

NEWS WATCH FOR the CHURCH OF GOD

News in the world and church — to give warning and help for God's people — by Ron Weinland

March/April 1998

SPECIAL EDITION

The subject of Passover will be addressed in this edition. Some brethren have become confused about the correct timing of Passover. The controversy over the 14th and 15th has been growing in the past two years.

The following article will define terms that have been misunderstood or misapplied. Once you understand these Bible interpretations and the timing of these events, the entire story of Passover will become more inspiring and exciting. The story flow of these events will not be addressed in this edition. Instead, we will offer you the taped series on "The Timing of Passover," which will cover the story in depth.

Much of the church does not understand what is covered in this article and therefore does not receive the full benefit of Passover.

PASSOVER

The timing of events surrounding Passover has periodically been a controversy within the Church of God. A single word in English Bible's has led to most misunderstanding and confusion. Translating more than one Greek or Hebrew word into a single English word is quite common. Many of you are familiar with how this occurs with words like heaven, hell, or love. Usually with a little digging, we can find the different meanings. If we were to look up the word *hell*, we would find it comes from three different Greek words: *hades*, *gehenna*, and *tartaroo*.

Our problem isn't so easily solved in the Passover controversy. The word *even* or *evening* is the focal point for confusion on this subject. The Hebrew in this case becomes more difficult than usual. Generally we could look up *even* or *evening* in our trusty Strong's Concordance. We would find various Hebrew words translated into this one English word.

The Hebrew word, *ereb* (#6153), found in Strong's is often misunderstood. Most people using Strong's would think the same Hebrew word was being used each time they found #6153. That's the problem! It isn't! It has different forms and structure in Hebrew. This paper will clarify those words.

The fact that there are different forms of the same Hebrew word which give vastly different meanings is only one problem. Even when people are aware of the different words, there is often much personal interpretation as to their meaning. Some hold to a particular belief and try to force their own definition into a specific word. We should, however, let the Bible interpret itself.

This paper will not focus on analysis of various arguments and interpretations. It will focus instead on Biblical interpretations. As we see the truth made plain by God's own word, we will more easily recognize why others have stumbled. We need to clear our minds of preconceived ideas and examine honestly and openly some of the words and scriptures that will lead to clarifying the timing of events surrounding the Passover.

SUNDOWN (*ereb*)

The best place to begin is at the beginning. In Genesis, God begins to show man how to divide time. God's ways are simple, but the intellectualism of man has confounded that simplicity. "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening (*ereb*) and the morning were the first day" (Gen. 1:5).

God makes plain what He wants to be obvious and simple for us. He said the light was day and the darkness was night. Then He introduced a direct but simple division of time for a complete day. God said, "And the evening (*ereb*) and the morning were the first day." This expression may seem a little strange when used in English, because we don't think of the English words for evening and morning as being a complete day. But we must let God define time for us. As we will come to see, He becomes even more specific when He defines Holy time.

What divides these two periods of time in Gen. 1:5? The sun does! The two periods of time between day and night occur when the sun is down and when the sun begins to rise. When the sun is up it is day. As long as light emanates from the sun, it is day. When the sun is down it is night or in this case, *ereb*. When the sun goes through one complete cycle, of being down and up, we have a complete day. The evening (*ereb*) and the

morning were the first day. We don't have to concern ourselves with nebulous periods of time that are ever changing when light is still in the sky after the sun has gone down. The sun, the source of light, is the dividing factor between the light of day and *ereb*, when the sun is down.

The Hebrew word *ereb* simply means the sun is down. *Ereb* can be any point of time during this period, when the sun is down, or it can be the whole time. This is much like using the English word *night*. *Night* can be at the beginning of a period of darkness, or at some point during that time, as long as it's dark or the sun is down. Like *night*, you couldn't say it was *ereb* at any point while the sun was still up.

UNTIL & AFTER

When we understand *ereb* as any period when the sun is down, we can proceed to other combinations used in Hebrew. First, let's look at *awd ereb*, which simply means "until" *ereb* or until sundown. This is a period of time that leads up to even, when the sun is down.

"The soul which hath touched any such shall be unclean until even (*awd ereb*), and shall not eat of the holy things, unless he wash his flesh with water. And when the sun is down, he shall be clean, and shall afterward eat of the holy things; because it is his food" (Lev. 22:6-7). This scripture, like Genesis, defines *ereb*, because verse 7 makes it clear the condition of being clean or unclean changes once the sun is down. A person was considered unclean until even (*awd ereb*). They were unclean during the day, as long as the sun was shining, but not until the sun was down (*awd ereb*) were they clean. This is describing a very specific division of time, which follows the Genesis timing for passage from one day into another. It wasn't until a new day began that this person could be considered clean. God uses very clear language to make His instruction clear and precise.

Another example is *ma ereb* which simply means "from" *ereb*. It is the opposite of *awd ereb*. Rather than a period of time that approaches *ereb*, *ma ereb* is marked "from" sundown, "from" the beginning of a new day. We will return to this word to see how

it is used in a single verse in Leviticus. In that example there will be three different forms of *ereb*, all recorded in Strong's as a single Hebrew word.

AT SUNDOWN (*ba ereb*)

The word *ba ereb* has caused people difficulty, but only when they try to stretch its meaning beyond the one definition God gives. If we try to force our own interpretations and doctrine into scripture, then any word can become confusing. Consider what religious teachers have done with words like *law* and *works*. Once we understand the true use of such terms through scripture interpreting itself (revealed by God through His Spirit), then the confusion and foolishness of adversarial arguments is revealed.

God's Word is beautifully written. It is awe inspiring and exciting to witness its simplicity. So it is with the use of the term "at" *ereb*. Instead of becoming entangled in the complicated arguments surrounding this word, let's look again at the plain speaking of some very basic scriptures.

The following scriptures are explicit because they concern the observance of Holy time. *"And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the Lord. And in the fifteenth day of this month is the feast: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten"* (Num. 28:16-17). We are well grounded concerning this Holy Day period. Leviticus 23 shows that the 15th day of the month is the first day of Unleavened Bread and an annual Sabbath, as is the seventh day of Unleavened Bread. *"And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread"* (Lev. 23:6). Unleavened bread was to be eaten for those seven days. It's a clear scripture, but even here, some would like to argue.

Look at how specific God gets concerning this observance. *"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even (ba ereb), ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even (ba ereb)"* (Ex. 12:18). What is *ba ereb* in this verse? The very use of the word, coupled with all the explicit instruction regarding this observance, gives the clear scriptural definition. What is the only use of this word so it will fit such precise instruction? When you have the answer, you will know the scriptural interpretation.

"At" should make it clear this is a specific period of time. It is "at" sundown. As we saw in Genesis, *ereb* occurs only when the sun is down. *Ereb* cannot be used to refer to any period while the sun is "going down". When it is "down", the sun divides a specific period of time from when it is "up".

Exodus 12 does not say the period for eating unleavened bread was to be from the 15th through the 21st. Instead it spells out the only way this word can be used. Was unleavened bread to begin being eaten on the 14th? No. A specific seven day period is being described. If this was some period beginning on the 14th, then it would have to end at the same period on the 21st *before* the days of Unleavened Bread were over. "At" *ereb* can have only one meaning and still fit into this verse. It can only be a specific moment at the end of one day while "going into" another day. In this case, it is from the end of the 14th "to" the beginning of the 15th. It is from the day of the 14th to the day of the 15th, specifically "at" the point the sun is down and no light is emanating from it. While light is coming from the sun, it is day and it is still the 14th. When light no longer can be seen from the sun it is night or *ereb*. God gave us what is plain and simple. We don't have to be scholars to understand.

Society today passes from one day into another at precisely 12:00 midnight. God divided time by showing us that we pass from one day into another precisely at the point the sun is down. Exodus 12 shows us the beginning of Unleavened Bread is at the specific point in time at the end of the 14th and the beginning of another day, the 15th. It also ends precisely at the end of the 21st when the sun is down and the 22nd begins. God divides time very clearly.

The *ba ereb* of any day is the moment of sundown for that Biblical day. Sundown (*ba ereb*) cannot occur during the period know as *ereb*. Sundown (*ba ereb*) in a Biblical day can only be at the moment which ends the daylight portion of a day, at the exact moment the sun is down. Sundown (*ba ereb*) cannot occur at any other time of *ereb*, because the sun is already down.

Another beautiful area of scripture is found in Leviticus 23. Again, God is making it very clear when His Holy time begins. This concerns the Day of Atonement. *"Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall*

afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord" (Lev. 23:27). Next we come to a precise and ever so specific instruction about time. *"It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even (ba ereb), from even (ma ereb) unto even (awd ereb), shall ye celebrate your sabbath"* (Lev. 23:32).

After seeing the clear use of *ba ereb* concerning the instructions for Unleavened Bread, we can easily understand the use of it for Atonement. "In the ninth day of the month *at even* (*ba ereb*)" can only mean we are to begin observance of Atonement at the precise moment that ends one day and begins the next. *Ba ereb* on the 9th day is at the very moment the 9th day ends when the sun has "gone down" on that day. So again, God makes it clear this is a precise time at the end of the 9th as we are going into the 10th day, precisely at the point when the sun is down.

This precise instruction for the timing of Atonement is further spelled out in the rest of the verse. "Ma" means "from", just as it is used here. It says "from even" (*ma ereb*) "unto even" (*awd ereb*)." Atonement starts precisely at the point the sun is down on the 9th and goes "from" that point, the beginning of *ereb*, "until" the next *ereb*, at the same point of time again. Atonement is a complete day, to be observed through the entirety of the 10th. God makes it clear Atonement is between two specific evenings.

If people don't understand there are three different words used in this verse to describe evening, then all sorts of interpretations can emerge. If any one of these three words is misapplied, especially *ba ereb*, then there is conflict with God's instruction and precise timing and understanding will be confused.

When using the word *ba ereb* (at sundown) in a present or future tense context, it can only occur at the end of the daylight period for that specific day when the sun goes down. With the instruction given in Ex. 12:18, only unleavened bread was allowed to be eaten beginning at sundown (*ba ereb*) on the 14th, which is the beginning of a new day, the 15th.

If the context is in the past tense for a specific day, "at sundown" (*ba ereb*) would apply to the end of the previous day. Using the example of Atonement, you could say, "You are to fast on the 9th day at sundown (*ba ereb*)." For Atonement it *could not be*

said, "You fasted on the 9th day at sundown (*ba ereb*). " The action is past. Using past tense action that has already occurred, it would be correct to say, "You fasted on the 10th day at sundown (*ba ereb*). " The fasting occurred on the 10th day beginning *ba ereb* (sundown) on the 9th. This will become important later and cannot be denied by context.

DEUTERONOMY 16

Before we continue to the last word to be examined, we need to pause and consider a particular verse (Deut. 16:6) that has led to some confusion over the term *ba ereb*. The misunderstanding surrounding this verse may be partly responsible for why some people think they can extend the definition for when the sun begins to go down.

Some use Deut. 16:6 to define *ba ereb*, rather than the verses we have used. We should always use the clearer context to better understand more difficult scriptures. The scriptural examples we have been using are an excellent exercise for learning how to let God's Word define itself, hence the Bible interpreting the Bible.

"But at the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even (ba ereb), at the going down (#935) of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt" (Deut. 16:6).

If you have fully grasped the meaning of *ba ereb* as being the precise moment the sun is down, you will immediately notice why this verse can cause people problems. We will return later and answer the question of why the word *ba ereb* is used in this verse. This verse holds some surprises which makes God's Word all the more exciting as we dig deeper into it.

The purpose for pausing to examine this verse is to focus on the "going down (#935) of the sun." This word "going down" is easily misapplied if you rely on English. "At even, at the going down of the sun" is used by some as a principle definition for *ba ereb*. When anyone focuses on the duration of time for the "going down" of the sun, then personal interpretations will become misleading.

How far back do we go in order to say this is the point where the sun begins to move downward? If we say that "going down" begins at the point the sun first touches the horizon, what prevents us from moving this somewhat nebulous period all the way up to

noon when the sundial shows it has begun its movement downward?

If we embrace the scriptures that plainly interpret themselves, we will better understand this scripture as well. There is another scripture that will help clarify what "going down" means. *"And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down (#935) at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day" (Amos 8:9).* On this particular day the sun doesn't give the appearance of movement downward, but when God causes the sun to "go down" it is a complete change from daylight to night. What is important in the use of this word in the Hebrew is not the "duration" of a thing, but the "result"!

The word "down" has been added to this definition. The word simply means "go" or "going". In Deut. 16, the people were being instructed to "sacrifice the passover (KJV)" at the "going of the sun", at sun down (*ba ereb*).

When we return to give further explanation of the verses in Deut. 16, it will become clearer that the "going down of the sun" can only be at the specific moment of *ba ereb*, precisely when the sun is down.

BETWEEN TWO EVENINGS

We have finally come to the last word to be discussed. This word for evening is "*bane ha erebyim*". It literally means "between the two evenings" or "between the dual evenings". *"And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening (bane ha erebyim)" (Ex. 12:6).*

Some of the main points of debate over the timing of Passover have come from this verse and the inability of people to agree on the two evenings to which it refers. Probably the most widely held interpretation within the Church of God has been of one evening being at sundown and the second evening being when the twilight has gone and the dark of night has set in. This is vague because the point at which it becomes totally dark is somewhat hard to define. Of the various interpretations, this one has agreed more fully with Biblical instructions and timing for Passover events. Others within the church have agreed with this interpretation, except the time has been extended by beginning the first evening at the point the sun first touches the horizon.

Controversy and conflict occur when brethren begin gravitating to the traditional Jewish and traditional Christian explanations for *bane ha erebyim* (between the two evenings). When any part of this interpretation is adopted, killing the Passover is moved to the afternoon of the 14th, while eating it is moved to the 15th. Some brethren have come to believe it is permissible to observe the Passover late on the 14th, during the daylight hours before sundown.

Traditional Christianity seemingly chooses this period since it coincides with the time of day Jesus Christ died. Jewish tradition holds that it was necessary to kill the Passover in the afternoon to allow enough time to complete the immense task of slaughtering the hundreds of animals required for everyone to keep the Passover. Most Jewish teaching places the first of the two evenings at some time during the afternoon of the 14th. Some claim this is around 3 p.m., while others insist it can be no later than 1 p.m. Such interpretations allow for killing the Passover on the afternoon of the 14th and eating it on the night of the 15th.

Notice the interpretation of Exodus 12:6 by a renowned Jewish scholar in *The Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary* on page 102. *"At dusk--From six hours (after noon) and upward is called ben ha arbayim, when the sun declines towards the place of its setting to be darkened. And the expression ben ha arbayim appears in my sight (to refer to) those hours between the 'evening' of day, and the 'evening' of night; the 'evening' of day is at the beginning of the seventh hour [1 p.m.] from (the time that) 'the shadows of evening are stretched out,' and the 'evening' of night is at the beginning of night".*

Jewish scholars have interpreted the first evening of "between the two evenings" (*bane ha erebyim*) as being 1 p.m. in the afternoon and even refer to it as the 'evening' of day. That is very creative reasoning. *Ereb* can never be a time when the sun is up. *Ereb* for a day time period can only be at the very close of the day, at the very instant the sun is down (*ba ereb*).

So what are the two evenings of *bane ha erebyim*? From our investigation, there is only one answer. It is plain and simple. You are left with only one conclusion. Let's look at the words we have covered.

Ereb ----- any time when the sun is down
Awd erab ----- "until" sundown
Ma erab ----- "from" sundown
Ba erab ----- "at" the moment of sundown
Bane ha erebyim -- between the two evenings

When God gives us a special day to observe, what period of time defines that day? We have already seen several scriptures making it clear how we define that time. Could the expression "between the two evenings" be any clearer?

Notice again the clear instruction regarding Atonement. *"It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even (ba erab), from even (ma erab) unto even (awd erab), shall ye celebrate your sabbath" (Lev. 23:32).* As we saw earlier, Atonement begins at the moment of sundown (ba erab) on the 9th, which is the beginning of the 10th. It then goes "from" that moment of even (ma erab) "until" even (awd erab), which can only be the following evening at the end of the 10th. God makes it clear that Atonement is between two specific evenings.

WHY BANE HA EREBYIM?

"And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening (bane ha erebyim)" (Ex. 12:6). Some will reject the clear definition of *bane ha erebyim* as the two evenings that start and end a day. They will claim that such a definition for Ex. 12:6 is too broad and therefore cannot possibly have such a meaning. Is that a justifiable reason for rejecting God's instruction? Shouldn't we rather use God's clear definitions so we might come to better understand what God's will is?

Why would God use a term like "between the two evenings" as part of the instruction for killing the Passover? Other scriptures using this same term will begin to give us a clearer understanding. We shouldn't worry that a more specific term wasn't used in this verse. The context of the story clarifies the killing of the passover lamb had to take place right after sundown on the 14th, because there were still many things that had to occur during that same night. We will look at the timing and story flow later.

Bane ha erebyim (between the two evenings) gives ample room within that day for additional events to be accomplished or fulfilled. This is made clearer by the instruction given for taking the

second Passover. *"And the Lord spake unto 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 the passover at his appointed season. In the fourteenth day of this month, at even (bane ha erebyim), ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it. And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, that they should keep the passover. And they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even (bane ha erebyim) in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel" (Num. 9:1-5).*

These verses indicate Passover day involved much more than just killing the Passover lamb *between the two evenings (bane ha erebyim).* *Between the two evenings, during the 14th, they were to keep it according to all the rites and ceremonies, according to all the Lord had commanded Moses.* The verses following Ex. 12:6 show that killing the Passover lambs was only one part of God's instruction for the day.

"Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover unto the Lord. The fourteenth day of the second month at even (bane ha erebyim) they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor break any bone of it: according to all the ordinances of the passover they shall keep it" (Num. 9:10-12). This observance for Passover says that "between the evenings" on the 14th they were to keep it according to all the ordinances of the Passover and eat the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. In addition, they were not to leave any of it until the morning. "Between the two evenings" in these verses takes us up to the morning hours of the 14th.

Is "between the two evenings" intended to

cover only a part of the Passover of the 14th? We see that it includes more than just the killing of the lambs. It includes the eating of the passover lamb, as well as rites and ceremonies. Another scripture makes it plain that "between the evenings" includes the whole of the 14th. *"In the fourteenth day of the first month at even (between the two evenings) is the Lord's passover" (Lev. 23:5).* God wasn't just giving instructions to observe the first couple of hours for Passover. He was showing we are to keep the Passover on the 14th, which is one complete day, lasting "from" one sundown "until" the next. Passover, like Atonement (Lev.23:32), or any Sabbath or Holy Day is to be observed between two evenings, which defines one complete day.

Your study of this article may have been challenging, but we need the understanding. We must prove whatever doctrines we embrace, with God's Word interpreting itself and not with our own interpretations. When we yield ourselves to the Bible interpreting itself, God's Word becomes plain and simple to understand. This, in turn, makes His Word more inspiring and exciting.

We hope this research has provided you with the framework upon which you can build the story flow of Passover. You may now request the sermon series, *The Timing of Passover*, which continues where this article leaves off.

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Information for the Feast of Tabernacles site in Niagara Falls will be available after the Days of Unleavened Bread.

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