose, to have his name called there thou shalt sacrifice the passover *at even AT THE SETTING OF THE SUN . . .*"

The command is plain that the lambs had to be slain ON THE FOURTEENTH of Nisan, in the late afternoon, *BEFORE the sun had set!* But if the lambs were not slain till *AFTER SUNSET* of the 14th, they would have been slain on the FIFTEENTH! That would have been a violation of the commandment! Also, if they were slain at the beginning of the 14th, *after* sunset of the 13th of Nisan, that would not have been during the "going down" or "setting" of the sun.

Could anything be plainer? Even a small child can understand this truth! Why is it that so many cannot grasp these plain and simple Spiritual, Biblical truths?

"The Going Down of the Sun"

This same expression is used elsewhere in the Old Testament. "And when the sun was *going down . . .*" (Gen.15:12). The Hebrew Scriptures state: "AS THE SUN WAS ABOUT TO SET . . ." Clearly, this expression refers to the time *BEFORE* SUNSET, not afterward!

"And afterward Joshua smote them (the Canaanite kings), and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees UNTIL THE EVENING. And it came to pass at the TIME OF THE *GOING DOWN* OF THE SUN, that Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had been hid, and laid great stones in the cave's mouth, which remain unto this very day" (Josh.10:26-27).

The Septuagint also makes this verse clearer. Notice!

"And Joshua slew them and hanged them on five trees; and they hung upon the trees until the evening. And it came to pass *toward the setting of the sun*, Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees, and cast them into the cave into which they had fled for refuge, and rolled stones to the cave, which remain until this day."

This event shows that the expression "going down of the sun" refers to the time right up until sunset or sundown, but not after. The Israelites were commanded, in the law of God, not to allow the dead bodies of criminals to hang on a tree at night. God told Moses, "If a man is guilty of a capital offense and is put to death, and you impale him on a stake, you must not let his corpse remain on the stake overnight, but must BURY HIM *THE SAME DAY*" (Deut.21:22-23). Since each day begins and ends at SUNSET, to bury such a criminal "THE SAME DAY" means he had to be buried *PRIOR TO SUNSET!* Thus, we read again of Joshua who slew the king of Ai. "And the king of Ai was impaled on a stake UNTIL EVENING. AT SUNSET, Joshua had the corpse taken down from the stake . . ." (Joshua 8:29, Tanakh)

This same expression is used in the Bible of the death of king Ahab. As Ahab was fighting the Syrians, he was struck by an arrow from a bowman and was sorely wounded. "And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and DIED AT EVEN: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. And there went out a proclamation throughout the host *about the going down of the sun*, saying, Every man to his city, and every man to his own country" (I Kings 22:35-36).

The Hebrew Tanakh, or "Holy Scriptures," has this verse, "*as the sun was GOING DOWN . . .*"

Again, the reference is to the time just prior to sunset or sundown, as the sun's disk begins to move toward the horizon and set in the west.

God's Covenant with Abraham and the 400 Years

After God brought Abraham out of the land of the Chaldees, He made a covenant with him, promising him that his children would someday be innumerable like the stars of heaven. Then, that afternoon, God had Abraham sacrifice a heifer of three years age, a she goat of three years, and a ram of three years, and a turtledove, and a pigeon. These sacrifices were a *type* of the coming sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. His ministry lasted exactly *three years*, which is the age of the sacrificed heifer, she goat, and ram. After he completed the sacrifice, Abraham drove away the birds that attempted to alight on the carcasses of the sacrifices (Gen.15:1-11). Then we read:

"And *when the sun was going down*, a deep sleep fell over Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward they shall come out with great substance . . .

In the same day the LORD made a *covenant* with Abram, saying,
Unto thy seed have I given this land . . ." (Gen.15:12-18).

Why did a "horror" or a "nightmare" come over Abraham, as the "sun was going down"? This is the same expression we have just been studying. This "horror" came over Abraham at the same time the future Passover lambs would be slain -- at the identical time when Christ our Passover would be slain for us! No wonder Abraham felt this sense of horror -- the innocent "lamb of God" would be slain at the very time -- the Son of God would die upon the tree of crucifixion!

These sacrifices pictured Christ, and they were performed in the late afternoon, as the sun was going down, and descending in the sky. Four hundred years later, on the very same day, God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt!

"Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of four hundred and thirty years, *even the selfsame day* it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations. And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the Passover . . ." (Exo.12:40-43).

What Abraham was permitted to preview, some 400 years earlier, *to the very self-same day*, was the ordinance and sacrifice of the Passover! Therefore, for the typology to be complete, just as these sacrifices he performed were done in the afternoon, at the going down of the sun, before sunset, even so the Passover lambs some 400 years later would be slain in the afternoon of Nisan 14, and eaten on Nisan 15 -- the very night of the Passover, when the LORD "passed over" the children of Israel, and slew the firstborn of the Egyptians -- the very night God freed His people from slavery and bondage by the act of the "Passover"!

A New Look at "Between the Two Evenings"

Since the term *ben ha arbayim*, "between the two evenings," is so controversial, let us see how this expression is used in the Scriptures. According to the Word of God, there were four things which were to be performed at the time period known as "between the two evenings" -- it was the time the Passover was to be killed, the time of the evening sacrifice, the time the lampstand in the Temple was lit, and the time the incense was offered.

Notice, now, how this expression denotes the time of the "evening sacrifice."

In the book of Numbers God gives instructions concerning the *daily sacrifices* which were to be offered before Him. God commanded, "And thou shalt say unto them, This is the offering made by fire unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot DAY BY DAY [Heb. 'IN A DAY'], for a continual burnt offering. The one lamb shalt thou offer IN THE MORNING, and the other lamb shalt thou offer AT EVEN [Heb. *ben ha arbayim*, or *between the two evenings*] . . ." (Num.28:3-4).

Notice carefully! Both these offerings were to be offered DAILY, "day by day," "IN A DAY" -- that is, *WITHIN THE SAME DAY!* The first one is the morning sacrifice, and the second one is the EVENING sacrifice. In order for the evening sacrifice to be offered the SAME DAY as the morning sacrifice, it had to be offered *BEFORE SUNSET!* Otherwise it would have been the NEXT day! What could be clearer? Thus, here we find incontrovertible, inexorable, yet simple proof that "between the evenings" has to refer to the period of time *BEFORE SUNSET*, not after sundown, as the Samaritans taught!

Notice it again! In this plain passage of Scripture, we are told that the DAILY SACRIFICE involves both a morning and an "evening" sacrifice, and the "evening" sacrifice occurs "between the two evenings." Yet this passage says plainly that these two sacrifices were "IN A DAY." The morning sacrifice, which was done first, was in the SAME DAY as the "evening" sacrifice, which was made that same day, "between the two evenings"! Since the day ENDS at sunset, this expression *ben ha arbayim* HAS to refer to late AFTERNOON! If it referred to dusk, or twilight, after sunset, as some claim, then it would be THE NEXT DAY!

How clear it all is, when we simply let the Bible interpret the Bible! It's really NOT complex at all. It's simply a matter of following the Bible and not a man, even if that man happens to be some self-anointed "scholar" or swaggering minister who is "wise in his own eyes" and a "legend in his own mind." The question is, will we follow the INSPIRED WORD OF GOD -- or will we follow the opinions of a man?

Lighting of the Lamp, and the Incense

The lighting of the Lampstand in the Temple, and the incense offering, both also occurred at *ben ha arbayim*, or "between the two evenings." Interestingly, at the time of the morning sacrifice, which was offered at 9 o'clock in the morning, the Temple lamps were "dressed," and incense was also offered, together with the morning sacrifice (Exodus 30:7). Then at the time of the evening sacrifice, we read:

"And when Aaron lighteth [Heb. "setteth up" or "causeth to ascend"] the lamps at even ["between the two evenings"], he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations" (Exo.30:8).

Therefore, the daily sacrifice, the incense offering, and the lamp lighting and trimming, was done every day, throughout the generations of Israel, as long as there was a Sanctuary or a Temple, at the appointed time called "between the two evenings."

Can we establish this as being in the mid-afternoon, or about 3:00 o'clock, by another approach to the subject?

The Appointed "Time of Prayer"

The daily sacrifice was a time of "prayer" at the Temple, and the daily sacrifice and incense were physical types of prayer and sacrifice of ourselves to the service of God. The apostle Paul speaks of prayer as "the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of

our lips giving thanks to his name" (Heb.13:15). David declared, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee *as incense*; and the lifting up of my hands as *the evening sacrifice*" (Psalm 141:2).

In the book of Revelation, we read:

"And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him *much incense*, that he should offer it *with the prayers of all saints* upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the *incense, which came with the prayers of the saints*, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand" (Rev.8:3-4).

Thus it is clear that "incense" and the time of prayer are connected in the Word of God. They are connected with each other, and with the *time* of the "evening sacrifice" (Psalm 141:2). What is this "time"? Is it after sunset, or before? Is it after dark, or during the afternoon? Let us continue.

It was customary for the people of Israel to be at the Temple, and to pray, at the time of the offering of the incense, and the evening sacrifice. We read in the book of Ezra, Ezra the priest declared:

"And *at the evening sacrifice* I rose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God" (Ezra 9:5).

Likewise, Elijah the great prophet of God, at the time of the evening sacrifice, prayed to God, and fire came down from heaven and devoured his offering atop Mount Carmel. The scene was Mount Carmel in northern Israel. The prophets of Baal have been crying out to their god to bring fire down from heaven to consume their sacrifices. But nothing happens. We pick up the story:

"And it came to pass, *when midday was past*, and they prophesied until the time of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any answer, nor any that regarded. . . . And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the *evening sacrifice*, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the *burnt sacrifice*, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God" (I Kings 18:29, 36-39).

Here again, prayer to God is connected with the evening sacrifice -- it is the time of "evening prayer." As David said in the Psalms, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17). Daniel also prayed three times a day to God, at the hours of prayer (Daniel 6:10). One of these times was the time of the evening sacrifice -- as Daniel records:

"Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the *evening oblation*" (Dan.9:21).

This custom continued into New Testament times. Luke records of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptizer:

"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).

When Was the "Time of Prayer"?

Thus the time of incense, the time of the daily sacrifices, morning and evening, was the time of prayer. But when was the "hour of prayer"? Does the Bible tell us elsewhere when the appointed, traditional, customary "time of prayer" at the Temple occurred? Yes, it does! The book of Acts, in the New Testament, gives us the literal, undeniable answer:

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the *hour of prayer, being the NINTH HOUR*" (Acts 3:1).

"And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the *ninth hour I prayed* in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard . . ." (Acts 10:30-31; also 10:1-4).

The ninth hour of the day, Jewish time, would be 3 o'clock in the afternoon, our time. This was therefore the time of evening devotions, the evening sacrifice, the evening incense offering, the time of the lighting of the lamps in the Temple -- and it is the time called "between the two evenings," or *ben ha arbayim!*

The morning time of devotion and prayer, was the time of the morning sacrifice, the morning incense, and morning lamp trimming in the Temple. It was the time Peter and the disciples went to the Temple, to worship, on the Day of Pentecost, in 30 A.D. At that time of prayer, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and lighted on the disciples, like a flame of fire, and enabled them to speak in many different languages, miraculously (Acts 2:1-13). Peter said to the assembled multitude, worshipping at the Temple:

"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but *the third hour of the day*" (Acts 2:14-15).

What is the real significance, then, of these times of prayer -- 9 o'clock in the morning and 3 o'clock in the afternoon? We read in the gospel of Mark:

"And it was the *third hour* [9:00 AM], and they crucified him

. . . . And at the *ninth hour* Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? . . . And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Mark 15:25, 34-38).

Jesus Christ was nailed to the stake, or tree, of crucifixion, at 9 o'clock in the morning, where He remained all day, suffering, until 3 o'clock in the afternoon, when He died. Thus He was nailed to the stake as the "morning sacrifice," and died at the same time as the "evening sacrifices" were normally killed. He died at the very time of *ben ha arbayim*, or "between the two evenings." But there is even more to the story. Jesus Christ died at the very time of the Passover sacrifices in Jerusalem, which also were offered at *ben ha arbayim* -- in the afternoon, before sunset!

During the Time of Christ -- an Eye-Witness Speaks

During the time of Christ, the Jews were slaying their Passover lambs at the Temple of God -- about 250,000 lambs at each Passover celebration during the first century. We are not told precisely how so many lambs were killed during the afternoon of Nisan 14, but undoubtedly hundreds of priests were conscripted into service, so that the logistics of the problem could be met. Additional areas on the Temple Mount, including the sacred area of the Mount of Olives, where the red heifer sacrifice was performed, may also have been drafted into service to accomplish the task. However it occurred, Josephus the Jewish historian who lived during the first century, relates:

"So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, *from the ninth hour to the eleventh*, but so that a company not less than ten belong to every sacrifice . . . and many of us are twenty in a company, found this number of sacrifices was two hundred and fifty six thousand five hundred: which, upon the allowance of no more than ten that feast together, amounts to two million seven hundred thousand and two hundred persons that were pure and holy" (*Wars of the Jews*, Book VI, 9:3).

Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, used Jewish time reckoning, so when he says the lambs were killed from the "ninth to the eleventh" hour, he means from about 3 o'clock in the afternoon until about 5 o'clock.

Jesus Christ -- Perfect Passover Lamb, Perfect Proof!

Jesus Christ was killed at 3:00 PM in the afternoon of Nisan 14, according to Scripture. At the ninth hour, when the Jews began killing their Passover lambs, Jesus himself hung on the stake.

Matthew's gospel states, "Now from the *sixth hour* [noon] there was darkness over all the land until the *ninth hour* [3:00 PM]. And about the *ninth hour* Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias [Elijah]. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and

put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost" (Matt.27:45-50).

Jesus Christ, Yeshua, the Saviour and Messiah, God's Anointed One, the "Lamb of God" (John 1:36), IS God's suffering servant who gave His life for the sins of the world, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, who wrote:

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are HEALED.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a LAMB to the slaughter [the Passover lamb!], and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was CUT OFF from the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

"And he made his grave with the wicked [the two robbers slain with him], and with the rich in his death [he was given Joseph of Arimathea's tomb]; because he hath done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make HIS SOUL [LIFE] AN OFFERING FOR SIN, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days [be resurrected!], and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand" (Isaiah 53:4-10).

As Paul put it plainly: "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (I Cor.5:7-8). Jesus Christ fulfilled the symbolism of the ancient Passover lambs *perfectly*. He was God's "lamb without blemish."

The Perfect Proof

Certainly Christ the Passover Lamb had to be slain at the proper time! Those who claim that the Passover is to be observed at the BEGINNING of Nisan 14, and admit that the lambs were slain in the afternoon of Nisan 14, have a very serious problem. According to their chronology, Jesus was therefore not slain until some twenty or twenty four hours LATER than the time they claim the Passover is to be observed!

On the other hand, those who claim that the Passover lambs were slain after sunset of Nisan 13, during the dusk or twilight of the beginning of Nisan 14, have an even greater problem. According to their reckoning, Christ died about 20 hours AFTER the Passover lambs were to be slain, at the beginning of Nisan 14 -- thus invalidating and compromising His claim to being our Messiah! By their reckoning, His death was at the *wrong time*, and did not therefore perfectly fulfill the Passover typology!

If that were the case, then Christ could not truly have been our Saviour, God's Passover Lamb -- He would be a fake, a fraud, an impostor, a counterfeit!

But thank God, Christ was the PERFECT fulfillment of the Passover. Therefore, He was slain at the VERY MOMENT the Passover lambs were being slain at the Temple of God! He was slain at the VERY TIME God commanded for the Passover to be killed -- "between the two evenings"!

Even as these sacrificial lambs were being slaughtered at the Temple, in 30 A.D., God's own True Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, also known as Yeshua Ha Mashiach ("Yeshua the Messiah"), was being slain for all of us who accept His shed blood for the forgiveness of our sins (II Cor.5:21; I Cor.5:7-8). Thus Jesus Christ fulfilled the TYPE of the Passover lambs PERFECTLY -- RIGHT ON TIME, exactly on schedule!

If the lambs were sacrificed the previous evening, as some claim, then Jesus missed the correct time by twenty hours -- and did not fulfill the type of the Passover perfectly! If that were true, then He could not be our SAVIOUR! He would be an impostor! But Jesus fulfilled EVERY Scripture that prophesied of His coming TO THE MOST INFINITE DETAIL, in every respect -- *PERFECTLY in all points!*

Now, let's look at this question from the reverse angle. We know Christ was our Passover lamb (I Cor.5:7). Therefore, we know that He must have died at the right time, when the Passover was to be killed. The fact that the gospels plainly show that Jesus was killed at precisely 3:00 PM on the afternoon of Nisan 14, then, *PROVES* that the original Passover lambs were to be killed at that same time! This is further proof, then, that *ben ha arbayim* has to mean the *late afternoon!*

Here, then, is the *ultimate proof* -- the example of Jesus Christ Himself, our Passover lamb! HE was slain at 3:00 PM in the afternoon; *He HAD to fulfill the commandment to be slain "between the two evenings" (Exodus 12:6). Therefore, ben ha arbayim, "between the two evenings," MUST refer to a time which includes 3:00 PM in the afternoon!*

What More Proof Do We Need?

If the Pharisees were wrong in sacrificing the Passover in the late afternoon, then Jesus would have been wrong to say they sit in Moses' seat and that we are to follow their interpretation of the Law (Matt.23:1-3). If they were wrong in the time they sacrificed and observed the Passover, then Jesus would have been derelict in His duty as the Son of God and the One "greater than Moses" for never chiding or faulting them for such a heinous error of the greatest magnitude.

If the Pharisees were wrong, then the apostle Paul, who said he was a Pharisee, and that he kept the law of God "blamelessly" as a Pharisee (Phi.3:5-6), would have been a *liar*. But both Jesus, and Paul, endorse the teachings of the Jews, and the Pharisees, as the correct teachings concerning the time of killing the Passover, and observing the Passover. They never faulted the Pharisees on this teaching.

To know and understand the truth of God is a wonderful blessing. To *obey* God is even better! The times of ignorance God has winked at, but now commands all who learn the truth

to *repent* of error, and to correct their mistakes.

It may not seem to men to be a very important thing as to when they observe Passover, or how they keep it. But it is important in the sight of God. God Himself sets the parameters of true worship -- not men, ministers, priests, or other human beings. Will we obey God in this matter? Or will we follow men? Will we serve God? Or follow Baal?

I know that many have gone through traumatic changes, in recent years, concerning church doctrines, teachings, and fellowship. Some don't want to see any more "changes" for a long time -- even if they happen to be *wrong!* But isn't the truth of God worth more than all the accolades of men? Isn't fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, by observing His Passover at the correct time -- which He appointed "for ever" (Exo.12:14-16), and He does not change (Mal.3:6) -- worth far more than fellowship with erring, sinning, human groups and churches which are too traumatized or too intransigent, to face this truth honestly?

Thank God for His wonderful, inexpressible, glorious Truth!