

Did Jesus Really Die on Good Friday?

Reconciling the Resurrection with the Calendar

Have you ever wondered how Jesus could have been crucified on Good Friday and resurrected on Easter Sunday, if He was supposed to be in the grave three days and three nights? Somehow, our traditions don't make much sense, at least when you measure them by the Scriptures. What's the deal? The problem is not with the Bible. The problem is with our understanding and interpretation (*Mark 7:8, 9*).

What We Know

Here is what the Bible says about the timing of Jesus' death and resurrection:

- "Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." *Matthew 12:38-40*
- "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" *Matthew 26:59-61; 27:40; Mark 15:29*
- "We remember that when He was alive that deceiver said, 'After three days, I am to rise again.'" *Matthew 27:63*
- "The Son of Man must suffer many things, be killed, and after three days rise again." *Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34*
- "Destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another that is made without hands." *Mark 14:58; John 2:19-22*

The Problem

These passages (and there are others) clearly state that Christ was to be dead for three days before He was to be resurrected. The problem is, according to tradition, Jesus was crucified on Friday afternoon (around 3:00 PM) and buried that evening, before the Sabbath (which is Saturday for the Jews). Then, tradition says that

Jesus rose from the grave on Sunday morning (first day of the week). Thus, today, we celebrate Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday.

The difficulty here is that the interval between Friday evening and Sunday morning leaves no room for the prophecies of three days and three nights in the grave. In fact, according to tradition, Jesus would have been in the grave only two nights and one and a half days.

Through the years, commentators have offered various solutions to the problem. For example, the ancient Jews reckoned time differently than we do today. They reckoned part of a year as a full year; and the Jews reckoned part of a day as a full day, whereas we do neither of these today. Thus, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday would suffice for the three prophesied days in the grave. However, a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection do not add up to three nights in the grave. This solution works for some but seems to be a slight of hand to account for Jesus' prophecy. Perhaps there is another solution.

Another Possibility

First, we must clarify that the Bible never states that Jesus was crucified on Friday. When looking at the Scriptures (*Mark 15:42*), we find that Jesus died on the day before the Sabbath. But, because the Jewish weekly Sabbath falls on Saturday, the conclusion has been simply that Jesus died on Friday, the day before.

However, it is a well-known fact that the Jews had other Sabbath days (days of rest) besides the one on Saturdays. For example, "On the first day of Unleavened Bread, Passover, Feast of Booths, you shall do no work" (*Ex. 12:14-16; Lev. 23:1-8; Num. 28:16-18*).

The first day of Passover was always a Sabbath, no matter on which day of the week it came. The question, therefore, arises whether the Sabbath before which Jesus was crucified was

the weekly Sabbath (on Saturday) or the Passover Sabbath (the 15th of Nisan). Since Passover was during Passion Week, then we know that there had to be another Sabbath.

Does the Bible give us any indication to which Sabbaths it was referring? Yes, it does. "Now, it was the day of the preparation of the Passover," when Pontius Pilate delivered Jesus to the Jews to be crucified (*John 19:14*). Here we have evidence that Jesus was slain not on the day before the weekly Sabbath but on the day before the Passover Sabbath, meaning Jesus was crucified on Wednesday (14th of Nisan).

But wait a minute. Doesn't the Bible say that Jesus celebrated Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread with His disciples? Yes, it does, but the Bible also tells us (*John 13:1*) that the Lord's Supper was held before the first day of Passover (13th of Nisan). Why would John tell us that? Jesus was to be killed the next day, the 14th, the day before Passover began.

Therefore, it is possible that Jesus died about sunset on Wednesday. Then, 72 hours later, exactly three days and three nights, at the beginning of the first day of the week, Sunday (or Saturday at sunset), Jesus rose from the grave. The Bible verifies this fact, because when the women visited the tomb just before dawn on Sunday, meaning during the night or as soon as the weekly Sabbath was over, they found the grave already empty.

There's More!

In *Luke 24:13-21*, there is a story recorded of two men walking "that very day" (resurrection day) on the road to Emmaus, when Jesus joined them and discussed the events of the week, which included His own death, burial, and resurrection. In Verse 21, one of the men said that it had been three days since the Messiah was killed. According to the traditional account of these events (the Friday crucifixion), three days would not have passed yet. But, with a Wednesday crucifixion, three days had more than passed for this quote to be accurate. Wednesday evening to Saturday evening is 72 hours or three days and nights. Sunday, the

first day of the week, would have begun the fourth day.

Perhaps the most compelling information to support the Wednesday crucifixion is Passover itself. There are many events and people in the Old Testament that represent a type of Christ or a foreshadowing of His coming. One of the most interesting Old Testament types is the event of Passover. If we take just exactly what the Bible says, that Jesus was slain before the Passover Sabbath, the type is fulfilled in every way. But if we take the traditional account of the Friday crucifixion, the type fails.

- Jesus was the Lamb without blemish (*Exodus 12:3-5*).
- He was chosen as the Lamb for the people on the 10th of Nisan (as God instructed), which would have been the previous Sabbath according to the calendar. John tells us (*12:1*) that Jesus came to Bethany to stay with Lazarus six days before Passover (the following Thursday, 15th of Nisan), which would have been Friday, the 9th.
- Then, John says (*12:12*) that Jesus walked into Jerusalem the next day, and the people welcomed Him with palm leaves (Palm Sunday). This was Sabbath, the 10th of Nisan, and in essence the people were choosing their Lamb for the slaughter by hailing Him as their coming King to redeem them from bondage.
- Furthermore, if we accept the Friday crucifixion and the triumphal entry occurring on the Sabbath (10th of Nisan), that would mean that Jesus had to walk from Jericho to Jerusalem in one day, which was by law too far to walk on the Sabbath. But Jesus did not do that. John said He walked from Jericho to Bethany and then from Bethany to Jerusalem. In *Luke 24:50* and *Acts 1:12*, we are told that the distance from Bethany to Jerusalem is a "Sabbath day's journey," which of course is legal to travel on the Sabbath day.

- Also, it was the night before, after dinner, which would have been sunset Friday night (or Sabbath, *Matthew 26:6-16; Mark 14:3-11*), that Judas went to the chief priests and offered to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Thus, in essence, the Lamb that was to be slain was purchased on the 10th of Nisan for thirty pieces of silver (which was prophesied in *Matthew 26:15; Zechariah 11:12*).
- Not a bone of the Passover Lamb was to be broken, and though Jesus suffered a most agonizing death on the cross, not a bone of His body was broken (*John 19:36; Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20*).
- The Passover Lamb was to be slain on the 14th of Nisan (between the evenings, *Exodus 12:6*, on the night before Passover began), which was Wednesday in 30 AD. Jesus was crucified at the same time thousands were killing their Passover Lamb. Here we have more meaning given to the phrase, "It is finished!" No more sacrificing!

Everything in the Scriptures is perfectly harmonized by a Wednesday crucifixion.

Does It Really Matter?

In the big picture, knowing what day of the week that Jesus died is not important. We know what happened that week, and we know why it happened. Jesus took our place on the cross so that we might have salvation through Him, and that is good news no matter what day of the week it is!

For more information, go to www.HebrewCalendar.org and type in 30 AD for the year. The 14th of Nisan (Passover), the day Jesus died, is on a Wednesday of that year.

Also, visit www.BiblicalCalendarProof.com, for more research on dates aligning with Scripture.