

What Day Did Jesus Die?

Various Scriptures and Sources



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What Day Was Jesus Crucified?¹

Matthew 12:39-40 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: (40) For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.²

No one disputes that Jesus arose on Sunday morning, but there is much debate as to what day He was crucified. Most of us were taught Friday was the day Jesus was crucified and this has been widely accepted as the traditional day of crucifixion. But if Christ was crucified on Friday, how was He in the grave for three days and three nights as Jesus said in **Matthew 12:40** He would be? Some of people began to say that Jesus was the son of David, which is a term for the Messiah, after He had cast a demon out of a man. However, the scribes and Pharisees being alarmed that the people would think Jesus was the Messiah began to openly criticize Him saying He had cast the demon out by the power of Beelzebub meaning Satan. Jesus then rebuked them for their unbelief and blasphemy. Blasphemy is attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to the Devil and that is what

1 This article is based on one by Grady Daniel, but has been edited and additional added material by Cooper Abrams. Found online at <http://www.bible-truth.org/WhatDayDidChristDie.html> Any additional footnoting, such as you see here, along with addition of Scripture texts is made by Pastor David Buffaloe

2 All texts are King James Version (Authorized) unless otherwise noted

they did by saying that Jesus casting out the demon was the work of Satan. They showed the hardness of their hearts by then sarcastically demanding that Jesus would give them a sign of who He was. They had just witnessed a sign in the casting out of the demon, but they would not accept it. Jesus then rebuked them by saying no sign would be given by the sign of Jonah who was three days and three nights in the "heart of the earth." The phrase "heart of the earth" referred to dying and being buried. This passage is the key to understanding when Jesus was actually crucified.

Matthew 12:38-40 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. (39) But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: (40) For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The traditional explanation mistakenly says that Jesus was crucified on Friday. Trying to justify that Friday was the day of the crucifixion those that hold this view say that the Jews counted any part of a day as a full day. That is, part of Friday is day one; Saturday, day two; and He arose sometime Sunday morning - day three. This explanation has some serious problems.

The Jews did not reckon time the way we do. This is one of the first considerations.

1. The Jewish day ended at sundown (6:00 PM) and the new day began at sunrise (6:00 AM).
2. Their Sabbath Day began at sundown Friday (about 6 PM) and ended at sundown Saturday. In **Genesis 1:5** after the first day of creation, God said **". . . the evening and the morning were the first day."** After the completion of each day of creation the Lord states the **". . . the evening and the morning were the _____ day."**
3. The word "day" used by itself only refers to a period of time. The word has to be modified to specify what period of time it means. Example: **Acts 10:40 "Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly."** The word day is modified by the word "third" and we know it refers specifically to only the third day. (See **Acts 20:7** which refers to Sunday...the "first day" of the week.) **Romans 2:16 "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."** (This refers to the judgment day).

The modifier makes it specific as to the period of time. Grammatically three days and three nights means three twenty four hour periods of time.

If Jesus was crucified on the traditional Friday and rose again anytime after 6 PM Saturday (the Jewish Sunday) He could not have been in the tomb ("heart of the earth") three full days and three full nights as He said He would be. Some might try to dismiss the importance of Jesus' statement, but He said it would be a sign to the Jews that

He was the Messiah. If He was not actually in the grave three full days and three full nights there would be no way to authenticate the sign, so He had to be in the tomb the full time as He stated.

In the Jewish way of reckoning time, from Friday at 6 PM to Saturday at 6 PM would have only been twenty four hours if Jesus was buried before 6 PM. From Saturday at 6 PM until Sunday morning at day break would have been a maximum of twelve hours. That gives a total of only thirty six hours, not the seventy two hours the Bible records that He was in the grave. Jesus said He would be in the grave for seventy two hours and therefore He could not have been crucified on Friday.

Friday afternoon to Saturday 6 PM = 24 hours.
Saturday 6 PM to Sunday 6 AM = 12 hours.
Total 36 hours. (Not enough time)

WERE THESE THREE LITERAL DAYS/NIGHTS?

Some mistakenly refer to the passage where in **John 11:9** Jesus asked, "**... Are there not twelve hours in the day**" to explain away the problem with the time. In creation God divided the day and night. The evening and the morning = 1 day. If there were twelve (12) hours in a day then there must have been twelve (hours) in a night and the total would be twenty four hours. Also, anytime in the Bible when the word "day" is preceded by a number, it means whatever number of days is denoted by that number. "Day" can also be used in the Bible to mean an unspecified period of days such as "Day of the

Lord".

Dr. Charles Halff, Director of the Christian Jew Foundation, in writing "The Fallacies of Easter"³ stated:

"Sometimes people ask, 'Didn't the Jews count part of a day as a whole day or part of a night as a whole night?' Let me say this, beloved. Whenever you have the expression 'day and night' mentioned together in the Hebrew Scriptures, it always means a full day and a full night. . . For instance, if you will turn to **Esther 4:16; 5:1; 1 Samuel; 30:12-13, and of course **Jonah 1:17**, you will find the expression 'three days and three nights.' And in every instance it means full days and full nights - not part of a day and part of a night."**

From Friday to Sunday is not three 24-hour days. Jesus said he would be resurrected after three (3) days. (**Mark 8:31: "And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."** Counting backwards from Sunday three days, you will not arrive at Friday. Remember to count the way the Jews did.

From Saturday 6 PM to Friday 6 PM = 1 day;
From Friday 6 PM to Thursday 6 PM = 1 day;
From Thursday 6 PM to Wednesday 6 PM = 1 day.
Total 3 days.

HOW COULD WEDNESDAY BE THE DAY BEFORE THE SABBATH?

But if He was crucified the day before the Sabbath, how could He have been crucified on Wednesday? The answer lies in the fact that the Jews celebrated more Sabbaths than just the weekly Sabbath. They had a number of feast days that were "High Sabbaths," or high days. He arose on the first day of the week after the Sabbaths* (plural). Sometime after 6 PM Saturday, end of the Jewish day, in **Matthew 28:1** we read; **"In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher."**

The Schofield Reference Bible (1917 ed.) has a center column note which reveals that "Sabbath" in this verse is plural; from the Greek word "sabbata." (Also in Young's Analytical Concordance) The day after the crucifixion was not the regular (Saturday) Sabbath but a Special ("High" - Greek, "megas", large) Sabbath.

John 19:31 states, **"The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away."**

The Jews observed several "high" Sabbaths ("holy convocations") in their seasons. **Leviticus 23:3-6**; **"Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no**

work therein: it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover. 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."

The first Jewish month (Nisan or Abib) is our April. The Feast of the Passover (a high Sabbath) and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (another high Sabbath) were celebrated on April 14th and 15th respectively.

The day Jesus died was the preparation day (Wednesday) of the Passover celebration on Thursday **John 19:14, 31**: **"And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he (meaning Pilate) saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!"** This was the morning of the crucifixion day. **Verse 31** states, **"The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away."**

Therefore, Passover (Nisan 14) was on Thursday, that year, the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on Friday (seven day feast last to Nisan 21), and the regular weekday Sabbath was on Saturday. Jesus was crucified in the morning on Wednesday and placed in the tomb before 6 PM He arose from the grave sometime after 6 PM on Saturday, which would be early Sunday morning,

the first day of the week, according to Jewish time-keeping. This explanation fits Jesus' prophecy in **Matthew 12:40** that He would be **"three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."**

FURTHER EVIDENCE FROM THE BIBLE

The women purchased spices **"after the Sabbath"** or the Passover (Nisan 14 - Thursday) which would have been Friday as **Mark 15:42 and Luke 23:52-54** state. They would not have broken the Law and purchased anything on the Day of the Passover, or the regular Sabbath on Saturday. **Luke 23:56** says they returned and prepared the spices and "rested on the Sabbath" which was the regular Sabbath on Saturday. Then on the first day of the week, Sunday morning they went to the tomb to prepare the body.

A POINT OF CONJECTURE

If Jesus was born in 5 BC (The Bible Almanac, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980) and if He died about at 33 years of age, that would fix his death around 29 AD. The first Roman calendar was off four (4) years. Today's calendar is a product of the Julian & Gregorian calendars. There was a 1 BC and a 1 AD but there was no "0" between BC and AD. Counting 33 years forward from His birth in 5 BC would fix his death in 29 AD.

Herod the Great, who ordered the murder of all the babies less than two years old in Bethlehem, died in 4 BC. Therefore Jesus had to be born prior to his death and therefore Jesus probably was born in 5 BC or earlier.

(Matt. 2:13-16)

Those special Sabbaths, Feast of the Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread, occurred on the 14th and 15th of the first month of the Jewish calendar (about our April). **Leviticus 23:5, 6** states, **"In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover. 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."**

According to Encyclopedia Britannica the 14th day of Nisan (also called Abar "green ears of corn") (**Esther 3:7**), corresponding to parts of March and April in the year of Christ's crucifixion was the same as our April 7 on our calendar. (Julian and Gregorian calendars) The Perpetual Calendar [also from Encyclopedia Britannica] shows that the 14th day of Nisan, 29 AD (Passover), fell on Thursday. Hence, it would be followed by the Feast of the Unleavened Bread on the 15th (Friday), and the regular weekday Sabbath (Saturday). Jesus would have therefore been crucified on Wednesday the 13th. (Information sources were many, including commentaries of the late **Evangelist Dr. Oliver B.**

Greene⁴; Dakes's Annotated Reference Bible⁵, and the article "Sabbaths All In A Row" by Maret H. Dinsmore, Litt. D., Th.D., in The Biblical Evangelist, Vol. 18, No. 8, April 13, 1984)⁶

Passover was on 14th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar, or Nisan (Abib) - 14th no matter what day in the week it fell on as the follow passages attest:

Exodus 23:15 Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:)

4 Oliver B. Greene writes: "Was He crucified on the day known as Good Friday? If so, how could He have been in the tomb for three days and three nights? Passover that year began on Thursday, therefore Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, not Friday. The Jewish day began at six o'clock in the evening, so the body of Jesus was placed in the tomb just before six o'clock on Wednesday evening." (The Gospel of Matthew, volume 6, pp. 301-303)

5 Finis Dake writes: "However, the next day was a 'high day', a special Sabbath of the feast (John 19:31), not the ordinary weekly Sabbath, which was two days later. He was put in the grave Wednesday just before sunset and was resurrected at the end of Saturday at sunset." (Dake's Annotated Reference Bible)

6 From Pastor David also of note, see these quotes: Chuck Swindoll says, "Jesus was not crucified on Friday, but on Wednesday. We need to think through our position. There is no way it could be 3 nights if He died on Friday." (from a radio broadcast 4/2/96) ; M. R. DeHaan says: "It is my conviction that Christ was crucified on Wednesday, and arose right after sundown on Saturday night, which was the beginning of the first day in the Jewish calendar. In no other way can we account for three days and three nights. 'Good Friday' is an unscriptural tradition only." (508 Answers to Bible Questions, p.55); Dr. Howard Estep states: "Luke 24:21 is a strong argument for a Wednesday crucifixion. If the Friday crucifixion is held, it is impossible for the first day of the week to be "the third day since these things were done."

Exodus 34:18 The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, in the time of the month Abib: for in the month Abib thou camest out from Egypt.

Deuteronomy 16:1 Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night.

Leviticus 23:5 In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S passover.

Numbers 9:5 And they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel.

Numbers 28:16 And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the LORD.

Joshua 5:10 And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho.

2 Chronicles 35:1 Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.

CONCLUSION

This is the only view that fits the biblical account - that

Jesus was crucified on Wednesday and buried before 6:00 PM that day. The Jewish day began at 6:00 PM which was the Passover (Nisan 14). Therefore the Passover began on Wednesday after 6:00 PM which would actually be Thursday as the Jews reckoned time. The women brought the spices on Friday, rested on Saturday and went on Sunday morning after 6:00 AM and found the Lord was resurrected. This is the series of events and is in accord with Jesus' statement found in of **Matthew 12:38-40**. Jesus was in the grave three full days and three nights. Any other view violates the biblical account and the historical facts.

Quotation From Oliver Greene's "The Gospel of Matthew", Volume 6, © 1975 (pages 301ff)

No human eye saw the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor is the *exact moment of His resurrection revealed to us*. We do know that He arose sometime between sunset on Saturday evening and sunrise on Sunday morning, but the details of that glorious event were for Almighty God alone. It was enough that mortal man should see the empty tomb. That should have been proof positive that Jesus did exactly what He said He would do. Of one thing we can be certain: Jesus was in the heart of the earth for three days and for three nights. He Himself said it should be so (Matthew 12:40), His Word cannot be broken.

It is the commonly accepted tradition of man that Jesus was crucified on Good Friday and that He rose from the grave on Easter Sunday, but this does not add up to three days and three nights in the tomb. Men try to explain what seems to be a discrepancy here by saying that the

Jews counted any *part* of a day as a *whole* day, therefore there did not need to be definite days and nights as we know days and nights. But I declare unto you that the Word of God is eternally settled in Heaven and cannot be broken. What Jesus said He would do, He did!

..... It does not matter what religions teach, nor what teachers and preachers say. It does not matter what tradition teaches. It is the truth of the Bible that will stand the test of eternity. So, without apology I make the statement that Jesus *was not* crucified on Friday, but on Wednesday. The Bible no where says that He was crucified on Friday. Religions and traditions of men are responsible for that teaching.

You may ask, "Was not Jesus crucified on the day before the *Sabbath*? Did not the Jews ask that the legs of the crucified men (Jesus and the two thieves) be broken in order that their bodies could be taken down from the crosses before the Sabbath?" These questions, too, deserve a Bible answer. Yes, Jesus was crucified on the day before the Sabbath – but *which* Sabbath? The confusion here stems from the fact that people do not study and rightly divide the Word of Truth. For instance, many believers do not know that there were *many Sabbaths* in the Hebrew year besides the weekly Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. The Sabbaths by which the feast of the Passover was begun and ended were *particularly sacred* Sabbaths.

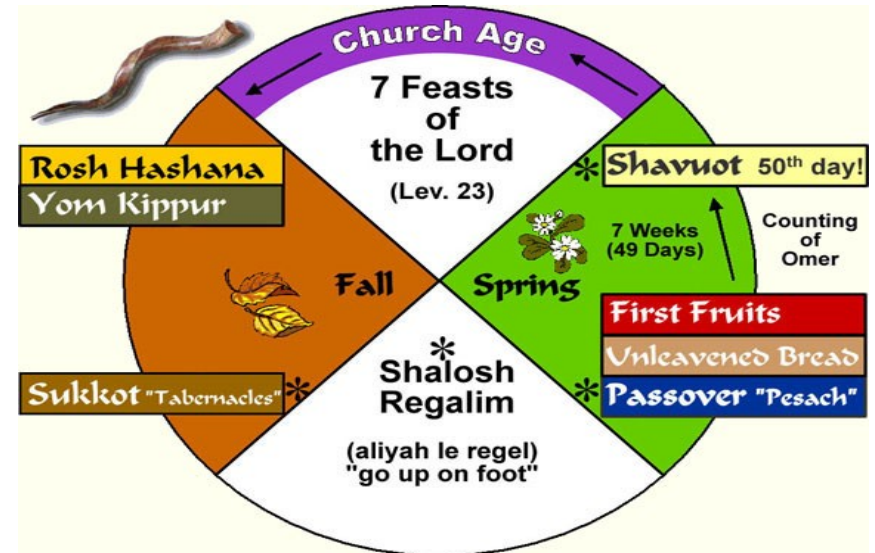
The Passover always fell on the fourteenth day of the month of Abib (**Lev 23:4-5; Deut 16:1-2**), also called *Nisan* (**see Neh 2:1; Esther 3:7**). *It corresponds to our month of April*. So, although Israel observed the

Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month of their year, it stands to reason that while the *date* did not change, the Passover did not always fall on the same *day* every year. For illustration of this statement we might look at our *fourth of July*. That particular day is always the fourth day of the month of July – but it is not always on the same day of the week. The *day* varies but the *date* is always the same. The same is true of our Thanksgiving Day – it always come up the *fourth Thursday* in November, but that Thursday does not always come on the same *date*.

In like manner, the Passover was always the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year but it was not always on the same day of the week. If Passover was on Monday one year, it would be on Tuesday the next year, and so on. All Bible teaching having to do with the crucifixion of Jesus points to the fact that the Passover that year began on Thursday, therefore Jesus was crucified on *Wednesday*, not Friday. He “gave up the ghost” on Wednesday afternoon. **John 19:31 The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and [that] they might be taken away.**

In this verse just quoted from John's Gospel we are plainly told that the Sabbath following the Lord's crucifixion was not an ordinary Sabbath, but “an HIGH Sabbath”. In other words, it was not one of the Sabbaths that always fell on the seventh day of the week. The Jewish day began at six o'clock in the evening, so the body of Jesus was placed in the tomb just before six

o'clock on Wednesday evening. The “high Sabbath” began at sunset. Counting three days and three nights that He was in the tomb, He rose from the dead sometime after sunset on Saturday, the beginning of “the first day of the week” our Sunday.



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eve day 13th	eve day 14th Passover	eve day 15th UB	eve day 16th UB	eve day 17th UB	eve day 18th UB	eve day 19th UB	eve day 20th UB	eve day 21st UB	eve day 22nd
	Lev 23:5 Num 28:16 Normal day; no sabbath restrictions. eve day	Ex 12:16 Lev 23:7 Holy convocation Ex Ex 12:8 12:10 LAMB LAMB EAT- BUR- EN NT	Pes 7:10 - the rabbis taught that the lamb was burnt on the 16th, or 17th if 16th was a sabbath					Ex 12:16 Lev 23:8 Holy convocation Ex 13:6 7th day was to be a feast	
Ex 12:15 Leaven put away		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Ex 12:18 Eve of the day, UB ceases to be eaten
Ex 12:5-8, Deut 16:8 - LAMB SLAIN Ex 12:18 - Eve of the day, UB begins to be eaten Lev 23:5 - Between evenings is the Passover	Lev 23: 6-7, Num 28:17 - 1st day of UB eve Ex 12: 29 - Midnight FB slain	Abbreviations used UB = Unleavened Bread FB = First Born Eve = evening (NB - The Jewish Day begins at sundown)						Deut 16:8 6 days to eat UB, 7th day a holy convocation - Cp Ex 12:15	
Extent of the Passover according to Ex 12:6-13		CHART 1							

credit 2

Month	What Was Done	Month	What Was Done
Abib 1	New Moon is seen.	Abib 12	
Abib 2		Abib 13	
Abib 3			Lamb is sacrificed.
Abib 4		Abib 14	Yahshua was sacrificed at 9th hour. (3:00 PM)
Abib 5			Yahshua buried before sunset.
Abib 6		Abib 15	Unleavened Bread Day 1 (Holy Day)
Abib 7		Abib 16	Unleavened Bread Day 2
Abib 8		Abib 17	Unleavened Bread Day 3
Abib 9		Abib 18	Unleavened Bread Day 4
Abib 10	Lamb is taken into the home.	Abib 19	Unleavened Bread Day 5
Abib 11		Abib 20	Unleavened Bread Day 6
		Abib 21	Unleavened Bread Day 7 (Holy Day)

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