

Was the “Last Supper” Really the Passover?

Was the “Last Supper” really the “Passover”? How could that be since Jesus died that year as our Passover Lamb, at the very time the Passover was commanded to be killed?

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I recently received this question from a lady about the Passover. She wrote:

“I was reading ‘Seven Proofs the “Last Supper” was not the Passover’. In Matt. 26:17-21 it states. ‘Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread (Passover Week), the disciples came to Jesus and said to Him, where do You wish us to prepare for You to eat the Passover supper? He said, Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, The Master says: My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples. And accordingly the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they made ready the Passover supper. When it was evening, He was reclining at table with the twelve disciples. And as they were eating, He said, Solemnly I say to you, one of you will betray Me! . . .’

“The disciples asked Jesus where He wanted the Passover Supper and Jesus told them where. After the meal, they went to Gethsemane – and it was there Jesus was taken and later crucified.

“To me, the Last Supper was the Passover Supper. Especially since Jesus told the disciples where they would have the Passover supper and with whom He would have it, (with the disciples).

“Will you comment on these verses (from Amp. Bible) that I’ve given you?”

The “Preparation” of the Passover

Let’s look at the verse in Matt.26:17 and Luke22:8 again. What does it really say? Jesus sent Peter and John telling them, “Go and prepare *the Passover* for us, that we may eat.” In context, then, He is telling them to “*Prepare* for the coming Passover Feast” – all the seven days of "Passover" (verse 1). They had to prepare – that is, obtain “unleavened bread,” and all the things necessary for observing the Passover for seven days. That is why this day was called a day of preparation.’ Jesus was telling His disciples to ‘PREPARE’ for the up-coming Passover – that is, to GET READY and make preparations. He did not say the meal that very night would be the Passover! Luke plainly calls it “supper” – not “Passover” – as we shall see!

IF this very evening was the time they were going to eat the Passover, and Jesus at this very late moment told them to “go and prepare,” wasn't He asking them to do the well-nigh impossible? Would it not have been a little late to think about beginning preparations? What about the lamb? What about taking the lamb to the Temple, having it properly approved, then killed, and roasted? No way could this have occurred as the sun set at the start of Nisan 14!

Actually, Nisan 14, when the Passover lambs are killed, in the afternoon, between 3 and 6 PM, is the final ‘preparation day’ for the Passover Festival! The ‘preparation days’ begin on Nisan 10, when the lambs are selected (Exodus 12:3). It was actually on the morning of Nisan 13 when Jesus told His disciples to ‘go and prepare the Passover.’

How do we know this?

The answer is simple: After this final supper, Jesus was seized by the Pharisees and Sadducees, interrogated that night, condemned by the Sanhedrin the following morning (Matt.27:1-2), and delivered to Pilate for judgment that same morning (verse 2). Pilate then sent Him to Herod (Luke 23:1-12). This had to be the daylight portion of Nisan 13. Herod then sent Jesus back to Pilate, and we read in the book of John:

“When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.

“And it was THE PREPARATION OF THE PASSOVER, and about the *sixth hour*: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!” (John 19:13-14).

Now when was the “sixth hour”? In his gospel, John always used JEWISH TIME reckoning (see John 4:1-6). The “sixth hour” meant TWELVE NOON! Jesus said, “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” (John 11:9). Daylight begins around 6 AM in the morning and ends around 6 PM in the evening. But in Jewish time reckoning, the first hour of daylight is hour “one,” and therefore the “sixth hour” would be TWELVE NOON, our time – the *middle of the day*! That is when Pilate finally condemned Christ to be crucified!

This had to be Nisan 13, the middle of the day. Then Jesus was whipped, scourged, and delivered to prison, and was led out to be crucified the next morning, and was nailed to the stake at the “third hour” of the day – NINE A.M., in the morning, our modern time (see Mark 15:20, 23-25). This could not have been the same day Pilate condemned Christ to death, because that sentencing occurred at twelve noon, the middle of the day, and Jesus was nailed to the stake at 9:00 A.M., in the morning of the day He was crucified! Otherwise, we would have the strange anomaly of Christ being crucified three hours *before* He was judged and condemned!

The preparation period for the Passover, then, was from Nisan 10 through the 14th, when the lambs were killed in the afternoon – at the very time Jesus Himself, our Passover Lamb, died on the cross (I Cor.5:7). Killing the lamb was just *the final part* of

the preparation needed to properly observe the Passover Feast.

During the preparation period, all leaven had to be put out of the homes of the people, and gotten rid of, and preparations had to be made for the obtaining of unleavened bread, wine, groceries, rooms had to be cleaned and or rented, and other preparations for the Passover dinner on Nisan 15, and the rest of Passover week, had to be made.

Thus the days from Nisan 10 to the 14th of Nisan was a very busy, sometimes hectic, time of "preparation." Finally, on the afternoon of the 14th, the lambs, themselves, had to be taken to the Temple, and inspected by the priests to be sure they were "kosher," and had no blemishes, and then had to be killed during the afternoon of Nisan 14, between roughly 3 and 5 o'clock, as Josephus the Jewish historian states.

When the Lambs Were Killed

Josephus, a leading Pharisee and Jewish general of the first century, and the greatest Jewish historian of ancient times, wrote concerning this subject. In his book *Wars of the Jews*, he declared: "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 . . ." (*Wars*, Bk.VI, ix, 3).

Edersheim describes the preparations of the Passover in his book *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* --

"The special preparations for the Passover commenced on the evening of the 13th of Nisan, with which, according to Jewish reckoning, the 14th began, the day being computed from evening to evening. Then the head of the house was to search with a lighted candle all places where leaven was usually kept, and to put what of it he found in the house in a safe place, whence no portion could be carried away by accident. Before doing this, he prayed: 'Blessed art thou, YHVH, our God, King of the Universe, who hast sanctified us by Thy commandments, and commanded us to remove the leaven.' And after it he said: 'All the leaven that is in my possession, that which I have seen and that which I have not seen, be it null, be it accounted as the dust of the earth.' The search itself was to be accomplished in perfect silence and with a lighted candle. To this search the apostle may have referred in the admonition to 'purge out the old leaven' (I Cor. 5:7)" (p.172).

Edersheim continues about events during the daylight portion of the "preparation day" of Nisan 14:

"Early on the forenoon of the 14th of Nisan the feast of the Passover may be said to have begun. In Galilee, no work was done all that day; in Judaea it was continued till mid-day; the rule, however, being that no new work was to be commenced, though that which was in hand might be carried on. . . . The strictest opinion fixes ten o'clock as the latest hour when leaven might be eaten, the more lax eleven. From that hour till twelve o'clock it was required to abstain from leaven, while at twelve it was to be solemnly destroyed, either by burning, immersing it in water, or scattering it to the winds."

Edersheim points out that the regular “evening sacrifice,” of the Passover day, was slain an hour earlier than on other days – at 1:30 in afternoon. Customarily, on most days it was slain at 2:30 P.M. and offered at 3:30, but on the eve of Passover it was killed an hour earlier. (If Nisan 14 fell on a Friday, then it was killed two hours earlier, or at 12:30 in the afternoon, so as to prevent any breach of the Sabbath day, so that all Passover sacrifices would be accomplished before sunset and the beginning of the weekly Sabbath.)

The Passover lambs had to be slain also, as part of the “preparation” for the Passover. They had to be slain at the Temple or sanctified areas. Edersheim describes the scene in this way:

“It was done on this wise: -- The first of the three festive divisions, with their Paschal lambs, was admitted within the Court of the Priests. Each division must consist of not less than thirty persons (3 x 10, the symbolic number of the Divine and of completeness). Immediately the massive gates were closed behind them. The priest drew a threefold blast from their silver trumpets when the Passover was slain. Altogether the scene was most impressive. All along the Court up to the altar of burnt-offering priests stood in two rows, the one holding golden, the other silver bowls. In these the blood of the Paschal lambs, which each Israelite slew for himself (as representative of his company at the Paschal Supper), was caught up by a priest, who handed it to his colleague, receiving back an empty bowl, and so the bowls with the blood were passed up to the priest at the altar, who jerked it in one jet at the base of the altar. While this was going on, a most solemn hymn of praise was raised, the Levites leading in song, and the offerers either repeating after them or merely responding . . .” (p.175).

“If the ‘Hallel’ had been finished before the service of one division was completed, it was repeated a second and, if needful, even a third time. . . . Next, the sacrifices were hung up on hooks along the Court, or laid on staves which rested on the shoulders of two men (on Sabbaths they were not laid on staves), then flayed, the entrails taken out and cleansed, and the inside fat separated, put in a dish, salted, and placed on the fire of the altar of burnt-offering. This completed the sacrifice. The first division of offerers being dismissed, the second entered, and finally the third, the service being in each case conducted in precisely the same manner. Then the whole service concluded by burning the incense and trimming the lamps for the night” (p.177).

Thus the Passover preparation day of the 14th of Nisan was filled with activity, as the people got ready for the Passover seder/dinner at the beginning of Nisan 15.

The “Last Supper”

The disciples asked Jesus about preparing for the Passover. He told them what to do, and they did it. The Passover was still several days away – it took time to prepare. It could not have been that very evening, because the Passover lambs must be slaughtered on the afternoon of the 14th of Abib, then roasted several hours, and then eaten on the 15th of Abib, the beginning of the “Feast” of Passover/Unleavened Bread.

So that evening, after the disciples did as He said, they all sat down at a final farewell type of meal, just a regular supper but superimposed with meaning because it would be their last one together. It was not and could not have been the Passover itself, because that year Jesus WAS the sacrificed Passover lamb – and He was killed at the very time the Passover lambs were being slain. Therefore, this meal was BEFORE the Passover (John 13:1). It was not the Passover. How could He both eat it and BE it the same year? He was already dead and buried when the Jews began eating the Passover lambs.

The lady in her letter quoted, “When it was evening, He was reclining at table with the twelve disciples. And as they were eating, He said, “Solemnly I say to you, one of you will betray Me!” This occurred later that same day, at evening, but it does not say it was the Passover! This was that same evening, but does NOT mention the Passover – just that they were “eating.” There is no mention of the requirements for the Passover – i.e. lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread (see Exodus 12).

If the Passover was that very night, then surely He would have advised them *much sooner* to begin preparations for it! The common interpretation of this passage makes Jesus out to be a disorganized, confused individual who asked His disciples to "prepare" for the Feast, but waited till the *very last minute* to do so! If we assume the traditional Passover was that very night, then they had to kill and roast the lamb, themselves, that very night, without taking it to the Temple for the priests to approve of it (the Temple was closed at night). This would have taken *hours*.

The whole idea is preposterous nonsense!

No, the fact is Jesus told His disciples to prepare DAYS in advance -- the actual day was Monday, Nisan 12. That night, Nisan 13, He held the "last supper." Later that night, He was arrested, and arrayed before Pilate and Herod the next morning, and finally condemned by Pilate at 12 o'clock NOON on Nisan 13. And He was finally crucified at 9 o'clock in the morning, of Nisan 14 – the very day the Jews killed their Passover lambs!

The ‘Last Supper’ therefore has NOTHING WHATSOEVER to do with the Passover dinner itself! Those churches and ministers who confuse the two things are totally and sadly mistaken. They should know better!

Now if Jesus was indeed setting us an example to take the “Passover” that very night, then it should be obvious that He and the disciples did not eat until about 10-12 P.M.! The sun would have set around 6:00 P.M., then they would have gone into Jerusalem to find the man, and followed him to his house, then they had to make the room ready and prepare for the “Passover.” The lamb had to be roasted (if this was a true "Passover"), and certainly all these preparations would have taken from 7:00 P.M. until about 11:00 P.M. or even later. If this is what modern churches believe to be the Passover, then WHY don't they keep it about 11:00 P.M.?

The whole idea reeks of folly and foolishness!

What The “Lord’s Supper” Really Was!

But what, then, was this special meal, or dinner, they were to have that very night? Could it also have been classified or considered as "part of the Passover"? It was certainly a very special occasion. But it occurred BEFORE Passover Week! It occurred on one of the prior "preparation" days. It was a meal that concluded the final instructions Jesus had to give His disciples, before His impending death. It was certainly very special. But *it was not the “Passover”!*

Rather, as David Stern writes in a footnote of the *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, this was a kind of banquet celebrating the conclusion of a period of study and instruction, after completing a course of special education. They had been with Jesus three years. They had completed a course of religious instruction, to prepare them to become apostles. And, this was a final meal celebrating their accomplishment, and preparing them for the future, when He would no longer be literally among them on the earth.

Says David Stern:

“However, Joseph Shulam has suggested that it may have been not the *Seder* but a *se’udat-mitzvah* the ‘celebratory banquet accompanying performance of a commandment’ such as a wedding or *b’rit-milah*.’

“Here is the background for his argument. When a rabbi and his students finish studying a tractate of the Talmud, they celebrate with a *se’udat-mitzvah* (also called a *se’udat-siyum*, ‘banquet of completion,’ i.e., graduation)” (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, page 77).

According to Joseph Shulam, “since Yeshua knew he was to die, he may have regarded it as appropriate to complete his disciples earthly ‘course of study’ with a banquet” (*ibid.*). Says David Stern, “This solution would also resolve the perceived conflict between Yochanan [the gospel of John] and the Synoptic Gospels over the timing of the Last Supper” (*ibid.*).

We must not assume, or jump to conclusions, that this dinner was the Passover, without real solid evidence. The whole picture puzzle must fit together, with each piece fitting in perfectly, without “forcing” them, to get the right picture!

The apostle John records this event: “Now *before the Feast of the Passover*, when Jesus knew that HIS HOUR HAD COME that He should depart from this world, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And *supper being served* [“ended” is a poor translation; my Bible margin says, “*during supper*”], the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus . . . *rose from SUPPER . . .*” (John 13:1-4).

Notice! This was “*before the Feast of the Passover*”! Therefore it could not have been the traditional, normal *Passover*! Supper was still being served when Jesus arose to wash the disciples’ feet. John nowhere calls this meal a “Passover.” He simply

calls it “supper.”

The Word “Artos”

What about the use of the word “artos” for “bread” at the last supper? What kind of bread was this? The word itself simply means “bread,” or even “food.” It is a generic word, and generally refers to regular (leavened) bread. It is used also in Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4 in reference to bread, generally speaking – or “food.”

Says *Thayer’s Lexicon*, “bread; food composed of flour mixed with water and baked.” Also, “food of any kind.” “A small loaf or cake,” says *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Says *Vine’s*, “The loaf at the Lord’s Supper.” Also, “bread of any kind” (Matt.16:11). (It is number 740 in Strong’s Concordance).

The word for “unleavened” bread, on the other hand, such as matzos, would be “azumos.” (#106 in Strong’s Concordance.) It means, “unfermented, free from leaven” (*Thayer’s Lexicon*). Says *Vine’s*, “denotes ‘unleavened bread,’ i.e. without any process of fermentation.” “With the article it signifies the feast of unleavened bread.” (See article “Bread,” page 77, Greek section).

Therefore, the bread at the Last Supper, *artos*, would have been regular leavened “bread,” which in this case Jesus dipped in a sop or sauce. This would be normal. If it had been “unleavened bread,” why didn’t Luke call it “unleavened bread” – that is, *azumos*! He didn’t because it wasn’t unleavened bread. The Jews would not begin eating “unleavened bread” until the night of Nisan 14, beginning of Nisan 15, when the FEAST of ‘Unleavened Bread’ began!

David Stern calls it “matzah” unfortunately, in *The Jewish New Testament*, simply because he *assumes* it was unleavened, because he *assumes* the last supper likely was the Passover, and in that case the bread would have to have been unleavened – like matzah. So he did not simply translate the word as it should be, “bread,” but rendered his own interpretation on the passage, and used the word matzah, which is unleavened bread. His usage is an interpretation, not a “translation.”

At this “supper” they ate regular “bread,” because the Feast had not yet begun (verse 1). The Greek word for “bread” used for this evening’s bread is *artos* and normally refers to leavened bread unless qualified otherwise with a modifier. The Greek word for *unleavened bread* is *AZUMOS*. The bread Jesus and the disciples ate this evening was the kind that one would “dip” into a gravy, as a “sop.” Jesus told John, when he asked Him who would betray Him, “It is he to whom I shall give a *piece of bread* when I have *dipped* it” (John 13:26). “And having *dipped the bread*, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now *after the piece of bread*, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, What you do, do quickly” (verse 27).

The next verse explains that no one knew why Jesus said this to Judas. “For some

thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, ‘Buy those things *we need for the Feast,*’ or that he should give something to the poor” (verses 28-29).

Now if this was the PASSOVER DINNER, doesn't it seem strange that the disciples thought Jesus was *sending Judas away from the Passover, right in the middle of it, to BUY GROCERIES FOR THE FEAST?*

That makes no sense at all!

If this was the Passover, then the markets would have most likely been closed, and certainly no shopping would be allowed to interrupt the very Passover dinner itself! The very fact that the disciples had such a thought in their minds indicates plainly that they knew this meal itself was not the Passover, but indeed was a very special meal eaten together as a "love banquet."

Now notice Luke 22:14: “And when the *hour had come*, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.” This compares with John 13:1: “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew *His hour had come* that He should depart from this world to the Father . . .” In neither passage does it say that the “hour” of the Passover had come! Rather, it was the “hour of His betrayal” that had come. Jesus knew that this night would be His last with His disciples, until after His forthcoming death and resurrection.

A “Forbidden” Desire

Now we come to the most enigmatic, perplexing verse of all. This is the verse which is the most misunderstood verse in all the New Testament, I believe. Notice! We have been studying this subject in context, bringing together all the related Scriptures. Now we come to Luke 22, verses 15-16. Here Jesus said to the disciples:

“With *fervent desire* I have desired to eat *this Passover* with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

Let’s take a spiritual microscope to this verse, and analyze it very carefully. Let’s notice what it *does* say as well as what it *does not* say.

What, then, did Jesus mean when He said, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat *this Passover* with you before I suffer”? The word for “desire” in this verse is an unusual word, *epithumia* in the Greek, and means “a longing, especially for that which is *forbidden*” (see *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, #1939). The word for “desire” in this verse is very important to understanding the context of Jesus’ words. Says *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, “desire, craving, longing,” “specifically for what is *forbidden*.” This is the “strongest expression of intense desire,” whether good or bad, says the Jamieson, Fausset, Brown *Critical-Experimental Commentary*.

In other words, Jesus here very likely was saying He desired to eat the normal, traditional Passover with His disciples, which would be held two *evenings* from then [i.e. the Last Supper was on the beginning of the 13th and the Passover seder would be at the

beginning of Nisan 15], but He knows that such a thing will be *impossible* – that it is *forbidden* – that for Him to fulfill God's PLAN He must be dead and in the grave that evening, and therefore it is *forbidden* and *impossible* for Him to eat that Passover seder meal with them, with all its special meanings and integral significance! HE COULD NOT BOTH “EAT” THE PASSOVER AND “BE” THE PASSOVER AT THE SAME TIME!!!

Suppose a man was talking to a friend in the world, and told him a few days before Thanksgiving, "With desire I have desired to celebrate *this Thanksgiving* with you before I leave, but unfortunately I have to take a long trip and won't be here for the holiday. But I won't be able to keep Thanksgiving with you this year."

In other words, it is nothing more than *pure assumption* on the part of some ministers and teachers to conclude that this verse “proves” Jesus was celebrating the Passover that very evening! This verse proves nothing of the kind – in fact, it says, in reality, that it would be IMPOSSIBLE – “FORBIDDEN” – for Christ to “eat” the Passover that year with His disciples! His statement proves that the last supper was NOT and could NOT be the “Passover” at all! The truth is the very opposite, when we understand the context!

Is It Really “Passover”?

One person asked me, “Why did Christ call the last supper ‘Passover’?” “Is that a mistranslation”? But wait. As I have written in this article, did Christ *really* call the last supper ‘Passover’? No He did not. When He sat down with them, at the supper, and said, “I have desired to eat *this Passover* with you,” He was not referring to that very meal, but the upcoming Passover which would be celebrated by all the Jews at the end of Nisan 14, beginning of the 15th, as they did all throughout history.

People get confused over His use of the word “this” and ASSUME He was talking about that very meal. But there is too much evidence that such could not possibly be the case. It was the wrong time. No lamb is mentioned, nor were they slain on the 13th anyway, but the afternoon of the 14th.

In other words, Jesus here was saying He really desired to eat the normal, traditional Passover with His disciples, which would be held on the *end of Nisan 14, beginning of Nisan 15*, but He knows that such a thing will be *impossible* – that it is *forbidden* – that for Him to fulfill God's PLAN He must be dead and in the grave that evening, and therefore it is *forbidden* and *impossible* for Him to eat that upcoming Passover meal with them, with all its special meanings and integral significance! – Rather, He would BECOME our “Passover lamb” and be sacrificed Himself, for us! Otherwise, God’s plan could not be completed, and we would not have our opportunity for salvation, or all mankind, for God made “Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God through Him” (II Cor.5:21).

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conclude that this verse proves Jesus was celebrating the Passover that very evening! This verse proves nothing of the kind -- in fact, it implies the very opposite, when we understand the context!

Alfred Edersheim in his excellent book *The Temple: Its Ministry and Service*, in his chapter on "The Paschal Feast and the Lord's Supper," makes an excellent comment showing why this final meal Jesus held with His disciples *could not possibly be the "Passover,"* if it were held a day or more prior to the actual Passover.

Alfred Edersheim was born in 1825 and died in 1889. He was born to Jewish parents in Vienna and was converted to Christianity as a young man. He studied theology in Edinburgh and Berlin and was one of the leading authorities of his time regarding the doctrines and practices of Judaism in the centuries preceding and during the time of Christ and the early Christian era.

Edersheim states in blunt and incontrovertible terms:

"At the outset we may dismiss, as unworthy of serious discussion, the theory, either that our Lord had observed the Paschal Supper at another than the regular time for it [Nisan 15], or that St. John meant to intimate that He had partaken of it on the 13th instead of the 14th of Nisan. **To such violent hypotheses, which are wholly uncalled for, there is this one conclusive answer, that, except on the evening [latter part] of the 14th of Nisan, NO PASCHAL LAMB COULD HAVE BEEN OFFERED IN THE TEMPLE, AND THEREFORE NO PASCHAL SUPPER CELEBRATED IN JERUSALEM"** (P.193).

This historic point, offered by Edersheim, proves that *if* this last supper were the "Passover," then it had to occur at the end of Nisan 14, beginning of Nisan 15. Since we have already proved that Jesus was slain at the time of the Passover lambs, prior to the Holy Day of Nisan 15, then plain and simply, this final meal *could not constitute the true historic Passover!*

The Spirit of Error

Many churches today have it all wrong. And they will be judged by Almighty God and Jesus Christ for their careless and false teaching on this subject! Beware and be warned of false teachers who will strive to distract you, lure you with their arguments, and puffed up "authority," and attempt to make "merchandise" of you! This is far too serious a matter to take lightly, or off-handedly, or to trust some clerical figure with your salvation! Beware lest any man "steal your crown" and cause you to lose out on God's gift of salvation which He offers to those who OBEY Him and keep His commandments (Matt.19:17; 5:19-20). It is time to stop assuming and "contend earnestly" for the faith once delivered to the saints! (Jude 3). For more information on this subject, write for our free articles on: "Jesus' Last Week," "The New Testament Passover," "A New Look at the Passover," "When Should the Passover be Observed?," "The Plot Against the Passover," "What Do You Mean, 'The Sixth Hour'?", and our four free Bible Correspondence Course lessons on the Passover.