

Is The Traditional Chronology of Jesus' Final Week Accurate?

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Many things about the life and ministry of Jesus have been confused and misinterpreted by Bible expositors through the centuries of the Church, but perhaps no subject has been less understood and more poorly commented upon than this last Passover in the earthly life of Jesus. It is of the greater concern because nothing in the life and ministry of Jesus is more urgent or important than this. It is essential that we get this right; and in order to do that I want to make some defining comments about Passover before moving on.

The First Passover in Egypt

The first mention of Passover in the Bible is in Exodus 12. Just now we are not going to teach lessons from the Passover about the atonement and about the sanctified life. At the moment we are seeking to establish the order and continuity of Passover so that we can apply it accurately to this last week of Jesus' earthly life. First of all we want to look at verses 1-3:

Ex 12:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying,

Ex 12:2 This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.

Ex 12:3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:

In these verses we are given several important pieces of information. The first is that this month is, from this day forward, the first month of the Jewish year. This is significant because it had not been the first month of the year prior to this. (We will not get off on to that now because the situation with respect to the months of the year prior to this is not germane to the point of the moment.) This teaches us, by prophetic, metaphorical, allegorical and symbolic testimony about the new birth and the life that begins when we are delivered from the bondage of sin through the blood of the Lamb of God.

The second thing we learn is that the sacrificial lamb was taken on the 10th day of the month, four days before Passover began. (There are lessons to apply to that four day period with respect to Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem as the King, but we will not go into that here because we want to stay with the effort to define Passover in terms of time and events.)

Next we want to look at verse 6:

Ex 12:6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.

This verse establishes for us in very clear language that Passover began on the evening of the 14th day of the first month.

Now we move onto verse 14:

Ex 12:14 And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.

This verse tells us that there could be no change in God's prescription for the Passover as long as Israel remained a covenant people. These instructions were to be followed to perpetuity. Verse 15 says:

Ex 12:15 Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.

We learn from this verse that Passover is seven days long. Then in verse 16 we are told:

Ex 12:16 And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you.

Thus we see that the first day of Passover, from sundown on the 14th day of the month until sundown on the 15th day of the month, was a holy convocation (or formal assembly). We will see shortly in the book of Leviticus that this day was a feast day, in fact the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which Jesus will eat with His disciples in the upper room (Jesus defined it as *eating the Passover*). We also learn from this verse that there is another feast, another holy convocation on the seventh day. We remember that the High Priest, in their schemes to take Jesus and kill Him, have declared that He must not be put to death on the feast day. It is the feast of the seventh day to which the High Priest is referring.

Verses 17 and 18 again verify for us that Passover was seven days long from the evening of the 14th day to the evening of the 21st of when they say:

Ex 12:17 And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever.

Ex 12:18 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.

In Leviticus 23:4-8, God is establishing to the great man Moses the feasts of the Lord and the holy convocations. Moses is telling the people exactly what these days entail and when they shall be. In verses 4-6 he says:

Lev 23:4 These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.

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

Lev 23:6 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.

In Christendom through the years, the subject has been debated as to whether or not Jesus ate the Passover feast. The basis of that controversy is the argument that the feast was at the end of the seven days, and since Jesus was not alive at that time He could not have eaten the Passover feast. The verses that we have just read make it unmistakably clear that the 15th day of the month (which was the first day of Passover from sundown on the 14th day until sundown on the 15th day) was a feast. Verse 6 says plainly that it was a Feast of Unleavened Bread. We read in Exodus that the 15th day of the month (being the first day of Passover) was indeed a holy convocation. And so now we know that the 15th day of the month (the first day of Passover from sundown on the 14th until sundown on the 15th) was both a holy convocation and a feast. That is repeated in verse 7 when it tells us that they are to have a holy convocation on the first day of Passover:

Lev 23:7 In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

Now we are told in verse 8 that there is another feast and another holy convocation on the 7th day of Passover:

Lev 23:8 But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

Particular emphasis is laid, over and over again, on the commandment that no one is to do anything on those two days except to prepare for the feasts. No other work or business of any kind is allowed. You will see the importance of that in a bit.

In Deuteronomy 16:1-7, this is verified and culminates in verse 8 when it says:

Deut 16:8 Six days thou shalt eat unleavened bread: and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work therein.

In all three of these passages there is no question and no legitimate argument that Passover was seven days long, that Jesus and His disciples ate the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the evening of the 14th, and that seven days intervene before the “Sabbath of Passover” that St. John 19:31 calls a “High Day.” Those who argue that by the time of Jesus the custom had changed in Israel, that the Passover was only two days long and that there was only one feast and it was always on Saturday are speaking in a Biblical, theological and factual vacuum.

And so we have learned some very important and instructive things from these scriptures about Passover:

1. Passover began at sundown on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish year.
2. Passover ended seven days later at sundown on the 21st day of the first month of the Jewish year.
3. There were two feasts comprehended in the seven days of Passover. They were both called holy convocations. The first was the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the first day of Passover from sundown on the 14th until sundown on the 15th. The second was a holy convocation and a feast on the seventh day. In St. John 19:31 this is called both a Sabbath and a high day.
4. Jesus and His disciples ate the feast of Passover on the first day in the upper room; which was the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
5. Jesus was not alive when the feast on the seventh day of Passover was observed.
6. By any legitimate consideration, seven days passed between the Feast of Unleavened Bread which Jesus and His disciples ate in the upper room and the feast of the seventh day which took place on the day after Jesus' crucifixion.

Nisan						1
First month of the Jewish Year						
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	Passover begins at 6pm on the 14th day, ends at 6pm on the 21st day.					

Now that we understand these things about the Passover, we want to look at the scriptures where Jesus expresses His desire and His intention to eat this Passover Feast of Unleavened Bread with His disciples, and sends them to find the upper room and to make preparations. We begin with St. Matthew 26:17-19:

Matt 26:17 Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

Matt 26:18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

Matt 26:19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

Next there is St. Mark 14:20-16:

Mark 14:12 And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?

Mark 14:13 And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him.

Mark 14:14 And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?

Mark 14:15 And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.

Mark 14:16 And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.

And finally there is St. Luke 22:7-13:

Luke 22:7 Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed.

Luke 22:8 And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.

Luke 22:9 And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare?

Luke 22:10 And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in.

Luke 22:11 And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?

Luke 22:12 And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready.

Luke 22:13 And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.

The Seven Days of Passover

Jesus and His disciples ate the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the evening of the 14th day of the month (which was Friday evening, and the first day of Passover).

Jesus was taken later on in the night by the soldiers and held prisoner at the home of the High Priest. He was mocked, belittled and persecuted by the soldiers, but St. Luke tells us that He was not taken before the high Priest until it was daytime.

Nothing at all was done the following day because it was the 15th day until sundown. In addition to being Saturday, the regular Jewish Sabbath, it was a holy convocation, it was still the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and it was strictly forbidden that anybody do anything except eat their food on that day.

It was early in the morning of the Sunday the 16th when Jesus was taken to Caiaphas the High priest and His examination and mock trial began. There were much goings on and false witnesses were brought in to try to make a case against Jesus, but they could not get their dishonest stories straight. In our outline we believe that this examination went on for two days. The High Priest knew that he had time before the high and holy convocation feast on the 21st and he very much wanted to go to Pilate with a strong case against Jesus, but he simply could not make it. Finally, at the end of the second day, which was Monday the 17th, Jesus was sent to Pilate. Pilate did not see Jesus that evening but on the morning of the 18th day, which was Tuesday. St. Luke tells us that after much talk and futile efforts of to get Jesus to defend himself, Pilate discovered that Jesus was a Galilean, so Pilate sent him to Herod.

Four Trials in Three Different Places

Jesus underwent four trials (and maybe five if you count the trial before Caiaphas as one and the trial before Caiaphas and Annas as another). There were two trials before Pilate and one before Herod. All of these things were

taking time. Neither Pilate nor Herod was standing at the door waiting when Jesus was brought in, and they acted at their own convenience and not that of the Jews. Beside that, the house of Pilate was a significant distance from the home of the High Priest, and the place where Herod was staying while he was in Jerusalem was a goodly distance from Pilate. Jesus was being led back and forth between these places while He was in bonds and all of this took time. In the ordinary course of events, Jesus would be taken to Pilate's palace, put in hold, and brought before Pilate when the Roman governor was ready to see Him. It is the notion that Jesus was brought in off the street and immediately put before this Roman governor with no communications or preparation that displays undisciplined imagination.

Herod did not see Jesus or question Him until Wednesday, the 19th day of the month, which was the fifth day of Passover. The Bible tells us that Herod questioned Jesus at length, made a great effort to get Jesus to talk to him and show him some miracle, and when he could not do that he allowed his soldiers to indulge in the humiliation and torment of Jesus. After that, Herod sent Him back to Pilate in the late afternoon of the 19th. St. John 18:28 says that on the fateful day, Pilate did not see Jesus until early in the morning. Sometime during the 20th, the sixth day of Passover (which was Thursday), Pilate gave in and ordered His crucifixion. He did not immediately send Jesus off to be crucified, but had the soldiers take Him back for processing that including, among other things, scourging. Around 6a.m. on Thursday, the 20th, Pilate sent Him off to be crucified.

The Seventh Day, the Sabbath of Passover

Thursday the 20th was a preparation day; but it was not a preparation day for Saturday, the normal Sabbath. It was a preparation day for a Sabbath, but this Sabbath was the seventh day of Passover, which was Friday. There was no ordinary preparation for the regular Sabbath. There was nothing to prepare for. People simply stayed home and did not leave their houses. The preparation was for this particular Sabbath. In St. John 19:31 we are told, **“That Sabbath was an high day.”** St. Mark 15:42 says that it was sundown

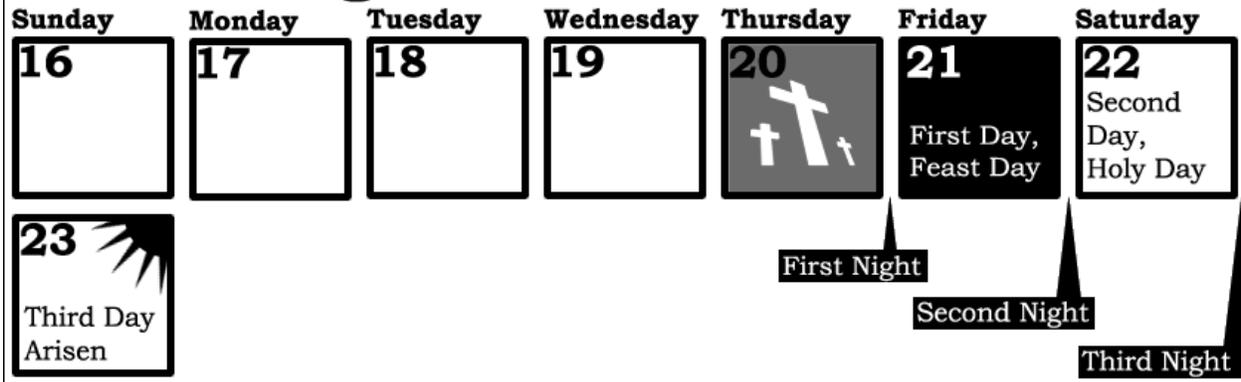
and the day was over when Joseph of Arimathæa retrieved Jesus from the Cross and laid him in the sepulcher. Thus Jesus was not placed in the grave until the evening of Thursday, the 20th, until after the day was over.

Passover Week						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
9 Jesus' Triumphal Entry	10	11	12	13	14 Jesus Taken	15 Feast Day, Holy Day
16 Caiaphas Tries Jesus	17 Caiaphas Tries Jesus (?)	18 Pilate Tries Jesus	19 Herod Tries Jesus	20 	21 Feast Day	22 Holy Day
23  Jesus Arises				Pilate Sentences Jesus/ Preparation Day		

Our Conclusion

From these facts we can determine that Jesus was in the grave Thursday night, Friday night and Saturday night; and He was in the grave Friday day, Saturday day and He was raised on the third day early Sunday morning. The Resurrection took place on the first day of the week which was the *eighth day*. This was a testimony, as it had been from antiquity, of the coming New Covenant, New Creation, Immortality and Eternal Life.

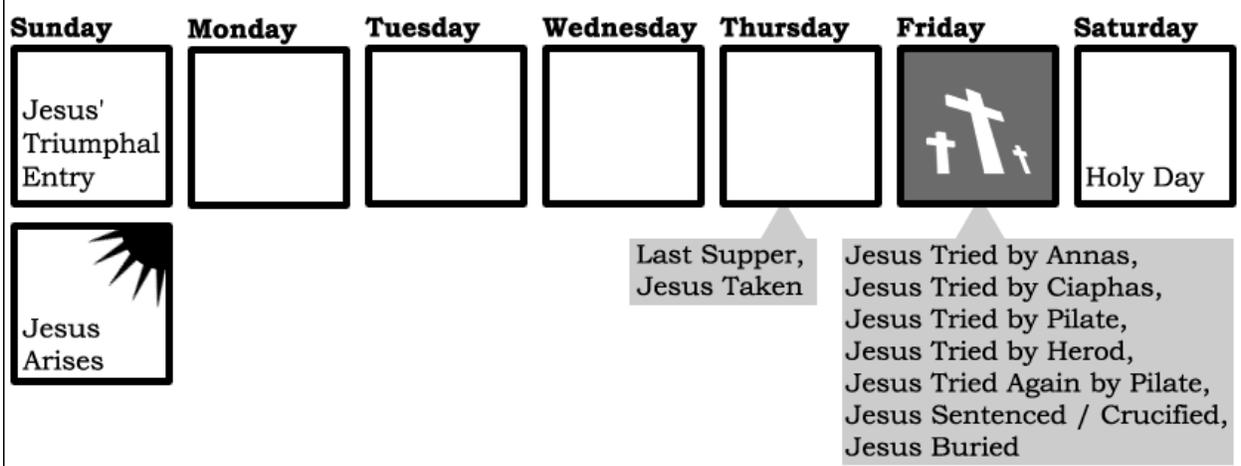
How Long is Jesus in the Grave?



No Biblical Alternative to the Time Frame

The formula that I have just given you does two very important things that modern traditional religious thought cannot and does not accomplish. It upholds the seven days of Passover from the time that Jesus and His disciples ate the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the evening of the 14th day of the first month to the highest Sabbath on Friday, the day after His crucifixion.

Passover Week - Traditional



So that is one thing, and the other is that it honors and verifies the words of Jesus Himself who said that He would be in the grave *three days and three nights*. We will look at one of these examples:

Matt 12:38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

Matt 12:39 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:

Matt 12:40 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.

Here Jesus states plainly that He will spend three days and three nights in the grave. My friends, this is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the Incarnate God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth talking. Do you dare to question His integrity or His understanding of the situation? Jesus was the one who went through the experience. How can anyone question His plain and unambiguous statement?

If that one statement was not enough, St. Matthew 17:23 and 20:19, St. Mark 9:31 and 10:33-34 and I Corinthians 15:3-4 also state this exact same thing. Each of these citations are from different occasions separated by time and distance. They are not repetitions. Now, my brothers and sisters, let us stop the nonsense here. If Jesus was not three nights and two full days and a part of the third day in the grave when He rose again, then Jesus did not know what He was talking about and neither did St. Paul. This places one of the strong platforms of the basis of the Gospel in doubt at the very least. It simply is not true and cannot be seriously countenanced by any honest Bible student.

And now I want to make the statement and I hope you listen and listen carefully.

Any interpretation of events that does not honor the seven days of Passover and the words of Jesus Himself concerning the time He spent in the tomb may be discounted by serious Bible students as being simply wrong on

its face. Such a view cannot be right because it defies the Scriptures and the words of the Master Himself.

Is Our Chronology Accurate?

Did the events transpire exactly as I have mapped them out? Almost certainly they did not. The Bible does not tell us what took place at what hour of what day over these first six days of Passover. But the significant point that I have been trying to establish is that Jesus was taken on the night of the 14th after eating the Passover meal with His disciples, He was crucified on Thursday afternoon, which was the 6th day of Passover, and He was put in the tomb on Thursday night after sundown when the 20th day had come to close. We know it was the sixth day because it was the preparation day for the holy convocation feast on the 7th day of Passover. All of the events regarding the capture, mock trials, and crucifixion of Jesus took place in that six day period. We know that for sure because the Bible spells it out in plain terms. Men have refused to believe it, but no one can deny it with impunity.

The Saturday Argument

You may argue that the Bible says the day after Jesus was crucified was the Sabbath. Actually the Bible does not say that; it says it was a Sabbath. There were many Sabbath's in the Old Testament that did not take place on the seventh day of the week. In this instance the seventh (which is what *Sabbath* means) is the seventh day of Passover. Remember the Scriptures that we read; there will be a holy convocation on the first day and the seventh day. That seventh day was the 21st day of the month. Some scholars contend that there were 30 days in the Jewish calendar while others say that that there were 31 days, just like there are in our calendar. In either case it does not matter. One does not have to be a great Biblical scholar or intellect to figure out the 14th day and the 21st day or the first day of the month do not always fall on the same day of the week. The bizarre formulas arrived at by the mystics and star gazers of the early centuries of the Church that are used to establish Easter so that it always comes on Sunday are misguided. At the time of Christ's crucifixion God arranged events in such a way that His resurrection was on the

first day of the week. The resurrection is a past historical fact. It does not matter what day of the week of the 21st day of the first month of the Jewish calendar falls on. We are not under the Law anymore, we do not keep Passover anymore, and Christ is not constantly being crucified and resurrected year in and year out (although that may be the theological effect of the system that we have lived under all of our lives). All of that aside, clearly there were seven days in Passover, clearly Jesus ate the feast of unleavened bread with His disciples on the evening of the 14th because the Bible says He did. Clearly the seventh day of Passover was not Saturday, clearly Jesus was in the grave three days and three nights (Thursday night, Friday night and Saturday night, Friday day, Saturday day, and Sunday morning), and clearly He rose on the third day just as He said He would. Later on we shall have some things to say about the importance of the *three days and three nights*, but what I have tried to do here is set out for you the outline of what was going on during this last Passover of Jesus' life.

Could Jesus' Ordeal Have Taken Six Days?

Many argue that the accounts in the Gospels of Jesus' trial and crucifixion simply cannot be stretched out to cover six days. My response is that each of these Gospel accounts are so different in particulars that it is clear there is no intention to establish an hour-by-hour and day-by-day chronology. What the Gospel writers are doing is telling us what happened. Each one of them is telling it just a little differently than the other in keeping with his assignment; although there is no conflict. It does not require imagination; in fact it requires only common sense, to see that these things could not be done in the time frame of one day or even two. Too much was going on, there was too much moving about, and there was a holy convocation in that time frame on which no priest, scribe, or Pharisee was going to go out of his house to do anything. The essential facts here do not revolve around how much time we understand the writers to be including in their stories. The essential facts are that Jesus was taken on the evening of the 14th after He had eaten the Feast of Unleavened bread with His disciples and He was crucified the day before the

high feast on the seventh day of Passover week. So you figure it out for yourself my friend. How many days intervene between the evening of the 14th and the afternoon of the 20th when Jesus was crucified? St. John 19:31 makes it clear that day He was crucified was the preparation day for the high Sabbath (the highest of the two Sabbaths during Passover) on the 21st. Those are the important issues. The question of how to account for the time in between is not of prime concern. We do not have to account for the time in between; the time in between accounts for itself.