

The Chronology of the Crucifixion

Reconciling History, Astronomy, and the Sovereign Sign of Jonah in 31 AD

Introduction: The Search for Timeless Accuracy

For generations, the traditional Christian calendar has observed a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday morning resurrection. This timeline, commonly referred to as Good Friday and Easter Sunday, has become deeply ingrained in modern culture. However, when we place this traditional model under the microscope of scripture, historical data, and calendar mathematics, significant structural issues appear. The most prominent obstacle is an explicit, mathematical condition given by Jesus Christ Himself regarding the validation of His identity: the Sign of Jonah.

To resolve these apparent discrepancies, researchers, historians, and theologians have meticulously pieced together an alternative framework. This framework demonstrates that Jesus Christ was crucified on Wednesday, April 25, in the year 31 AD. Far from being a modern invention, this timeline perfectly harmonizes the historical data points, astronomical calculations, and the literal demands of biblical prophecy. This narrative explores the complete, interconnected evidentiary chain that supports this specific Wednesday chronology, showing how every detail fits seamlessly together.

Chapter 1: The Sovereign Sign of Jonah

The foundational cornerstone of this chronological investigation rests upon a direct declaration made by Jesus. When the religious leaders of His day demanded a supernatural sign to prove His authority, Jesus explicitly denied them any spectacular display except for one specific, binding test.

“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: 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.”
(Matthew 12:39-40, KJV)

Jesus staked His entire identity as the promised Messiah on this single metric: the duration of time He would spend inside the tomb. He did not say 'a day and a half,' nor did He say 'parts of three days.' He defined the timeline with linguistic precision, using the phrase 'three days and three nights.' In first-century Hebrew thought and idiomatic language, this specific expression demands a full 72-hour period—three distinct daytime periods and three distinct nighttime periods.

When we attempt to fit this 72-hour requirement into the traditional Good Friday to Easter Sunday model, the mathematics break down completely. If Christ was buried late Friday afternoon before sunset and rose early Sunday morning at dawn, the duration of His burial amounts to approximately 36 hours. This covers only two nights (Friday night and Saturday night) and one full day (Saturday), alongside small fractions of Friday and Sunday daylight. To claim this fulfills the Sign of Jonah requires an elastic interpretation of language that strips Jesus's words of their explicit meaning. If Jesus was in the tomb for only 36 hours, He failed to perform the only sign He promised. Therefore, an exact 72-hour period requires us to look for a timeline where a full three days and three nights can physically and logically occur.

Chapter 2: The Prophetic and Historical Markers

To find the exact year of the crucifixion, we must step outside of tradition and examine the historical markers provided within the text of the New Testament. The Gospel accounts do not exist in a historical vacuum; they link the ministry of Jesus to specific political figures and dates in the ancient Roman world.

The Fifteenth Year of Tiberius Caesar

The Gospel of Luke anchors the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry—which immediately preceded the ministry of Jesus—to a precise imperial milestone:

“Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.” (Luke 3:1-2, KJV)

Tiberius Caesar assumed sole imperial power over the Roman Empire following the death of Augustus Caesar in August of 14 AD. Counting forward from this point, the fifteenth year of his sole reign spans from the late summer of 28 AD to the late summer of 29 AD. Jesus was baptized by John and began His public ministry shortly after John began preaching, placing the start of Jesus's ministry in late 28 AD or early 29 AD. The Gospel of John details that Jesus's ministry spanned four distinct Passovers (John 2:13, John 5:1, John 6:4, and John 13:1), which mathematically establishes a ministry lasting approximately three and a half years. Adding three and a half years to a starting point of late 28 AD or early 29 AD brings us directly to the spring of 31 AD.

The 'Middle of the Week' Prophecy

This three-and-a-half-year ministry perfectly fulfills an ancient messianic timeline found in the Old Testament. The prophet Daniel received a vision concerning the exact timing of the Messiah's work and ultimate sacrifice:

“And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the

consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.” (Daniel 9:27, KJV)

In biblical prophecy, a 'week' frequently represents a period of seven literal years, applying the principle of 'a day for a year' (Numbers 14:34, Ezekiel 4:6). The 'midst of the week' or the middle of this seven-year period represents exactly three and a half years. By preaching for three and a half years, Jesus spiritually fulfilled this prophecy by offering His life at the midpoint, causing the need for physical animal sacrifices at the Temple to cease forever through His ultimate, singular offering. Furthermore, this phrase carries a literal dual fulfillment. Not only was His ministry cut short in the middle of a seven-year prophetic cycle, but He was also physically crucified in the exact middle of a standard seven-day calendar week: a Wednesday.

Astronomical Alignment and NASA Data

To confirm if Passover could have fallen on a Wednesday in 31 AD, we must consult the structural mechanics of the Hebrew calendar. The biblical calendar is strictly lunar-solar, where each month begins with the sighting of the first crescent of the new moon. Passover is permanently assigned to the 14th day of the first month, known as Nisan. Therefore, Nisan 14 always occurs two weeks after the new moon, coinciding with a full moon.

Modern astronomical calculations, including historical lunar phase tables verified by NASA data, confirm that the new moon introducing the spring month of Nisan in the year 31 AD occurred in mid-April. Calculating the subsequent 14 days reveals that in 31 AD, the 14th of Nisan fell precisely on Wednesday, April 25 (according to the Julian calendar format used by historians). Additionally, ancient astronomical records like Oppolzer's Eclipse Tables note a partial lunar eclipse that occurred on the evening of April 25, 31 AD, visible in Jerusalem at approximately 10:45 PM. This provides a striking historical correlation to the words spoken by the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost, recalling how the local population witnessed the 'sun turned into darkness, and the moon into blood' (Acts 2:20) during the period of the crucifixion.

Chapter 3: Tuesday Evening and the New Symbols

With the calendar year established as 31 AD, we can trace the events of the crucifixion week day by day. The biblical day does not begin at midnight as our modern Gregorian calendar does; instead, it transitions from one day to the next at sunset, following the foundational pattern established in the creation narrative: 'And the evening and the morning were the first day' (Genesis 1:5).

Consequently, as the sun dipped below the horizon on Tuesday evening, the thirteenth day of Nisan ended, and the fourteenth day—Passover Day—officially began. On this Tuesday evening, Jesus gathered with His apostles in an upper room in Jerusalem to observe His final Passover meal. Because He was the true Passover Lamb who would be physically dead by the following afternoon, He observed the meal an evening early, shifting the focus from the old symbols of the physical lamb to the new spiritual symbols of the New Covenant.

“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise

also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:19-20, KJV)

By instituting the unleavened bread to represent His broken body and the wine to represent His shed blood, Jesus transformed the Passover observance for all future believers. He showed that His imminent death would replace the physical rituals of the Temple. Later that Tuesday night, still within the boundaries of Nisan 14, Jesus led His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane. There, He endured hours of intense spiritual agony, was betrayed by Judas Iscariot with a kiss, and was arrested by an armed mob sent by the high priests. Throughout the dark hours of Tuesday night and early Wednesday morning, Jesus was subjected to illegal, clandestine trials before Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin, enduring mocking, beating, and false accusations.

Chapter 4: The Preparation Day and the Hurried Burial

As the dawn broke on Wednesday morning, the daylight portion of Nisan 14 began. The religious authorities transferred Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, seeking a formal execution order. After a series of hurried hearings before Pilate and Herod Antipas, Pilate yielded to the pressure of the crowd and condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion.

The Crucifixion and Death

Jesus was led out to Golgotha and nailed to the cross at approximately the third hour of the day (9:00 AM). By the sixth hour (12:00 PM noon), a supernatural darkness covered the entire land, lasting until the ninth hour (3:00 PM). At this exact moment, Jesus cried out with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit, dying at the precise hour when the traditional Passover lambs were being slaughtered at the Temple by the Levitical priesthood. This perfectly fulfilled the typography outlined by the Apostle Paul: 'For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us' (1 Cor. 5:7).

The Urgency of the Preparation Day

Jesus died at 3:00 PM on Wednesday afternoon. A severe time constraint now faced His followers. The sun was scheduled to set at approximately 6:00 PM, at which point Nisan 14 would end and Nisan 15 would begin. The Gospel accounts explicitly identify Wednesday daytime as a specific calendar day known as the 'Preparation Day':

“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.” (John 19:31, KJV)

To understand the frantic urgency that followed, we must look at the biblical laws governing this specific day. The Jewish leadership was terrified of violating a critical commandment found in the Law of Moses concerning the bodies of executed individuals:

“And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.” (Deuteronomy 21:22-23, KJV)

Leaving a body exposed overnight was viewed as an act that would bring a spiritual curse upon the land. Furthermore, this was not a preparation for an ordinary weekly Saturday Sabbath. John explicitly states that the incoming Sabbath was a 'high day.' According to Leviticus 23:5-7, the day immediately following the Passover (Nisan 15) is the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is designated as an Annual High Sabbath, an annual holy day where no servile work is permitted, regardless of which day of the week it falls upon. In 31 AD, this High Sabbath fell on Thursday.

Because the High Sabbath banned all physical labor—including handling a corpse, washing a body, purchasing burial clothes, and moving a heavy stone—Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had a narrow window of less than three hours to complete the burial process. Joseph had to walk to Pilate's palace, secure an official audience, request the body, and wait for Pilate to confirm the death with a centurion. After obtaining permission, Joseph purchased fine linen, returned to Golgotha, and helped Nicodemus lower the heavy, wounded body from the cross.

They had no time to perform a complete, dignified first-century Jewish burial, which typically required washing the entire body, shaving hair, and methodically applying liquid ointments and heavy spices directly to the skin. Instead, they performed an emergency, temporary layout:

“And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.” (John 19:39-42, KJV)

They hurriedly wrapped Jesus's body in the linen cloth along with the dry mixture of myrrh and aloes, rolled a massive stone across the entrance of the tomb, and completed the task just as the sun sank below the horizon. As the final rays of twilight disappeared on Wednesday evening, the High Sabbath began, locking down the city and bringing the burial operations to an immediate halt.

Chapter 5: The Two Sabbaths and the Women's Spices

The historical reality of the 'two-Sabbath week' is heavily supported by the actions of the women who followed Jesus. A careful comparative analysis of the Gospels of Mark and Luke reveals a fascinating detail that standard tradition struggles to explain. When read sequentially, these accounts demonstrate that a normal, commercial work day must have occurred between two separate Sabbaths.

The Structural Timeline of the Women

Notice the precise wording used by the evangelist Mark regarding when the women obtained the burial spices:

“And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.” (Mark 16:1, KJV)

Now, contrast Mark's account with the timeline recorded by Luke, detailing when the women prepared those same spices:

“And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.” (Luke 23:56, KJV)

If we assume there was only one single Sabbath during the crucifixion week (the weekly Saturday Sabbath), these two passages present a direct, irreconcilable contradiction. Mark states that the women did not **buy** the spices until **after** the Sabbath was already past. Luke states that the women **prepared** the spices **before** resting on the Sabbath day. How could the women prepare spices before the Sabbath if they were unable to even purchase them until after the Sabbath had ended?

This puzzle disappears when we apply the Wednesday 31 AD timeline, which includes two separate Sabbaths separated by a standard working day:

Day & Calendar Date	Sabbath Status / Type	The Women's Actions & Scriptural Fulfillment
Thursday (Nisan 15)	Annual High Sabbath (First Day of Unleavened Bread)	The women rest all day in obedience to Leviticus 23:7. All commercial shops are legally closed; no transactions can occur.
Friday (Nisan 16)	Regular Commercial Work Day	The High Sabbath is now 'past' (Mark 16:1). The women go to the local markets, purchase the raw spices, spend the afternoon pounding and blending the ointments, and finish just before sunset (Luke 23:56).
Saturday (Nisan 17)	Weekly Seventh-day Sabbath	The weekly Sabbath arrives at Friday sunset. The women must halt their work again, resting a second time 'according to the commandment' (Luke 23:56), which is the fourth commandment of the Decalogue.

This structural separation between the High Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath provides clear textual proof that the Wednesday burial was incomplete. The women knew that Joseph and Nicodemus had performed a rushed, temporary job on Wednesday afternoon. Their entire motivation for purchasing raw materials on Friday and preparing them was to return to the tomb at the earliest opportunity to give Jesus a proper, respectful anointing. They were forced to wait out the weekly Saturday Sabbath before they could physically visit the grave site.

Chapter 6: The Plural Sabbaths of Matthew 28:1

This two-Sabbath structure is further confirmed by the original Greek grammar of the New Testament. In the opening verse of Matthew 28, the Gospel writer records the arrival of the women at the tomb. In standard English translations, the plural nature of the word is hidden. For example, the King James Version reads:

“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.” (Matthew 28:1, KJV)

However, if we examine the underlying Greek text authorized by Matthew—*Opsé dè sabbátōn, tē epiphōskoúsē eis mían sabbátōn*—we find a unique grammatical feature. The Greek word translated as 'sabbath' appears twice in this verse, and both times it is written in the **plural form (*sabbaton*)**.

A literal word-for-word translation of the opening phrase reads: **'Now late of the Sabbaths... '** or **'After the Sabbaths... '** Literal translations, such as *Young's Literal Translation*, correctly capture this formatting, rendering the phrase as: 'And on the eve of the sabbaths...' The use of the plural genitive noun indicates that Matthew was explicitly referencing the fact that *multiple* Sabbaths had concluded during that momentous week. The week contained a pair of Sabbaths—the Thursday High Day and the Saturday weekly Day—which had blocked the women's access to their Lord until Sunday morning arrived.

Chapter 7: The Saturday Sunset Resurrection

Having assembled all the chronological, historical, and grammatical pieces, we can now determine the exact time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus was laid in the tomb right before sunset on Wednesday afternoon, and He promised to remain in the heart of the earth for exactly three days and three nights, the math points to a specific conclusion.

A precise 72-hour block calculated from a Wednesday sunset must conclude at the exact same time of day: **sunset on Saturday afternoon**.

The Mathematical Countdown

Let us calculate the full three days and three nights inside the tomb to verify the precision of the timeline:

- 1. Wednesday Sunset to Thursday Sunset: Includes Night 1 (Wednesday night) and Day 1 (Thursday daylight, the High Sabbath). This completes 24 hours.
- 2. Thursday Sunset to Friday Sunset: Includes Night 2 (Thursday night) and Day 2 (Friday daylight, the work day). This completes 48 hours.
- 3. Friday Sunset to Saturday Sunset: Includes Night 3 (Friday night) and Day 3 (Saturday daylight, the weekly Sabbath). This completes exactly 72 hours.

At the precise moment when the sun was setting on Saturday afternoon, completing the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, the 72-hour period concluded. Jesus Christ broke the chains of death, resurrected from the dead, and walked out of the tomb as the absolute conqueror of the grave. He did not rise on Sunday morning; He rose at the close of the Sabbath.

Reconciling Sunday Morning

If Jesus resurrected at sunset on Saturday, how do we understand the Sunday morning narratives that form the bedrock of traditional teaching? Let us look closely at what the text actually says when the women arrived at the tomb early Sunday morning:

“And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.” (Mark 16:5-6, KJV)

When the women arrived at dawn on the first day of the week, the angel did not say, 'Watch closely, for He is about to rise.' Instead, the angel used the past-tense Greek verb **ēgerthē**, meaning ****He has been raised**** or ****He is already risen.**** The tomb was already empty. The stone had been rolled away not to let Jesus out, but to allow the eyewitnesses to look inside and see that He was gone.

Sunday morning was not the **moment** of the resurrection; it was simply the ***moment of discovery***. Jesus had left the grave twelve hours earlier at twilight on Saturday evening, fulfilling His prophetic commitment to the exact minute. He did not alter His timeline to accommodate later traditions; He fulfilled the Sign of Jonah perfectly, validating His identity as the true Messiah.

Conclusion: A Harmonized Framework

When we put all the pieces together, the timeline of the crucifixion week becomes a beautifully synchronized model of historical and scriptural harmony. By setting aside traditional assumptions and allowing the text to speak for itself, the apparent contradictions between the Gospel accounts disappear, replaced by an exact sequence of events.

Through this lens, we see that Jesus Christ perfectly navigated the political timelines of Tiberius Caesar, fulfilled the ancient 'middle of the week' prophecy of Daniel, instituted the new covenant symbols on Tuesday evening, died as the ultimate Passover Lamb on Wednesday afternoon, rested through a unique two-Sabbath week, and rose in absolute victory at the close of the

Sabbath on Saturday evening. This complete framework stands as a striking testament to the structural accuracy of the biblical text and the sovereignty of the Messiah, who fulfilled every detail of His promise down to the very hour.