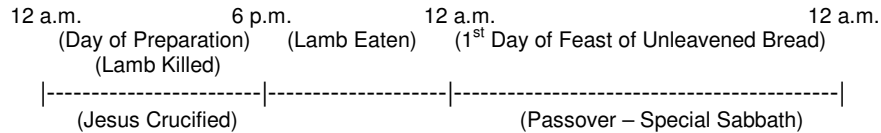


The Church of the Servant King
Survey of the Bible Series
The Gospel of Luke

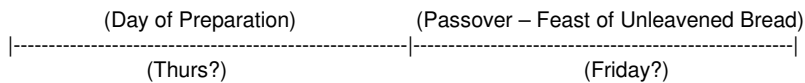
SB_22A_The Setting for Jesus' Last Week

Background Setting – The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread

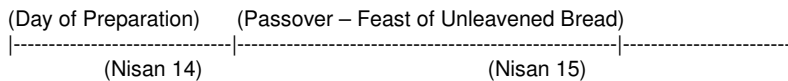
Although we have studied this information previously in our study of the book of Matthew, I believe that it is necessary to review it again lest we forget. Crucial to an appreciation of this passage is the events of the week of the Passover leading up to our Lord's crucifixion. During the Passover week, Jewish (and Gentile proselyte) pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. Jesus had already presented Himself to Israel as the nation's Messiah and King through His triumphal procession into Jerusalem on what is known as Palm Sunday (Lu 19:28-40 cf. Matt 21:1-11; Mk 11:1-11; Jn 12:12-19). This was the Sunday of Passover week and the Sunday just prior to His crucifixion.



Gentile Reckoning:



Jewish Reckoning:



During Passover week, there was a day of preparation for the Passover and then the day of Passover. Since the Passover feast was actually eaten during the evening of the day of preparation, then according to the Jewish method of counting the start of a day at 6 p.m., the Passover feast was eaten on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, i.e. Nisan 15 per Jewish reckoning of a day. The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was considered a Sabbath day in addition to the normal Saturday Sabbath during that week. As we shall see below, the typology associated with the Jewish feast days of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seem to support the view that Christ was crucified on Thursday, Nisan 14 and placed in the tomb sometime late that afternoon or evening, i.e. the afternoon of Nisan 14 or that evening which would have been the beginning of Nisan 15.

If the day of the feast of Unleavened Bread (and the eating of the Passover meal) that year fell on any day other than the normal Sabbath (i.e. Saturday), then it would have been possible that there were two Sabbaths during the Passover week the year our Lord was crucified.¹ Let's review some points regarding the Passover week.

¹ We have examined this subject in depth in a previous study of the day of the Lord's crucifixion as an Easter special so I will not reexamine it in depth here. Rather, I will just summarize some of the pertinent points as they relate to our study. Sources that I have consulted for this study include the following: 1) J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 411-426; 2) Daniel Fuchs, *Israel's*

Summary Points Regarding The Day of Jesus' Crucifixion

- Scripture documents the fact that Jesus was resurrected by daylight on Sunday morning (Matt 28:1, Lu 24:1; Jn 20:1).
- The word Passover is the term used to designate the Feast of Unleavened Bread which is an annual Jewish festival of seven days duration.² It began at sundown on the close of the 14th day of Nisan (April) which was the beginning of the 15th day of Nisan per the Jewish method of reckoning.
- The day before the Sabbath during which preparation is made for the Sabbath so that no work was done on the Sabbath is known as the Day of Preparation (Jn 19:31).³
- John 18:28 – “Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled: but that they *might eat the Passover*.” This is the day of Jesus' crucifixion – the 14th of Nisan. The chronology of Passover week seems to support that this was Thursday.
 - In this verse Jesus is being taken before Pilate for his fourth trial on the day of His crucifixion, probably the 14th of Nisan.
 - On the 15th of Nisan, which begins at sundown on this day, the Passover begins.
 - Passover and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread coincided or were parts of the same day per Jewish reckoning.
 - The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a special Sabbath day per Lev 23:5-7 and Ex 12:15-16.
 - Since the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were special Sabbath days, this means that the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread would have two Sabbaths if the Feast did not begin at sundown on Friday.
 - The day of Jesus' crucifixion is called the “preparation.” “Preparation” means “the eve of the Sabbath.” John 19:31: - The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation [*the day before a Sabbath during which preparation was made for the Sabbath; the specific Sabbath in view is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread*], that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day [*specifically, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread*], (for that Sabbath was a high day [*the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread*]), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.
 - The Roman custom was to abandon the corpses of criminals to dogs and vultures, but Jewish law forbade leaving a body on the cross overnight.

Holy Days In Type and Prophecy (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1985), 9-28; 3) Ceil and Moishe Rosen, *Christ in the Passover, Why This Night is Different?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 25-49.

² Actually, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were originally quite distinct from each other. Originally, there was the *Egyptian Passover* and later the rabbis labeled the Passover celebrated by Jews the *Permanent Passover*. The Passover occurred on the 14th of Nisan and the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the 15th of Nisan and lasted seven days until the 21st day of the month. The distinction is clear in Leviticus 23:4-6. However, since both feasts are so close to each other (the Passover lamb slain on the 14th could not have been eaten until the 15th of Nisan per the Jewish reckoning of a day beginning at 6 p.m.), they are generally treated as one feast in the Old and New Testaments. The lamb was selected on the 10th of Nisan. Special preparations began on the evening of the 13th of Nisan (actually the start of the 14th per the Jewish calendar). The lamb was slain on the 14th of Nisan and eaten that evening (the beginning of the 15th of Nisan). See Daniel Fuchs, *Israel's Holy Days*, 15-29 and Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 415.

³ “It seems that since the days of the Dispersion, the Jews had added an extra day at the beginning of the eight days of this festival season and called it the Day of Preparation.” Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 415.

- In this case, the law would be more stringently enforced because the next day, beginning at sundown on the evening of Jesus' crucifixion, was a high day [the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread].
- The Passover Feast
 - The institution of and commands related to the Passover are recorded in Exodus 12.
 - The 1st month on the Jewish calendar is Nisan which corresponds to our March/April timeframe.
 - A male lamb without blemish is set aside on the 10th of the month. This could have corresponded to Palm Sunday.
 - The lamb was kept until the afternoon of the 14th when it was to be killed as the sun began to go down.
 - The blood would be caught in a basin and then applied to the door post with hyssop.
 - The lamb was then taken into the house, roasted whole and eaten that very night (the beginning of Nisan 15) with nothing to remain until morning. Anything not eaten had to be burned.
 - At daylight on the 15th of Nisan, the Israelites celebrated the start of their journey from their homes out of the land.
 - The 15th of Nisan marked the beginning of the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and was considered a Sabbath. (See Lev 23:5-7 and Ex 12:15-16).
- There are three major theories regarding the day of our Lord's crucifixion – the Wednesday theory, the Thursday theory, and the Friday theory. (See previous studies for a more detailed analysis)
- The Gospel of John was written later than any of the other Gospels (i.e. 85 to 95 AD). It contains the clearest detail regarding the timing of Christ's crucifixion during the week of the Passover in my opinion. I believe that it is quite possible that by the time John wrote, the other accounts had raised questions as to the day of Christ's crucifixion among the readers of the other Gospels (i.e. Matthew, Mark, and Luke). John might have added the extra detail to attempt to clarify issues. If so, I believe that the evidence tends to favor a Thursday crucifixion view even though all views have their difficulties. The prophecy that Jesus uttered in Matthew 12:40 (i.e. three days and nights as Jonah) would require a minimum of 72 hours to be literally fulfilled. However, the typology of the Passover week is perhaps best demonstrated with a Thursday view that doesn't allow for a full 72 hours, but does allow for a non-literal three days and three nights.⁴
- Was Jesus' last meal the Passover meal?
 - The eating of the lamb is characterized in every instance as a ceremonial feast and never as an ordinary meal or supper.
 - If the meal that Jesus and His disciples ate was the feast of the Passover, then Jesus was tried and crucified on this special sabbath and not on the day preceding it.

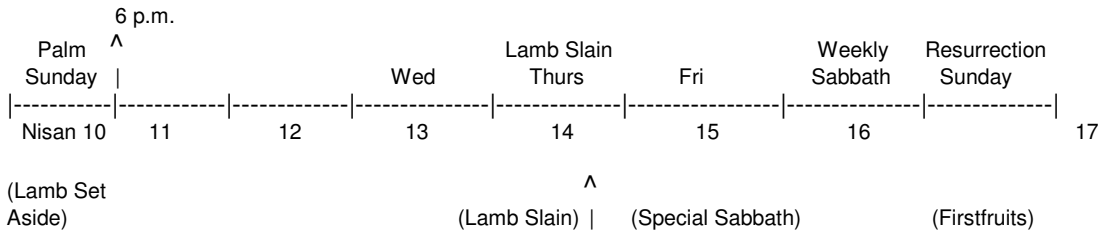
⁴ As we have noted in previous studies regarding the day of Jesus' crucifixion, all theories of the actual day of the crucifixion have problems when attempting to reconcile them with a literal 72 hour period of three days and nights in the belly of the earth (Lu 9:21-22; 11:29-32; 18:31-34 cf. Matt 12:39-40; 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:19). Whether one adopts a Wednesday, Thursday or Friday view, the most important issue is not the day, but the fact of the resurrection. Secondly, it is important that we recognize that "Good Friday" is based more upon religious tradition than solid fact.

- However, we are told that Jesus was crucified on the preparation of the Passover (John 19:14) which was Nisan 14.
- John 18:28 indicates that the Jews had not yet eaten the Passover.
- No matter what day of the week that the 14th and 15th of Nisan occurred during the week of our Lord's crucifixion, we must consider the fact that the events surrounding the Passover were meant to be a type of our Lord's death. The slaying of the Lamb on the 14th of Nisan as the sun began to go down should correspond to the actual events that were played out in our Lord's life and death.
- If true, then Jesus couldn't have been the Passover lamb and at the same time eaten the Passover lamb in the week He was crucified. Admittedly, this is not the strongest argument against the last supper being identified with the Passover; however it is worthy of note.
- None of the accounts directly state that the supper that Jesus ate was the Passover. It is by inference from such passages as Mark 14:12; Matt. 26:17; Luke 22:7. The background for these passages is found in Exodus 12:15, 18.
 - It is possible however that the Jews had begun a practice even in Jesus' day that is still common among the orthodox Jews of today. The threat of being cut off from Israel was taken so seriously that it was universal practice to put away leaven a whole day before the prescribed period. This would increase the possibility that there would be no overlooked portion of yeast which had not been put away.
 - This could explain the fact that unleavened bread was used by our Lord at the Last Supper.
 - Therefore the reference in these passages to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread might be interpreted to mean the first day that the Jews start to eat unleavened bread.
 - The reference to the killing of the lamb in these verses would therefore be an explanatory clause further identifying the particular feast.
- It is possible that Judas made his bargain with the priests on Palm Sunday, the day of triumphal entry. This would correspond with the setting aside of the Lamb for death on the 10th of Nisan.
- Preparation for the Passover would need to begin in Jerusalem even prior to the 14th of Nisan. There were thousands of visitors arriving in Jerusalem for Passover. Rooms were at a premium and the itinerant disciples had no headquarters of their own. John was one of the two disciples sent to prepare the upper room per Luke 22:8.
- John 13:28-29 provides further evidence that the supper the Lord and His disciples were eating might not have been the Passover. Some of the disciples thought that Jesus had to buy those things they had need of for the feast.
- Luke 22:15-16 seems to refer to the meal as the Passover. However, it is possible that Jesus was merely informing them that He was not going to be able to eat it with them.
- When the time came to take Jesus' body from the Cross and bury it, where were the disciples? It might be that they were engaged in eating the Passover.
- The Resurrection Typology Via the Offering of the Firstfruits
 - The three main events during Passover week consisted of:
 - The killing of the Passover lamb – Nisan 14
 - The Feast of Unleavened Bread – Nisan 15
 - The Offering of Firstfruits – the day is debated
 - The Saducees of our Lord's day believed that the first sheaf was always offered on the day following the weekly Sabbath (i.e. Sunday) of Passover week verses any special Sabbaths other than the weekly Sabbath.⁵

⁵ Daniel Fuchs, *Israel's Holy Days*, 29.

- If Jesus was crucified on Thursday, Nisan 14, and if the Offering of the Firstfruits was celebrated on Sunday, then Jesus' resurrection on early Sunday morning provides the perfect anti-type to the typology of the first sheaf offering.

A Possible Chronology of Passover Week



Conclusion

This study is an effort to provide background for our future study of Luke 22 and following. It will not resolve every issue or question surrounding the day of our Lord's crucifixion and I have not attempted to address every question since it is not the day but the fact of the resurrection that is important.⁶ While we will never know with certainty the exact day of Jesus' crucifixion and whether it was the Passover meal that He ate, we can have a better appreciation for the setting of these last chapters of Luke. We can see Jesus more clearly as the anti-type of the Passover sacrifice since we realize that there are other acceptable alternatives to the last meal He ate than the Passover itself.

⁶ See Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 415-424 for a good analysis of the issues and questions associated with this topic.