



The Year and Day of the Crucifixion

By

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Introduction

This booklet was written to accompany the author's study of Daniel Chapter 9. In verse 27 we read that *"... He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering;"* The identity of the He is much debated. Some believe that 'he' refers to the Antichrist who will appear at the end of this age. Others identify the 'He' as Messiah the Prince. How that question is answered determines the interpretation of the prophecy. What follows adds support to the view that the reference is to Jesus the Messiah.

We will find that Jesus was crucified in the middle of a seven day week and a sabbatical week of seven years. He fulfilled the Passover and ended the need for the sacrificial system.

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the pivotal event of history. Through His sacrificial death on the cross our sins are atoned for and reconciliation with God made possible. Nothing should take our focus away from what Jesus did for all those who place their trust in Him.

According to tradition Jesus was crucified on a Friday in either the year 30 AD or 33 AD. Although the events leading up to the death of Jesus are recorded in great detail the gospel writers appear to have regarded the timing as either self evident or not important.

Luke in his account takes great care to provide background information to date both the birth of Jesus and the beginning of His ministry. Over time this historical detail has become less clear opening the way for debate over which year was intended.

Likewise within the Gospel accounts there are some apparent contradictions with regard to the order of events. This has led to different understandings of the chronology of the final week.

The year and day of the week on which Jesus died are not central issues of our faith. This booklet is not intended to be controversial. It is written in the belief that by re-examining this issue we gain a greater understanding how Jesus' death fulfilled prophecy. It also confirms the reliability of scripture.

Whether you agree or disagree with the view in this booklet is not of major importance. What is important is to know that through faith in Jesus Christ your sins can be forgiven.

Jesus Christ came from the Father and took human form. He lived among us and in time gave His life as a willing sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sin. He died, was buried and on the third day was resurrected from the dead. He ascended to heaven and will come again. That coming is the blessed hope of all who believe in Him. I trust that what follows will deepen our faith in these glorious events.

The Jewish Calendar

The Jews follow a lunar calendar with leap months inserted to correct the short-fall with the solar calendar. Each month commenced with the sighting of the new moon. The lunar month is approximately 29.5 days. Therefore the new moon might be sighted on either the 29th or 30th day of the old month.

At the time Jesus lived, the start of a new month was established by the Sanhedrin. On the testimony of credible witnesses, they decided the day on which the moon had been sighted and the new month had begun.

Although the dates of some of the historical facts have become clouded by history there is no doubt about the orbit of the moon. We can exactly calculate when the new moon could have been seen in Jerusalem for any month at the beginning of the first century AD.

In this study we are particularly interested in the sighting of the first new moon after the spring equinox. That moon determined the beginning of the month of Nisan. It was on the 14th day of that month that the Passover Lamb was sacrificed. Once the date is known the day of the week can be determined.

The Phases of the Moon

The following table is based on data from U.S. Naval Observatory Astronomical Applications Department. It sets out the days of the week on which the new moon at the start of Nisan could have been sighted in the years when Jesus may have been crucified.

The day of the week on which the 1 st Nisan fell.					
29 AD	30 AD	31 AD	32 AD	33 AD	34 AD
3 rd Day	7 th Day	5 th Day	3 rd Day	2 nd Day	6 th Day
Tuesday	Saturday	Thursday	Tuesday	Monday	Friday

From this table we can establish that the 14th Nisan fell on the following days of the week in the years when Jesus may have been crucified.

The day of the week on which the 14 th Nisan fell.					
29 AD	30 AD	31 AD	32 AD	33 AD	34 AD
Monday	Friday	Wednesday	Monday	Sunday	Thursday

In 34 AD the Sanhedrin would have adjusted the calendar using what was called the ADU rule. This delayed the start of the month one day in order to ensure that one Sabbath does not immediately follow another. Therefore in 34 AD the 14th would have fallen on a Friday.

From this table the years 29, 32, and 33 AD can be discounted as possible years for the crucifixion because the Monday or Sunday clearly don't fit the scriptural account.

This leaves us with a choice of 30, 31 and 34 AD. Two of the dates fit with Jesus being crucified on a Friday while one date points to a Wednesday crucifixion.

Which day best fits the scriptural account?

To determine the year in which our Lord was crucified we need to understand both the timetable of three spring feasts and also the scriptural account.

The timetable of the Spring Feasts

We know with certainty that Jesus died at Passover. This was the first of the three great festivals of the Jews when the nation was expected to gather in Jerusalem to worship God.

Passover was celebrated in the Spring in the month of Nisan. The Feast began fourteen days after the Sanhedrin had established that the new moon had been sighted. On that day the Passover lamb was sacrificed as a memorial to the events of the Exodus when God led Israel out of Egypt. In Egypt the lamb was killed and its blood painted on the door posts of the houses in which the Israelites were gathered. Under the covering of the blood the people were protected from the destroying angel who took the lives of all the first born males.

The 13th and 14th Nisan were the days of preparation for Passover. The historian Josephus records that due to the large numbers of lambs to be slaughtered, [his estimate was 250,000] the priests started to kill the lambs on the 13th. During the preparation all leaven was removed from the houses. On the 14th in the Temple at 3.00 pm the Passover lamb for the nation was slaughtered. The High Priest would shout the words 'it is finished' as the lamb was slain.

On the 15th Nisan at the start of the day in the evening the Passover Seder (meal) was eaten. The meal marked the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened bread which lasted seven days. The days which began and ended the feast were set aside as Sabbaths. During the week there would also be the normal weekly Sabbath.

On the first day of the new week, following the weekly Sabbath, the Feast of First Fruits was celebrated. On that day the first of the barley was harvested from a field on the Mount of Olives. The grain was then ground into flour and two loaves baked, which were presented before the Lord in the Temple. [Leviticus 23: 4 – 14].

Therefore in addition to the weekly Sabbath both the 15th and 21st of Nisan were Sabbaths on which no work was to be done.

The Scriptural Account

The scriptural account is at first confusing. Was Jesus crucified on the day of preparation or the first day of unleavened bread?

"My time is at hand; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples." Matthew 26:18. Jesus wanted to keep the Passover with His disciples. Therefore many have assumed that the last meal he took with them was a Passover Seder. This would mean that He was crucified following a Passover Seder on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread [15th Nisan].

The main translations of the Bible are confusing with regard to the day on which Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples. Typical is the NIV's translation of Mark 14:12. *"On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb"*. This translation turns the verse into a clear reference to the 14th, or is it the 15th Nisan? It is an emphatic translation, which tries to make things clear, but in reality introduces unnecessary confusion. According to the law the Passover lamb was sacrificed on

the day before the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They were not the same day.

In order to reduce the confusion, the following quotes are taken from Jay P. Green's literal translations:

"And on the first of unleavened the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You desire we should prepare for You to eat the passover?" Matthew 26:17

"And on the first day of the unleavened, when they killed the passover, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You desire that going we may prepare that You may eat the passover?" Mark 14:12

"And the day of unleavened came, on which the passover must be killed." Luke 22:7

There is no mention of Feast or Sacrifice. The literal translation is lower key. The preparations for the feast of unleavened bread would start well before the 15th Nisan. The houses had to be swept and cleaned and all leaven removed. Then at the beginning of the 14th a final search was made to remove any leaven that had been missed. If the first of unleavened is connected to the killing of the Passover, it must refer to the preparations not the feast itself.

Not a Passover meal

There are a number of reasons for doubting that the meal that Jesus ate with His disciples was the Passover.

First in John 13: 29 the disciples thought that Judas was being sent out to make preparations for the Passover.

Second the New Testament manuscripts never use the word for unleavened bread in the references to this meal. A Passover meal cannot be celebrated with leavened bread. In the earliest texts it is leavened bread [artos] which Jesus broke and shared with His disciples not unleavened bread. Matt 26: 26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19 all use the word for leavened bread, as does 1 Corinthians 11: 22 – 28. Jesus did not celebrate a Passover meal with His disciples but took the

opportunity to institute a new totally Christian feast. It would be a memorial to remind us of His sacrifice for our sin. Elsewhere the word for unleavened bread [azumos – as in Matt 26: 17] is used in reference to the Jewish feast. Therefore this is not a mistake made out of ignorance.

Third the leaders of the people had not eaten the Passover. *“They led Jesus therefore from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium in order that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.” John 18:28*

Fourth it was not acceptable to the Jews to execute someone on a high holy day, which the day would have been if it was the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread.

But Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples

In answer to the above some will protest that Jesus distinctly said that He was eating the Passover with his disciples.

“And He said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer,” Luke 22: 15

It is common to refer to the evening meal eaten at the beginning of the 15th Nisan as the Passover. In scripture it is not the meal but the sacrifice of the lamb which is called the Passover.

“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them pick and take lambs for yourselves according to your families and kill the Passover.” Exodus 12: 21

“Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the Lord your God from the flock or herd....”Deuteronomy 16: 2

“Then they slaughtered the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month.” 2 Chronicles 30: 15

“And they slaughtered the Passover of all the descendents of captivity,” Ezra 6: 20

The feast looks ahead to Jesus who would in His sacrifice fulfill the Passover.

"For indeed Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us." 1 Cor 5: 7

When Jesus said that He wished to eat the Passover with His disciple He was speaking about Himself. He was not referring to the meal which, if He had not been in the tomb, they would be sharing the following evening. He was celebrating in advance of His own sacrifice which would fulfil the Law.

His body and blood would now replace Passover. Every time we come together to share a meal in fellowship with other believers we are to remember His sacrifice. Remission of sins and our new life in Christ is entirely due to His body and blood. We remember His sacrifice until the glorious day on which He returns.

The Day of Preparation

"And when evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath," Mark 15:42

"And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. And it was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin". Luke 23: 53,54

"Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" John 19:21

The Jews therefore, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. John 19:31

The above verses confirm that Jesus was crucified on the day of preparation, the day before the start of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Having established that Jesus was crucified on the day of preparation we now need to know the day of the week.

Which Day?

Traditionally Friday has been accepted as the day of the Crucifixion. All the above quotes could fit a Friday crucifixion. This would mean that the year Jesus was crucified, the Sabbath of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the weekly Sabbath coincided.

One reason for questioning a Friday crucifixion is that Scripture indicates that there were more than one Sabbath during the time when Jesus lay in the grave.

Now after the Sabbaths, Matthew 28:1, I have given a literal translation of this phrase in which the word Sabbaths is plural. There was not just one Sabbath but two. Two Sabbaths explains the apparent conflict in scripture between Luke 23:55, 56 "Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed after, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid, and they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment." and Mark 16:1-2, "And when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen." In one verse the women buy the spices before the Sabbath in the other they buy them after the Sabbath. The simple answer is that there was a day intervening between the first and second Sabbath.

From the above we conclude that Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday. His body lay in the tomb Wednesday night, Thursday night and Friday night. He rose from the dead Saturday evening at the beginning of the first day of the week. His own words were fulfilled: *"for 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 12:40.*

In that week the Thursday was the first day of Unleavened Bread and therefore a Sabbath and Saturday the weekly Sabbath. His resurrection was on the first day of the week the Feast of First Fruits.

If the crucifixion took place on a Wednesday neither 30 AD nor 34 AD fit the timetable of events. This leaves a Wednesday in the year 31 AD as the only date which fits the scriptural account. The Wednesday of Passover week 31 AD also fulfills prophecy.

The Sabbatical Years

The Jewish calendar is based on a seven year cycle. The seventh year is a Sabbath year when the land can enjoy a rest.

When Ezra returned from the exile in Babylon he re-instituted the sabbatical cycle. In 1856 The German scientist Benedict Zuckermann published a table of sabbatical years in ancient times, which has become the accepted basis for calculating the sabbatical years. According to Zuckerman's table both 27 AD and 34 AD were Sabbatical years.

Jesus began His ministry in 27 AD at the beginning of a Sabbatical of cycle of years. He was crucified at Passover in 31 AD the midpoint of the sabbatical cycle.

This fulfils the prophecy in Daniel that in the middle of the week He [Messiah the Prince] will put a stop to sacrifice and offering. Daniel 9: 27. Following the death of Jesus the need for sacrifice came to an end.

At the start of His ministry, Jesus confirmed God's covenant with Israel by coming to them. In the middle He, by His own blood, brought the sacrificial system to an end. He became the sacrifice made once for all to cleanse us from our sins.

Chronology of the Events of the Passion Week

Note the numbered days refer to the Jewish day starting at 6.00 pm in the evening and running through to the next evening.

Main Scriptures	Event	Also found in
	Friday	
John 12: 1	Six days before Passover Jesus goes to Bethany	
	Day 1	
Jn. 11:55-12:11	Supper at Bethany [Mt 26: 6 – 13, Mk 14: 3-9 Both place this event on Day 3 Monday evening]	
	Sunday	
Mt 21: 1 - 7,	Jesus sends for the colt	Mk 11: 1-7, Lk 19:29-35
Mt 21: 8 - 9	Triumphal entry to Jerusalem Jesus foresees the destruction of the Jerusalem	Mk11: 8-10, Lk 19:36-40, John 12:12-16 Lk 19: 41 – 44,
Mt 21: 10 - 11	The crowds recognize Jesus	John 12, 17 – 19
Mt 21: 12 - 13	Jesus cleanses the Temple	Lk 19: 45-46
Mt 21: 14-16	The blind, lame and children praise Jesus The purpose of Christ's death	Jn 12: 20-36
	Day 2	
Mt 21: 17	Jesus returns to Bethany	Mk 11:11
	Monday	
Mt 21: 18 - 22	The unfruitful fig tree Jesus cleanses the Temple	Mk 11:12-14, 20 - 26 Mk 11:15 -17,

Mt 21: 23 - 27	Jesus' authority questioned	Mk 11:27-33 , Lk 20:1-8
	The plot develops	Mk 11:18 , Lk 19:47,48
	Parables in the Temple	
Mt 21: 28 - 32	The two sons	
Mt 21: 33 - 41	Murderous Tenants	Mk 12: 1 – 9, Lk 20: 9 - 16
Mt 21: 42 - 44	The rejected stone	Mk 12: 10 -11, Lk 20: 17 - 18
Mt 21: 45 -46	The religious leaders angered	Mk 12: 12, Lk 20: 19
Mt 22: 1 – 14	The wedding banquet	
	Questioned	
Mt 22: 15 -22	Paying Taxes	Mk 12: 13 – 17, Lk 20: 20 - 26
Mt 22: 23 - 33	Resurrection Questioned	Mk 22: 18 – 27, Lk 20: 27 - 38
Mt 22: 34 - 40	The greatest commandment	Mk 12: 28 – 34 , Lk 20: 39 - 40
Mt 22: 41 - 46	Whose son is the Christ?	Mk 12: 35 – 37 , Lk 20: 41 - 11
Mt 23: 1 - 12	Self righteousness condemned	Mk 12: 38 – 40, Lk 20: 45 - 47
Mt 23: 13 - 36	Woe to you teachers of the law	
	Disbelief	Jn 12: 37 - 41
	Final public appeal	Jn: 12 42 - 50
Mt 23: 37 - 39	Lament over Jerusalem	
	The widows offering	Mk 12: 41 – 44 , Lk 21: 1 - 4
Jesus leaves Jerusalem – the sermon on the Mount of Olives		
Mt 24,25	Prophecies of what is to come.	Mk 13: 1 – 31, Lk 21: 5 - 36
	Jesus teaches at the temple	Lk 21:37 - 38

Mt 26: 1 - 2 Prophecy of crucifixion

Mt 26: 3 - 5 The plots against Jesus

Day 3

Jesus anointed at Bethany is placed here in Mt 26: 6 – 13, Mk 14: 3-9. Both identify this event as what tipped the balance with Judas in his decision to betray Jesus.

Mt 26: 14 - 16 Judas decides to betray Jesus

Tuesday

Mt 26: 17 - 19 Preparations for the Lord's Supper
Mk 12: 17 -19,
Lk 22:7 - 13

Day 4

The Lord's Supper
The importance of the occasion
Lk 22: 14 -16

Mt 26: 20 - 25 Jesus Predicts betrayal
Mk 14: 17 - 21

Mt 26: 26 - 29 The memorial
Mk 14: 22 - 25,
Lk 22: 17 - 20
Apostles dispute
Lk 22: 24 - 30

Jesus washes the disciples feet
Jn 13: 1 - 17

Jesus Predicts betrayal
Jn 13: 18 -21

Identity of the betrayer
Lk 22: 21 – 23,
Jn 13: 22 - 30

Mt 26: 31 - 35 Prediction of Peter's denial
Mk 14:27 - 31,
Lk 22: 31 - 43,
Jn 13: 31 - 35

A call for love
Jesus going to prepare a place
Jn 13: 36 – 14: 7

Philip wants to see the Father
Jn 14: 8 - 15

The promise of the Holy Spirit
Jn 14: 16 - 31

Fulfilment of Prophecy
Lk 22: 35 - 38

Mt 26:30, 36-46	Gethsemane	Mk 14:32 - 42, Lk 22:40 - 46
	The vine and the branches	Jn 15: 1 - 17
	The world will hate you	Jn 15: 18 – 16:4
	The work of the Holy Spirit	Jn 16: 5 - 16
	Grief will turn to joy	Jn 16: 17 -33
	Jesus prays for His disciples	Jn 17
Mt 26: 47 - 55	Jesus arrested	Mk 14:43-50, Lk 22:47-53, Jn 18:1-11
	Wednesday [probably about midnight]	
Mt 26: 57 – 67	Before the Sanhedrin	Mk 14: 53 – 65, Jn 18: 12-14,19 - 24
Mt 26: 69 - 75	Peter disowns Jesus	Mk 14:69-72, Lk 22:55-62, Jn 18:15-18, 25-27
Mt 27: 1 - 10	Judas hangs himself	
Mt 27: 11 - 23	Jesus before Pilate	Mk 15:2-14, Lk 23:2 - 6,13 - 23, Jn 18:29-19:16
	Pilate sends Jesus to Herod	Lk 23: 7 - 12
Mt 27: 24 - 26	Pilate washes his hands of Jesus	Mk 15: 15, Lk 23: 24 – 25, Jn 19:17
Mt 27: 27 - 30	The soldiers mock Jesus	Mk 15: 16 – 19, Jn 19: 1-3
	Pilate present Jesus to the crowds	Jn 19: 4 - 6
	Jesus questioned again	Jn 19: 7 - 15
Mt 27: 31 - 32	Jesus is led out	Mk 15: 20 - 22, Lk 23:26, Jn 19:17
	The women weep for Jesus	Lk 23: 27 - 31
Mt 27: 33 - 44	The Crucifixion	Mk 15:21 - 32, Lk 23:26 - 43, Jn 19:17-24

Mt 27: 45 - 56	The death of Jesus	Mk 15: 33 – 41, Lk 23: 44 - 49
Mt 27: 57 - 61	The burial of Jesus	Mk 15: 12 - 47, Lk 23:50 – 56. Jn 19: 38 - 42
<u>Days 5 - 7</u>	Thursday - Saturday	
Mt 27: 62 - 66	The guard at the tomb	
	Sunday	
Mt 28: 1	After the <u>Sabbaths</u>	
Mt 28: 2 - 4	The stone rolled away	Mk 16: 1 – 4, Lk 24: 1 - 3
Mt 28: 5 - 7	The resurrection announced	Mk 16:5 - 7
	Women reminded of prophecy	Lk 24: 4 - 8
	Women go away fearful	Mk 16: 8
	Peter and John told	Jn 20: 2
	Peter and John at the tomb	Lk 24: 12, Jn 20: 3 - 10
	Jesus with Mary Magdalene	Mk 16: 9, Jn 20: 11 - 17
Mt 28: 8 - 10	Jesus appears to the women	
Mt 28: 11 - 15	The cover up	
	Women tell of the appearance	Mk 16:10-11, Lk 24:9-11, Jn 20:18
	The road to Emmaus	Mk 16: 12-13, Lk 24:13-35
	Jesus appears to the disciples	Mk 16:14, Lk 24:36-44, Jn 20:19 -23

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Our Beliefs

We believe: in one God eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that Jesus Christ is God manifest as man, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His atoning death and bodily resurrection, His ascension into heaven and His return in power and glory to judge the earth.

We believe: that salvation is only through faith in shed blood of Jesus Christ which paid the debt of our sin, that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to lead a victorious Christian life, that all people who have ever lived will be raised from the dead some to eternal judgement and some to eternal life.

We believe that the Bible does not just contain but is the uniquely inspired and inerrant word of God. The Bible is the revelation of God's truth to men, truth which has been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit. We believe that the true meaning of scripture is the natural and most obvious interpretation. We pray that the Holy Spirit may lead us into that understanding and enable us to hold firmly to the truth.

The study of the prophetic events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ has suffered from many imposed systems of interpretation which have brought about considerable confusion within the church. We pray that the simplicity of the teaching of Scripture with regard to the Second Coming will be restored.

We pray that any who read this book who have not already trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ will be challenged to make that commitment. Further help is available from the email address below:

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