

DATE AND DAY JESUS CRUCIFIED



JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD ON A SUNDAY MORNING

All Christians agree that Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday morning. *“After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other*

Mary went to look at the tomb” (Matthew 28:1).

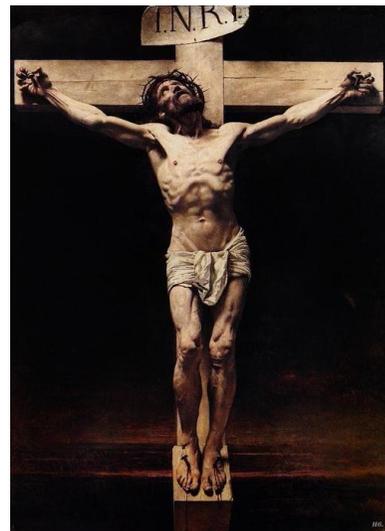
In the time of Jesus, and among modern orthodox Jews, the Jewish day began at sunset on one day and ended at sunset the next day. Sunday starts at sunset or approximately 6pm on Saturday. The third hour would be what we know as 9am, the sixth hour noon, and the ninth hour 3pm. These times are mentioned in reference to Jesus’ crucifixion on the cross.

In Mark’s account, Jesus was crucified about 9am: *“It was then the third hour they crucified him”* (Mark 15:25, although John 19:14 says Jesus was crucified about noon). Matthew, Mark and Luke do not mention when Jesus was crucified but agree on what happened next: *“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour [noon to 3pm] darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani?’—which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”* (Matthew 27:45-46).

THREE DAYS IN THE GRAVE

All four Gospel writers agree that Jesus died about 3pm in the afternoon. If Jesus was crucified on Friday afternoon, how do we come up with three days in the grave?

Friday afternoon to Saturday afternoon at 3pm is 24 hours or one chronological day. Sunday would start three hours later. If Jesus rose from the dead around



6am, this adds up to 39 hours total—nowhere near 72 hours (three full days and nights).

But if we say Friday was a “day” in general, and Saturday was a “day” in general, and Jesus rose on Sunday, then you can force three days into the equation and make a Friday crucifixion work, although you cannot get three nights out of this equation. Technically it is really just one full day and two nights. Fifth graders have scratched their heads at this peculiar math—I certainly did.

But what if he didn’t die on Friday.

PASSOVER (Pesach in Hebrew)

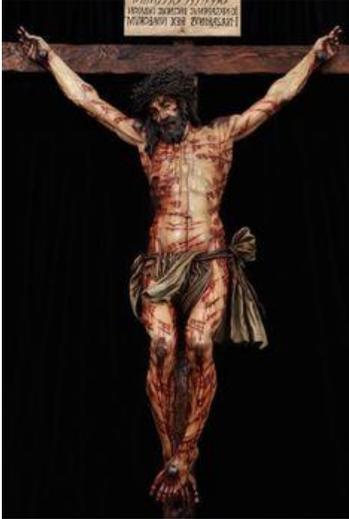
According to the Torah (Exodus 12:7), the Jewish people were to remember how the Angel of Death “passed over” the homes of the firstborn Jewish children and animals, because they dabbed lamb’s blood onto the sides of the entrance door frame and across the lintel on top. God decreed that future generations would reenact this feast as a memorial, as an everlasting ordinance (Exodus 12:14, 17; Numbers 28:16; Joshua 5:10-11).



The Passover feast does not occur on the same day each year; it is a floating holiday celebrated on the day of the first full moon that comes after the vernal equinox (Earth day time and night time are equal in length). This feast day is always on the 14th day of the month Nisan on the Jewish calendar.

During the time of Jesus, the Book of Jubilees 49:1-12, states that Passover was celebrated on 14 Nisan with the meal consumed throughout the night, and nothing left over in the morning.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, also from the time of Jesus, wrote, “*In the month of Xanthicus, which is by us called Nisan, and is the beginning of our year, on the 14th day of the lunar month, when the sun is in Aries, (for in this month it was that we were delivered from bondage under the Egyptians), the law ordained that we should every year slay that sacrifice which I before told you we slew when we came out of Egypt, and which was called the Passover; and so we do celebrate this Passover in companies, leaving nothing of what we sacrifice till the day following*” (The Antiquities of the Jews, 3:248).



DATE OF EASTER CELEBRATION SET

The date Christians celebrate Easter is also a floating holiday and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is loosely based on the Jewish Passover. The Council of Nicaea (325AD) determined that the date of Easter would follow a similar calculation: To be celebrated on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox. That is why Easter can come as early as March 21st and as late as April 25th.

Whatever day Christians celebrate Holy Week and Easter, it has little to do when Passover was celebrated during the time of Jesus, or today in modern times.

Why is that? Because Easter only occurs on Sunday. The Jewish celebration of Passover occurs on 14 Nisan, which can occur on any day of the week.

SABBATH (Shabbat in Hebrew)

God commanded, “*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy*” (Exodus 20:8), the fourth of the Ten Commandments.

During the time of Jesus until today, the weekly Sabbath celebration—the day of rest instituted by God—started on Friday evening at sunset and ended Saturday evening at sunset. Saturday is still a day of rest for the Jews.

HIGH SABBATH

The Jewish people also celebrated the High Sabbath. The day before a High Sabbath is called Preparation Day. After the day of Passover, God instituted seven days of celebration. God commanded, “*On the first day of the celebration hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat—that is all you may do*” (Exodus 12:16).

WHAT DAY OF THE WEEK WAS JESUS CRUCIFIED?

In Matthew, Jesus explains that he would rise after three days and three nights, using Jonah as an example: “*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a*

huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40). This is precise language about a specific event and period of time: From his death on the cross until his resurrection three full days and three full nights would pass—at least 72 hours.

Jesus spent Passover with his disciples. “*Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover Lamb had to be sacrificed*” (Luke 22:7, Matthew 26:17). Jesus sent the disciples to get the room ready. “*When evening came, Jesus reclined at the table with the Twelve.*”



On 14 Nisan, at the start of Passover that evening, Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples. That means that when Jesus was crucified the next day, it was still 14 Nisan—the day of Passover.

The High Sabbath of 15 Nisan would begin at sunset and no work was allowed. The Pharisees asked that the legs of the criminals be broken so that they would die and could be disposed of before the High Sabbath began (John 19:31-34).

“It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea...asked for Jesus’ body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead” (Mark 15:42-44).

If we didn’t know about the High Sabbath, we might assume from this verse that Jesus was crucified on Friday afternoon and taken down from the cross and buried before sunset, marking the beginning of the regular Saturday Sabbath.

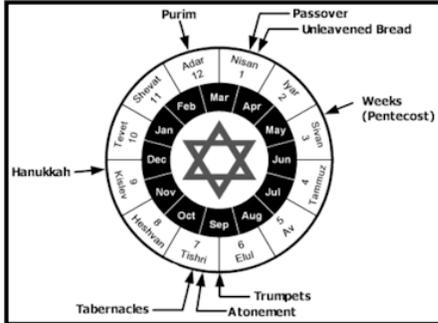
But it was Preparation Day, following Passover, so this Sabbath could be any day of the week, not just Friday. Jews reading this at the time Mark wrote it would understand what he meant, because he wrote Preparation Day.

The Apostle John wrote, “*Now it was the Day of Preparation and the next day was to be a Special Sabbath*” (John 19:31). In the original Greek, this verse reads: “*Therefore, the Jews, because it was the Preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for it was a High Sabbath day, asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and they might be taken away.*”

John states that Jesus was crucified on Passover just before the High Sabbath started.

Matthew supports John’s account. “*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb*” (Matthew 28:1).

Once again, the Greek for Sabbath in this verse is actually plural, so it would correctly read, “*After the Sabbaths...*” This would cover the High Sabbath during the week and the regular Sabbath on Saturday.



WHAT CALENDAR DAY DID JESUS DIE?

If Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday morning, and he was three full days and three full nights in the grave before that, then the crucifixion had to be on a Wednesday afternoon. The only time 14 Nisan appears on a Wednesday when Jesus was in his

early 30's is 30AD.

In 30AD, Passover began on Tuesday evening at sunset and ran through Wednesday at sunset. Therefore, Jesus was crucified on Wednesday afternoon at 3pm. This would put Jesus in the grave three full days and nights: Thursday day and night, Friday day and night, and Saturday and night.

THE AGE OF JESUS WHEN HE DIED

History tells us that Herod the Great died in 1BC. There has been speculation about 4BC being the year he died, but more recent scholarship believes 1BC to be more accurate. In Matthew the Magi tell Herod that they saw the star, indicating the birth of the King of the Jews. I don't know when they started their journey, but from what they told Herod, two years had passed before they arrived. For this reason, Herod, “...gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old or under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi” (Matthew 2:16).

Based on this scripture that would put the birth of Jesus in 3BC.

Luke tells us that John the Baptist began his preaching in the 15th year of Emperor Tiberius' reign (Luke 3:1-3), which we know was 29AD. Jesus began his ministry shortly after—within a few months, and Luke tell us, “*Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry*” (Luke 3:23).

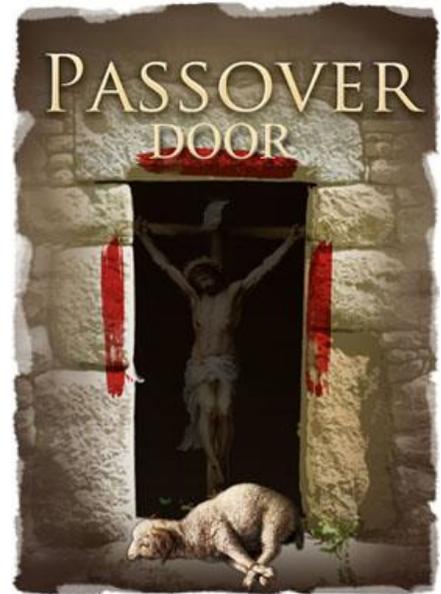
If Jesus was born in 3BC, that would make him approximately 31 years old. [2 years old in 1BC plus 29AD = 31. No zero year.] Like Luke said, Jesus was about 30 years old.

At some time in the distant past, the Christian church came to believe that Jesus died before the weekend Sabbath. This has been further promoted because 14 Nisan occurs on Friday in the year 33AD. If you believe that the ministry of Jesus lasted three years, as first postulated by Origen Admantius (184-254AD) in his incorrect study of the Book of Daniel, then 33AD would also support that idea nicely. I write in another place (<http://www.joelgraves.com/Theology/OneYearMinistry.pdf>) that Jesus' ministry was only 16 months long. This fits perfectly with his birth date and date of crucifixion.

RECAP

Jesus and the disciples ate the Passover meal on Tuesday evening. He was arrested late that night or early Wednesday morning and finally taken before Pilate, who gave the order of execution. He was crucified between 9am and noon, and died at about 3pm. His body was taken down before the High Sabbath began at sunset. He was in the grave three full days and nights, and resurrected from the dead on Sunday morning.

MINOR NOTE: The Lamb of God (Lamb tied on floor) image in this artwork was painted by Joel Graves.



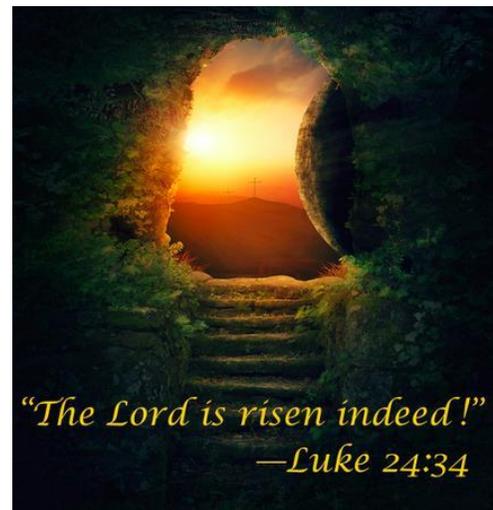
DOES ANY OF THIS MATTER?

It does to me.

I am a Traditionalist. I attend Good Friday solemn services and weep along with others when contemplating what Jesus did in the Garden, and how he suffered at the hands of his tormentors. But I also want to remember his crucifixion on the date it happened, whether using the Jewish calendar or the Gregorian calendar.

Will I make a stink every year about what date Jesus actually died on? No.

It is more important to celebrate his death and resurrection, because by his incredibly and



magnificently great sacrifice, he saved my soul and all who would come to believe in him.

I agree with the Apostle Paul. He believed that the resurrection of Jesus was more important than what day he died. *“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’”* (Romans 10:8-13).

The big question, the real question, is not whether Jesus died on Wednesday, or Thursday, or Friday, but whether you are saved from eternal damnation [separation from God for eternity] and have declared with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.

POSTSCRIPTS

DAYS FOR 14 NISAN BY YEAR

28AD = Monday

29AD = Saturday

30AD = Wednesday

31AD = Monday

32AD = Monday

33AD = Friday (often used as the day of Passover and Jesus' death)

34AD = Monday

35AD = Monday

TRANSLATION ISSUES

Why would bible translators not say High Sabbath or Sabbaths when that is what the authors wrote? I believe the scholar's bias for a Friday crucifixion influenced their interpretation of the scriptures. Instead of being honest, they were deceptive. Sad. But a

shout-out to the Berean Literal Bible and the International Standard Version who interpreted Matthew 28:1 as Sabbaths—plural.

For John 19:31, the Berean Study Bible properly translated High Sabbath. The New American Standard, King James 2000 Bible, English Revised Version, American King James Version, American Standard Bible, and Jubilee Bible 2000 said Sabbath but added a parenthetical (*for that Sabbath was a high day*). Close enough.

TODAY THE JEWS CELEBRATE PASSOVER ON 15 NISAN

If you Google *Passover*, you will see a note that says, “In the Torah (the body of Jewish scripture), Passover begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan, the day in the Hebrew calendar on which the Jewish departed from Egypt thousands of years ago.”

Why does Exodus state that Passover should be celebrated on 14 Nisan, and it was celebrated on 14 Nisan in the time of Jesus and for many centuries since, but the modern Jewish celebration is on 15 Nisan in direct contradiction of the Torah?

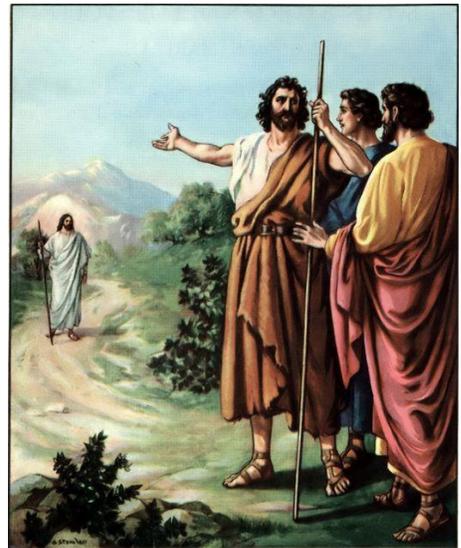
Although the seven day celebration was instituted by God in Exodus 12, the Festival of Unleavened Bread or Matzahs (Chag Hamatzot—the Celebration of Unleavened Bread) came about in Leviticus 23:6, “*And on the 15th day of the month is the Festival of Matzahs to the Lord; you shall eat matzahs for a seven-day period.*”

Interestingly, modern Jewish scholars say that the central food of the Passover meal, as celebrated on 15 Nisan now, is the unleavened bread not the lamb, because they were dressed for a quick departure and ate the unleavened bread as a symbol of their haste to flee Egypt (Exodus 13).

This is in sharp contrast to how Christians view the Passover. “*The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’*” (John 1:29).

Christians understand that the Passover sacrifice is a type and shadow of the coming of Jesus, the Lamb of God, to save the world the way the lamb’s blood on the door sides and lintel saved the Jews.

Despite many explanations (or excuses), to be strictly obedient to the Torah, the Jewish people do not celebrate Passover on the right day anymore. I could not find out when they changed the date of the celebration feast from 14 to 15 Nisan. The sacrifice and consumption of the lamb should begin at sundown, marking the beginning of 14



Nisan. The original intent of Pesach was the sacrifice of the lamb to spare them from the Angel of Death. The fact that it has been superseded by the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a sad commentary on how far they have drifted from their Messiah and his sacrifice for them.

HOLY COMMUNION



When we celebrate Holy Communion, we are re-enacting the Passover Feast Jesus celebrated with his disciples. *“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’”* (Matthew 26:26-28).