

The Crucifixion Could Not Have Been on a Friday

The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ is widely accepted as having occurred on a Friday and is commemorated annually as Easter Friday.

However this article examines the astronomical data calculated by the Astronomical Applications Department of the Navy of the United States of America and must honestly report that a Friday is not a possibility for that momentous event.

Why? Firstly we will look at the Biblical evidence of which day of the month of Nisan (also called Abib) the crucifixion occurred, which is Nisan 14. We then turn to the expert tables provided by the Astronomical Applications Department to determine the day of the week was Nisan 14 in the year of the Crucifixion. Because there is some disagreement over the actual year, we consider each year from 28 CE to 35 CE, broader than the range of candidate years. We then find that for none of those years did Nisan 14 sit on a Friday.

1. Background to the Passover

The beginning of this annual religious activity is found in Exodus 12.

Exo 12:1 And Jehovah spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,

2 This month *shall be* to you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year to you.

3 Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth of this month they shall take to them each man a lamb for a father's house, a lamb for a house.

4 And if the household is too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take according to the number of the souls, each one, according to the eating of his mouth, you shall count concerning the lamb.

5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You shall take from the sheep or from the goats.

6 And you 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.

7 And they shall take *some* of the blood and strike on the two side posts and upon the upper door post of the houses *in* which they shall eat it.

...

14 And **this day shall be a memorial to you**. And you shall keep it as a feast to Jehovah throughout your generations. **You shall keep it as a feast by a law forever.**

15 You shall eat unleavened *bread* seven days; even the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.

16 And **on the first day shall be a holy gathering**, and in the seventh day there shall be a holy gathering for you. **No manner of work shall be done in them**, except that which every man must eat, that only may be done by you.

Note:

1. The lamb was killed on the fourteenth of the month, the first month of the calendar which God was giving them.
2. It was a one time event, but it was to be a memorial to them. (verse 14)
3. It was to be kept as a feast by a law forever. (verse 14)

4. The “first day” (verse 16), the day after the lamb was killed, i.e. the fifteenth of the first month, was a holy gathering.
5. No work was to be done on this “first day”. Thus it was to be treated like the weekly sabbath, but observed one a year, in the first month.

Further instructions were given in the Book of Leviticus in Chapter 23. This chapter lists “The feasts of Jehovah, which you shall proclaim, holy convocations, even these are My appointed feasts”. Note these are holy convocations or holy gatherings. These feasts were observed by the early New Testament Christian church but were rejected in later centuries by authorities at Rome. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words comments that Easter, the substitute for Passover, “was quite distinct and was introduced into the apostate Western religion, as part of the attempt to adapt pagan festivals to Christianity”.

Lev 23:1 And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,

- 2 Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, **The feasts of Jehovah**, which you shall proclaim, holy convocations, even these are **My** appointed feasts.
- 3 Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day *is* the sabbath of rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work. It *is* a sabbath to Jehovah in all your dwellings.
- 4 These *are* the appointed feasts of Jehovah, holy convocations which you shall proclaim in their **appointed seasons**.
- 5 In the **fourteenth day of the first month, between the evenings**, is Jehovah's Passover,
- 6 and on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the Feast of Unleavened *Bread* to Jehovah. You must eat unleavened *bread* seven days.
- 7 On **the first day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no work of labor**,
- 8 but you shall offer a fire offering to Jehovah seven days. In the seventh day *is* a holy convocation. You shall do no work of labor.

Note:

1. These festivals have appointed seasons.
2. The Passover sacrifice is on the fourteenth day of the month, followed by seven days of eating unleavened bread.
3. The first day of unleavened bread is a holy convocation.
4. These are “the feasts of Jehovah” or “the feasts of the Lord”. They are not “the feasts of Moses”, “the feasts of Israel”, or “the feasts of the Jews”. They claim to be “the feasts of Jehovah”.

Depending on the time of the new moon, the first day of the “first month” could happen on any day of the week and was not fixed to a particular day. The fourteenth of the month, the day of the lamb sacrifice, was a fixed thirteen days after the first, and so it too could vary depending on the time of the new moon that year.

2. Which day did the Messiah die?

The Crucifixion was held on the day before the Passover, regarded as the Preparation Day for the Passover.

In the following from the Modern King James Version, Pilate was addressing the crowd of the Jews seeking to have their victim crucified, about noon.

John 19:14 And it was *the* **preparation of the Passover**, and about *the* sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, Behold your king!

The murder proceeded, and later, we have this scene with Jesus on the stake, utters his last words.

John 19:28 After this, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, I thirst.

29 Then a vessel full of vinegar was set. And they filled a sponge with sour wine and put *it* upon hyssop, and put *it* to His mouth.

30 Then when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, It is finished! And He bowed *His* head and gave up the spirit.

31 Then the Jews, because **it was Preparation**, begged Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the sabbath. For that sabbath was **a high day**.

32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who was crucified with Him.

33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

These verses, and others in the other gospels, tell us that Jesus died on the afternoon of the fourteenth, the real Lamb of God, on the day of Preparation, the day before the First day of Unleavened Bread, the fifteenth day of the first month.

There is often confusion among those not familiar with the “Festivals of Jehovah”. In verse 31, John writes of haste amongst the Jews “so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the sabbath”. Typically, readers unfamiliar with the annual sabbath days listed in Leviticus 23 and repeated in Numbers 28, assume this means the weekly sabbath, being the only “sabbath” they know of, and the day of Jesus' death to them is therefore Friday. This is an unwarranted assumption and needs more investigation.

John wrote in verse 31 “that sabbath was **a high day**”, meaning it was one of the annual festival days. We have seen from Leviticus 23 verse 7 (“On the first day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no work of labor”) that what John wrote was correct. The fifteenth of the first lunar month, being an annual holy day, a holy convocation on which no work was to be done, could fall on any day depending on the time of the new moon.

The question is therefore: on which day of the week did the fourteenth fall during the year of the Crucifixion?

2. What was the week day of Nisan 14 in that year?

To answer this, we need to know what year it was, and what the western calendar was for that year.

There is some dispute as to which year the crucifixion happened, but generally scholars accept a birth in 4 BCE (not 0 CE or 1 CE as you might expect. The monk who published the dating system adopted in the Western world centuries ago made an error which was not detected until it was considered too late to alter the system.)

Jesus began his ministry at the age of 30 (Luke 3:23, 21-22. Numbers 4.). His ministry ran for about three and a half years.

There seem to be two reckoning methods for calculating end dates for periods beginning in BCE and ending in CE. One counts a year zero, so the sequence is 2 BCE, 1 BCE, 0, 1 CE, etc. This is the method used in the Appendices of Bullinger's Companion Bible, which places the crucifixion in 29 CE. The other method does not have a year zero, and counts 2 BCE, 1BCE, 1CE, etc. If Bullinger had used this alternative, he would have obtained an end year of 30 CE.

So depending on the finer details, the year of the crucifixion was around 30 CE, give or take two years, i.e. somewhere in the range 28 CE to 33 CE.

But which is the right year?

Perhaps it doesn't matter.

If we examine all of the years in that span, and determine for each year the week day of Nisan 14, we might find something illuminating.

That has been done, for years 28 CE to 35 CE. See my report "Passover Days 28 – 35 CE", available at <http://www.geocities.com/selwynrussell/SR/Passover2835.pdf>

The results of the analysis using data in "Spring Phenomena 25 BCE to 38 CE" produced by the Astronomical Applications Department of the United States of America Navy are:

28 CE Sunday
29 CE Saturday, perhaps Friday at one extreme of possible estimation error
30 CE Wednesday
31 CE Sunday
32 CE Saturday
33 CE Wednesday
34 CE Monday
35 CE Sunday

3. The Conclusion

Depending on the actual year, the Crucifixion may have been on a Sunday, a Wednesday, or a Saturday. It could not have been on a Friday, except in 29 CE and then only in the unlikely case of an extreme error in the estimation by the Naval Observatory.

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All scriptures taken from the Modern king James Version module of eSword.