

...people fail to note that John explicitly tells us that the Sabbath that began at sundown immediately after Jesus was entombed was one of these *annual* Sabbath days. Notice in John 19:31 his explanation that “that Sabbath was a *high day*”—“high day” being a term used to differentiate the seven annual Sabbaths from the regular weekly Sabbath days.

So what was this “high day” that immediately followed Jesus Christ’s hurried entombment?

The Gospels tell us that on the evening before Jesus was condemned and crucified, He kept the Passover with His disciples (Matthew 26:19-20; Mark 14:16-17; Luke 22:13-15). This means He was crucified on the Passover day.

Leviticus 23, which lists God’s festivals, tells us that on the day after the Passover a separate festival, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, begins (Leviticus 23:5-6). The first day of this Feast is “a holy convocation” on which “no customary work” is to be done (Leviticus 23:7).

This day is the first of God’s annual Sabbaths in the year. This is the “high day” of which John wrote. Several Bible commentaries, encyclopedias and dictionaries note that John is referring to an annual Sabbath here rather than the regular weekly Sabbath day.

Passover began at sundown and ended the following day at sundown, when this annual Sabbath began. Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples, then was arrested later that night. After daybreak the next morning He was questioned before Pontius Pilate, crucified, then hurriedly entombed just before the next sunset when the “high day,” the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, began.

It should be noted that the Jews often generically

referred to the whole Feast of Unleavened Bread as “Passover,” explaining why the day of Christ’s trials and crucifixion is even called “the Preparation Day of the Passover” (John 19:14)—that is, of the first Holy Day or annual Sabbath of the Passover week.

Leviticus 23 tells us the order and timing of these days, and the Gospels confirm the order of events as they unfolded.

Jesus crucified on Wednesday, not Friday

It can be shown that in the year Jesus was crucified the Passover meal must have been eaten on Tuesday night and that Wednesday sundown marked the beginning of the “high day,” the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Jesus, then, was crucified and entombed on a *Wednesday* afternoon, not on *Friday*. Proof of this can be found in the Gospels themselves.

Let’s turn to a seldom-noticed detail in Mark 16:1: “Now *when the Sabbath was past*, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.”

In that time, if the body of a loved one was placed in a tomb rather than being buried directly in the ground, friends and family would commonly place aromatic spices in the tomb alongside the body to reduce the smell as the remains decayed.

Since Jesus’ body was placed in the tomb just before that high-day Sabbath began, the women had no time to buy those spices before the Sabbath. Also, they could not have purchased them on the Sabbath day, as shops were closed. Thus, Mark says, they bought the spices *after the Sabbath*—

Centuries-Old Documents Show Evidence for a Wednesday Crucifixion

Did you know there is additional historical evidence for a Wednesday crucifixion? Although it was a minority position and ran against the prevailing teachings of the Roman church, some early historical documents acknowledge a Tuesday night Passover, a Wednesday crucifixion and a Saturday afternoon resurrection—matching the biblical record.

Around the year 200, a document purporting to pass on apostolic instruction, called the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, mentions that the last Passover of Jesus Christ and His disciples was on a Tuesday night.

This document states: “For when we had eaten the Passover *on the third day* of the week at even [Tuesday evening], we went forth to the Mount of Olives; and in the night they seized our Lord Jesus. And the next day, which was the *fourth* of the week [Wednesday], He remained in ward in the house of Caiaphas the high priest” (emphasis added throughout).

Paradoxically, the text goes on to mention that Jesus was crucified on a Friday—showing great confusion about the dates, for the biblical account clearly states that Christ was crucified in the daylight period following the night of that Passover meal and arrest. Nonetheless, the document demonstrates that Passover was then understood by some to have been on Tuesday evening, which would place the crucifixion on the next day, Wednesday.

Epiphanius (A.D. 367-403), the bishop at Salamis, wrote that “Wednesday and Friday are days of fasting up to the ninth hour because, *as Wednesday began* the Lord was arrested and on Friday he was crucified.” As we can see, even though the prevailing view was that Friday was the day of the crucifixion, Wednesday was known as the day of Christ’s arrest (happening as it did in the early predawn hours that day).

By the fifth century, Easter Sunday celebrations were widespread. However, a church histo-

rian of the time named Socrates notes in a section of his history titled “Differences of Usage in Regard to Easter” that some Christians celebrated the resurrection *on the Sabbath* rather than on Sunday. As he put it, “Others in the East kept that feast on the *Sabbath* indeed.”

Bishop Gregory of Tours (538-594), although himself believing in a Sunday resurrection, noted that many believed Jesus rose *on the seventh day of the week*, stating, “In our belief the resurrection of the Lord was on the first day, and *not on the seventh as many deem.*”

So rather than a monolithic acceptance of the Good Friday–Easter Sunday scenario, there was confusion about the timing of Christ’s crucifixion in early centuries. Moreover, these historical records show that a minority of Christians during that time understood the biblical timing of a Tuesday evening Passover, a Wednesday crucifixion and a late Saturday afternoon resurrection.

—Mario Seiglie