



What Day Was Jesus Crucified On?

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What day was Jesus Christ actually crucified on? If you are like most people, you probably answered, "Friday." After all, that's what the Bible says, right?

Well, I used to believe that, too. That is, until I got to thinking about a specific, prophetic statement that Jesus made regarding His death, burial, and resurrection. In Matthew 12:38 the Bible tells us that "certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees" said to Jesus, "...Master, we would see a sign from thee."

Jesus answered in verses 39-40, "...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: 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."

Now, if Jesus was crucified on Friday, we have a problem. Jesus would have been in the tomb ("the heart of the earth") Friday night through Sunday morning. That gives us two days, Saturday and Sunday, and two nights, Friday night and Saturday night. Of course, we could be generous and count parts of days as full days, which is not an uncommon or unreasonable thing to do. Unfortunately, while that does give us three days, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, it still only gives us two nights, Friday night and Saturday night. Of course, this would not be a problem if Jesus had not specifically said that He would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Not simply three days, but three days AND three nights. Try as we may, there is simply no way to fit three days and three nights between Friday night and Sunday morning.

The problem doesn't stop there, either. If Jesus was indeed crucified on Friday, then Jesus was wrong when He claimed in Matthew 12:39-40 that He would be in the tomb three days and three nights. Failing to fulfill His own prophecy would mean Jesus is a false prophet and we should not pay attention to anything else He has to say. After all, Deuteronomy 18:22 says, "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him." The only other alternative is that the Bible contradicts itself or is in error, either of which doesn't do much to bolster the credibility of either Jesus or the Bible.

So, if Jesus was not crucified on Friday, why does the Bible say that He was in Luke 23:50-56 and John 19:31? These passages very clearly tell us that Jesus was crucified on the day before the Sabbath. And, since the Sabbath is on Saturday, isn't that proof positive that Jesus was crucified on Friday? Well, even if it were we would still have the same problem of how to get three days and three nights in between the crucifixion and the resurrection and the doubt that it casts upon the credibility of both the Bible and Jesus. However, a closer examination of John 19:31 reveals that

there was something different about the Sabbath following the day Jesus was crucified. It was a high Sabbath: "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." (emphasis added). Consequently, as other passages indicate, there were two Sabbaths that week, a high Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath, with a day in between the two.

If you are keeping track, two Sabbaths that week, with a day in between them, means Jesus must have been crucified on Wednesday, not Friday. That, of course, gives us plenty of time to have three days, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, and three nights, Wednesday night, Thursday night, and Friday night, between the crucifixion and the resurrection.

But wait a minute, doesn't a Wednesday crucifixion conflict with Jesus' prophecy of three days and three nights as well? Didn't Jesus rise from the grave Sunday morning at sunrise? If so, what about Saturday night and Sunday? Too many days and nights is just as much of a problem as too few. And, while we are at it, if Jesus was crucified on Wednesday rather than Friday, how can you fit in all the events in that occurred between Palm Sunday and the crucifixion?

Well, in an effort to make sense of the Passion Week, and to fit in all the events surrounding the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, I have endeavored to come up with a suitable timeline, drawing only on the information given in the Bible. While looking at this, please keep in mind that not all of the events recorded in the Gospels are given in a strict chronological fashion. Matthew, for instance, seems to imply that Jesus cleared out the Temple on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:1-22). Mark, however, makes it clear that it was the next day (Mark 11:1-26). Also, for the same reasons, the feast in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, although included in the text after Jesus talks to His disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs of His coming, is never explicitly said to have occurred chronologically at that time. The Gospel accounts of the events of the Passion Week frequently jump about, going back and forth, adding various details here and there.

Another thing to keep in mind is the way days and hours are counted in the Bible. The Jewish day, for instance, ran from sundown to sundown, not midnight to midnight as does ours. As a result, the first day of the week starts Saturday at sunset and concludes at sunset on Sunday, at which time the second day of the week begins, and so on throughout the week. Also, prior to the invention of the clock, sunrise was always reckoned to be 6:00 AM, the time when the sun was at its highest as 12:00 PM, and sunset as 6:00 PM. In addition, the hours of the day were reckoned from sunrise, which makes midmorning the third hour of the day, or 9:00 AM, and midafternoon the ninth hour of the day, or 3:00 PM.

I'm not claiming that my timeline is perfect, but here it is:

Sunday (Palm Sunday)

- Jesus travels into Jerusalem from Bethphage on a borrowed donkey; the people line the road with palm branches and garments crying, "Hosanna!" (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-18).
- Jesus enters the Temple, looks around, and then, in the evening, heads to Bethany with the 12 disciples (Mark 11:11).

Monday

- Jesus returns to Jerusalem in the morning, curses the fig tree along the way (Matthew 21:18-19; Mark 11:12-14).
- Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44).
- Jesus enters the Temple and cleanses it (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46).
- Jesus teaches and heals people in the Temple (Matthew 21:14-16; Luke 19:47).
- Sometime Monday, or possibly Tuesday, the Chief Priests and Scribes decide to kill Jesus (Matthew 26:2-5; Mark 11:18; 14:1-2; Luke 19:47-48; 22:1-2; John 12:19).
- Jesus heads back to Bethany in the evening (Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:19; 14:3).
- Feast at house of Simon the Leper possibly occurred this night; Judas Iscariot becomes disgruntled (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:2-9 [John's account could be an earlier, similar feast—possibly the previous Saturday night]).

Tuesday

- Jesus returns to Jerusalem in the morning; disciples notice and comment on the fig tree which is now dried up; Jesus teaches the disciples about prayer (Matthew 21:20-22; Mark 11:20-26).
- Jesus teaches in Jerusalem and debates with the Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, Scribes, and others (Matthew 21:23-23:39; Mark 11:27-12:44; Luke 20:1-21:4).
- Sometime during the day Judas Iscariot meets with the Chief Priests and Scribes and agrees with them to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6).
- Jesus and His disciples talk about the Temple buildings and then, late in the day, they go to the Mount of Olives where Jesus teaches them about the signs and circumstances regarding His return and the end of the world (Matthew 24:1-25:46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-37).
- Jesus and His Disciples return into Jerusalem that night to observe an early Passover Feast (not the actual Passover which would not be until Wednesday night) where Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:1-2; 17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-38; John 13:1-17:26).
- After the supper Jesus and His Disciples return to the Mount of Olives where Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30-44; Mark 14:26-40; Luke 22:39-44; John 18:1).
- First Day of Unleavened Bread, the day of the preparation of the Passover Sabbath when the Passover lamb was killed, starts at sunset and ends at sunset the next day (Mark 14:12; 15:42; Luke 22:7).

Wednesday

- In the early hours of the morning, Jesus is betrayed by Judas, taken into custody, falsely accused, condemned, beaten, and led to Calvary (Matthew 26:45-27:32; Mark 14:41-15:21; Luke 22:45-23:32; John 18:2-19:16).
- Jesus crucified at 9:00 AM (third hour) and dies at 3:00 PM (ninth hour), the same time that the Passover lambs were being killed (Matthew 27:45; Mark 14:12; 15:22-41; Luke 23:34-49; John 19:17-37).
- Jesus taken from the cross and laid in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb prior to sunset and the start of the Passover Sabbath (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-55; John 19:31,38-42).
- Jewish Passover begins at sunset (John 19:42).

Thursday

- Passover Sabbath ends at sunset.
- Following the Passover Sabbath the Chief Priests and Pharisees ask Pilot to secure the tomb (Matthew 27:62-64).
- Pilot grants the Jews request, the tomb is sealed and a guard is set (Matthew 27:65-66).
- Jesus has now been in the tomb one night and one day.

Friday

- During the day, the women buy and prepare spices and ointments to anoint the body of Jesus but are unable to go to the tomb until after the weekly Sabbath (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56).
- The regular weekly Sabbath begins at sunset
- Jesus has now been in the tomb two nights and two days.

Saturday

- Weekly Sabbath ends at sunset
- Jesus has now been in the tomb three days and three nights, in accordance with His prophecy recorded in Matthew 12:39-40.
- Resurrection takes place sometime after sunset, which is the start of the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:9).

Sunday

- Women arrive at the tomb prior to sunrise on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2-3; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).
- The stone is rolled away and an angel invites the women to see that the tomb is empty (Matthew 28:2-8; Mark 16:4-8; Luke 24:2-12).
- Jesus begins to appear to people after His resurrection (Matthew 28:9-10, Mark 16:9-14; Luke 24:13-43; John 20:11-23).

I'm not saying that this is the definitive chronology of the Passion Week. Some may argue over the timing of some of the events or even claim that I divided up or sorted out some of the passages referenced incorrectly. Nevertheless, it makes a lot more sense than trying to cram three days and three nights between Friday evening and Sunday morning. (Go ahead and try. The best I can come up with is three days and two nights.) Ultimately, however, no matter what day you believe Jesus was crucified on, Wednesday or Friday, you have to reconcile your position with the Bible. And in particular, with Jesus' prophecy concerning His death, burial, and resurrection in Matthew 12:39-40:

"...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: 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."

If you cannot fit three days and three nights between Friday night and Sunday morning, then either Jesus was wrong or the Friday crucifixion date is wrong.