

THE TIMING OF JESUS CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION AND OTHER ELEMENTS OF EASTER

For many centuries it has been taught that Jesus Christ was crucified on a Friday, hence the so-named "Good Friday" before Easter. It is true that the timing of His crucifixion and death are not a salvation-level issue. However, in the interests of having as truthful a picture of Biblical events as possible, it is important to know when Jesus was crucified. It is also necessary to know accurately what transpired at the Last Supper, during the time He was buried, and at the time of His rising from the grave. We need something more than the standard seminarian "Good Friday" explanation. What happens when we examine the facts? We learn that they point to the conclusion that Jesus was crucified on a Thursday, not a Friday. We shall endeavor to give you as good, concise, and accurate an explanation as we can. Bear in mind that there are many explanations about the timing of the crucifixion. The objective here is to develop one that is accurate and easy to understand.

A. THE TIMELINE OF PASSION WEEK

Many Bibles have a Harmony of the Gospels in the back, presenting an overall picture of Christ's ministry as well as His death, burial, and resurrection. The following timeline picks up the action at the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Sunday of the week of His crucifixion. We will then zero in on the last hours of His life up until the time that He rose again. You may wonder at this point why it is such a big deal as to whether Jesus was actually crucified on Friday or on some other day. From a salvation standpoint, it is not. In seeking the truth, it is much more significant. Traditions have wended their way into the Church over the many centuries of her existence until now, modern Christianity is loaded with them, and one of those traditions is that Christ was crucified on a Friday, hence "Good Friday." In order to return to a purer form of the faith and a more accurate knowledge of the events chronicled in Scripture, we must strip away these obscuring layers of tradition so we can get to what is real.

1. The Passion Week Timeline

The following is taken from *The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible, New King James Version*, Copyright 1997 B. B. Kirkbride Bible Company, Inc. and Copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc., pages 2145-2146, with some modifications to format, wording, and timing of events:

DAY	EVENTS AND SCRIPTURE REFERENCES
Sunday	Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (<i>Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19</i>)
Monday	Jesus clears the Temple again (<i>Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46</i>); first time is in John 2:13-22
	Jesus heals in the Temple (<i>Matthew 21:14</i>)
	Jesus curses the fig tree (<i>Matthew 21:18-20; Mark 11:12-14, 20-21</i>)
Tuesday	Jesus's authority is challenged (<i>Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8</i>)
	Parable of the two sons (<i>Matthew 21:28-32</i>)
	Parable of the wicked vinedressers (<i>Matthew 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16</i>)
	Parable of the wedding feast (<i>Matthew 22:1-14</i>)
	The question about the tax money (<i>Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26</i>)
	The Sadducees' question (<i>Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40</i>)
	Jesus speaks of the greatest commandment (<i>Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34</i>)
	Jesus's question (<i>Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44</i>)

DAY	EVENTS AND SCRIPTURE REFERENCES
Tuesday (cont'd)	Jesus pronounces woes against the Pharisees (<i>Matthew, Chapter 23; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47</i>)
	The widow's mite (<i>Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4</i>)
	Visit of the Greeks (<i>John 12:20-36</i>)
	Jesus's discourse on unbelief (<i>John 12:37-50</i>)
	Jesus's prophecies of coming calamities in the world (<i>Matthew 24:1-14; Mark 13:1-13; Luke 21:5-19</i>)
	Jesus's discourse on signs and coming events (<i>Matthew 24:15-42; Mark 13:14-37; Luke 21:20-36</i>)
	Parable of the ten virgins (<i>Matthew 25:1-13</i>)
	Parable of the ten talents (<i>Matthew 25:14-30</i>)
	Jesus's discourse on the judgment day (<i>Matthew 25:31-46</i>)
Wednesday	Plot of the Jews and Judas (<i>Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16; Mark 14:1-2, 10-11; Luke 22:1-6</i>)
	Preparation for the Passover (<i>Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13</i>)
	The Last Supper (<i>Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:17-18; Luke 22:14-18</i>)
	The disciples' dispute (<i>Luke 22:24-30</i>)
	Jesus washes the disciples' feet (<i>John 13:1-17</i>)
	Jesus predicts His betrayal (<i>Matthew 26:21-25; Mark 14:18-21; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:21-30</i>)
	The Lord's Supper (the memorial meal for the new covenant) (<i>Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20</i>)
	The parting words of Jesus (<i>John 14:1-31</i>)
	Parable of the true vine (<i>John 15:1-11</i>)
	The promise of the Holy Spirit (<i>John 16:7-15</i>)
	Jesus's intercessory prayer (<i>John 17:1-26</i>)
	Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (<i>Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1</i>)
	Jesus is betrayed (<i>Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:3-13</i>)
	Malchus's ear cut off, then is healed (<i>Matthew 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50-51; John 18:10</i>)
Thursday	Jesus before the high priest (<i>Matthew 26:57; Mark 14:53; Luke 22:54; John 18:13-14</i>)
	Peter's denial of Jesus (<i>Matthew 26:58, 68-75; Mark 14:54, 66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27</i>)
	Jesus before the Council (<i>Matthew 26:59-68, 11-14; Mark 14:55-65; Luke 22:66-71; John 18:19-24</i>)
	Jesus before Pontius Pilate (<i>Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38</i>)
	Jesus before Herod (<i>Luke 23:6-12</i>)
	Pilate tries to release Jesus (<i>Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-24; John 18:39-40</i>)
	Appeal of Pilate's wife (<i>Matthew 27:19</i>)
	Pilate washes his hands (<i>Matthew 27:24</i>)
	Pilate gives Jesus the death sentence (<i>Matthew 27:26-30; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:24; John 19:1-16</i>)
	Jesus mocked by Roman soldiers (<i>Matthew 27:30; Mark 15:16-20; John 19:1-3</i>)
	Judas commits suicide (<i>Matthew 27:3-10</i>)
	Jesus led away to be crucified (<i>Matthew 27:31-33; Luke 15:20-22; Luke 23:26; John 19:16-17</i>)

DAY	EVENTS AND SCRIPTURE REFERENCES
Thursday (cont'd)	Lamentation of the women (<i>Luke 23:27-31</i>)
	Jesus is offered wine (<i>Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23</i>)
	The crucifixion (<i>Matthew 27:35-38; Mark 15:25-28; Luke 23:33-38; John 19:18-24</i>)
	Lots cast for His garments (<i>John 19:23-24</i>)
	Jesus mocked by Jews (<i>Matthew 27:39-43; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35</i>)
	A dying criminal confesses and repents (<i>Luke 23:39-43</i>)
	Jesus's mother entrusted to John (<i>John 19:25-27</i>)
	Darkness falls; Jesus dies (<i>Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46; John 19:28-30</i>)
	Veil of the temple torn, and graves opened (<i>Matthew 27:51-53; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45</i>)
	Centurion confesses (<i>Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47</i>)
	Jesus's body taken down (<i>Matthew 27:57-58; Mark 15:42-45; Luke 23:50-53; John 19:31-38</i>)
	Jesus's body entombed (<i>Mark 27:59-61; Mark 15:46-47; Luke 23:53; John 19:39-42</i>)
Friday	Grave guarded (<i>Matthew 27:62-66</i>)
	Jesus's body in the tomb
Saturday	Jesus's body in the tomb
Sunday	Earthquake (<i>Matthew 28:2-4</i>)
	Women come to the grave to anoint Jesus's body (<i>Matthew 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-5; Luke 24:1-2; John 20:1</i>)
	Mary finds the tomb empty (<i>John 20:2</i>)
	Mary Magdalene tells Peter (<i>Mark 16:10; John 20:2</i>)
	Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene (<i>Mark 16:9; John 20:11-17</i>)
	Jesus appears to the other women (<i>Matthew 28:8-10</i>)
	Report of the guard (<i>Matthew 28:11-15</i>)
	Jesus appears to Peter (<i>Luke 24:34</i>)
	Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (<i>Luke 24:33-35</i>)
	Jesus appears to the disciples (<i>Luke 24:36-48; John 20:19-25</i>)

You can see, besides my notation, the modifications made to the Passion Week timeline to account for a Thursday crucifixion. Of course, there are many theories about the timing, even for proponents of a Thursday crucifixion date. We will not examine those other theories. Rather, using the Scriptures as our guide, we will soon look at the chain of events surrounding the Last Supper, Christ's arrest and events springing from it, and the crucifixion itself.

2. Issues Needing Resolution

There is confusion about a number of things surrounding the timing of Christ's crucifixion, especially about the timing of the Passover that week. The accounts in the synoptic Gospels seem to place the Passover meal on the evening of the Last Supper (*Matthew 21:17-21; Mark 14:12-18; Luke 22:7-16*). In John's Gospel it sounds as though the main Passover meal had not yet taken place, but that the crucifixion was on the Preparation Day (*John 18:28, 19:14*). The synoptic references also refer to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. If one were to go strictly by the original Old Testament dating and description of the Passover meal, one would think that the crucifixion occurred on Friday, and there are reputable Bible scholars who make a strong case for a Friday crucifixion. Included in this scenario is the

assertion that the following day was the regular weekly Sabbath. There are other good Bible scholars who make strong cases for a Thursday or even a Wednesday crucifixion, and they point out that the day following was a special Sabbath in addition to the regular one. The Bible manuscripts favor this scenario because in the New Testament Greek the word for Sabbath in such passages as Matthew 28:1 is in the plural form, indicating that more than one Sabbath had occurred during Passover week. Our belief is that the crucifixion was on Thursday, and the reasons we believe this will be discussed in the next section. Bear in mind that there are variant opinions on this subject even among those who believe in a Thursday crucifixion, so our belief is not actually one, but one of many. Did Jesus and His disciples eat the actual Passover meal or a different sacrificial meal known as a chagigah? What about the bread and the wine? Was “Passover” referring to the actual meal or that whole week? Had the method of Passover observance changed over the fourteen and a half centuries since its initial appearance? What was the Sabbath the day after Christ’s crucifixion referring to? How did Easter come into being? Is Christ our Passover and the Lamb of God? We will now turn to these questions and bring out what we believe to be the correct answers.

B. EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

There are many theories about the timeline of Passion Week, even among Jewish commentators. So many, in fact, that to examine them all would create extraordinary confusion. Complicating this already challenging situation is the fact that there were various calendars in use at the time of Christ’s crucifixion. There was the Creation calendar (the original Hebrew calendar), then the Babylonian calendar which was very slightly out of step with it and was apparently in use by the Jewish religious leaders of that time. Also, there was the Julian calendar, commissioned less than a century earlier by Julius Caesar. It was virtually identical to our current Gregorian calendar except that it incorporated a few too many leap years. Also, its use was not yet consistent in Christ’s day. We will now give our explanation for how things happened.

1. Two Calendars, Two Passover Meals?

The Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem was on the first day of the week, Sunday. On the calendar in AD 30 this was the tenth of Nisan (on the Jewish leaders’ calendar), the day that the lambs to be sacrificed for Passover were chosen. On 14 Nisan, between 3 PM (the ninth hour) and sundown, they were to be slaughtered. It is seemingly indicated in the synoptic Gospels that Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover meal, as these verses state:

Mark 14:12, 16-18a: Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover *lamb*, His disciples said to Him, “Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?”...So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover. In the evening He came with the twelve. Now as they sat and ate,...

Without further inspection, it would seem as though Jesus was crucified on Friday, as Church tradition has long held. However, when we examine the Scriptures in their entirety we see that this is impossible. In fact, it appears that the synoptic Gospels and John’s Gospel contradict one another. Because the Bible is inerrant, this, too, is impossible. There is an underlying explanation tying all these elements together. So what are the Scriptures in John which with a casual view are confusing, and what is a Scripture which helps pin down the timing of the crucifixion to Thursday? Let’s look:

John 18:28, 19:14a, 31: Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover... Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour... Therefore, because it was the Preparation *Day*, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on a Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away.

Luke 24:1-3, 13-24: Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain *other women* with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus... Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, **“What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?”** Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, “Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?” And He said to them, **“What things?”** So they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those *who were* with us went to the tomb and found *it* just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.”

Starting with the Luke passage, we can see that three days back from Sunday was Thursday. The Friday crucifixion is too late. Some argue that each day was counted as one day inclusively, making the third day back from Sunday a Friday, but notice the phrase, “this is the third day *since* these things happened” (emphasis mine). The New Testament Greek word for “since” is “apo” (a-PO) (short “o” sound), which has various connotations of separation, such as after. It is hard to get three days *since* from an inclusive count! Therefore Sunday was three days *after* the day of crucifixion—three days *after* Thursday. From John’s Gospel we see that Jesus Christ was crucified on the Preparation Day. All three of the synoptic Gospels tell us that the Lord died at the ninth hour—3 PM—, which is the precise time that the slaughter of the Passover lambs began. So how could Jesus and His disciples have eaten the Passover the night before? It was a day early—or was it?

The timing of the Last Supper/Passover meal seems to be a paradox at first, but there is a solution to this mystery. It would be tempting to say that since Jesus is God, He had the authority to change the timing of the Passover meal, but in fact He would have never done that. Since the dates for the Passover events were in the inspired Scriptures, Jesus would not have violated the Word. So what is the answer? Most likely the Lord and His disciples were observing the Passover on the original Hebrew lunisolar calendar, which seems to have been a day out of step with the Jewish leaders’ Babylonian-based lunisolar calendar. How could the two calendars be out of step if they were both based on the same thing? It is because in the Babylonian region the moon’s phases would have reached their peaks (new, full) at a slightly different time than in Jerusalem due to the distance between the two areas. The observed phase times at Babylon would have been anywhere from 16 to 40 hours ahead of the times observed in Jerusalem, causing there to be a time lag between the Hebrew and Babylonian calendars. Therefore in the year of Christ’s crucifixion Nisan 10 on the original calendar would have been on Saturday, a regular Sabbath day, instead of on Sunday, so Nisan 15, the Passover, would have been Nisan 14, the Preparation Day, on the

Babylonian calendar the Jewish leaders were using. Bear in mind that about six centuries earlier the southern kingdom of Judah (which included Jerusalem) was conquered by the Babylonian Empire, and that observant Jews in the captivity would have had to make do with the calendar being used in Babylon. We see, then, that Jesus and His disciples actually were on time in eating the Passover, yet He died on the cross at the time that the slaughter of the Passover lambs began in the Temple by the Jews in His day. Still, it is hard to comprehend how the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were such strict observers of the Mosaic Law, could have utilized such a calendar since the Babylonian captivity ended over 500 years prior to Christ's day, but apparently they did. Regardless of opinion, once more I state that the Scriptures must be our guide, including for the Passion Week timeline.

A couple of other explanations, both of which have some basis in fact, have been put forward by some commentators. One was that by the time of Christ, the whole period of Passover was called Passover, not just the actual meal. Another is that some would eat a separate sacrificial meal known as the Chagigah. It is indeed possible that this could have been the case at the Last Supper, though the calendar theory explains the whole difference quite nicely and practically. In any case, as we have already seen, the Bible timeline demands that Christ had to have been crucified on Thursday. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were guided also by the original Hebrew calendar, whereas John was being attentive to the calendar the Jewish leaders were using in that day.

Think also to what Jesus said of Himself in this passage:

Matthew 12:39-40: But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

The Jews consider a day as being from sunset to sunset, so you have the night first and then the day, or the Creation days' reckoning. The law of first mention, a valid hermeneutic tool, holds that when a word, concept, et cetera is described for the first time in the Bible, it has that same meaning throughout the rest of the Bible. For example, sin is always what it is from the beginning of the Word of God to the end. This law is not set in stone, however. The term “sons of God” in the Old Testament refers to angels while in the New Testament that or its variant, “children of God,” means people who have been born again. Rigid Bible literalists maintain that since a day is a literal 24-hour period from the first time it is mentioned, in the Creation account, that it is always that including during the period of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, therefore they maintain that the crucifixion occurred on Wednesday. We have already demonstrated that to be impossible by the Scriptures. Therefore the law of first mention on the length of days breaks down a little during this timeline, but not much.

Consider this: Christ died at the ninth hour (3 PM) on Thursday, His soul and Spirit going into the heart of the earth immediately upon the death of His body. So you have Thursday day to Friday before sunrise, one day and one night; Friday day to Saturday before sunrise, a second day and night; then Saturday day to Sunday before sunrise, a third day and night, and He rose from the grave before sunrise on Sunday. Thus, Jesus Christ fulfilled the “three days and three nights” prophecy.

So what about the bread and the wine that Jesus and His disciples shared at the Last Supper? This was a memorial meal, one of the steps observed when individuals in the ancient Middle East were establishing a blood covenant. The covenant was in blood because animals were sacrificed. In the ancient world a blood covenant was taken very seriously. Passing through the blood together between the pieces of the animals cut in half was, in effect, saying, “May the same happen to me if I break this covenant.” This gives new weight to Christ's warnings about the wicked servant not being found doing his master's will at his master's return (**Matthew 24:45-51**). Interestingly enough, Melchizedek, a type (foreshadow) of Christ,

brought out the same meal to Abram (Abraham) and those with him. Melchizedek was king of Salem (Jerusalem) and priest of God Most High. Jesus Christ is our High Priest (*Hebrews 3:1-2*). The memorial meal Melchizedek served in Genesis 14 was served not long before God formally made a blood covenant with Abram (*Genesis 15:1-21*). Jesus Christ shared the bread and wine of the new covenant with His disciples shortly before He sealed the new covenant with His blood on the cross. Look at these two Scriptures:

Genesis 14:18-20: Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he *was* the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he gave him a tithe of all.

Luke 22:19-20: And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, “**This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.**” Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, “**This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.**”

Every step of the way, God knew what He was doing. We can trust Him, and we can trust His Word. That is why we can use the Bible to not only know the proper sequence of events during Passion Week, we can also use it for whatever else we need to know about life, most importantly for salvation, and what the Lord did that week for all of mankind—for whoever will accept His free gift of salvation—no scale can measure and no amount of money can buy (*2 Corinthians 9:15*).

2. The Preparation Day, Two Sabbaths, Our Easter, and Jesus our Passover Lamb

The Preparation Day, noted by John in Chapter 19 of his Gospel, was the day that the Passover lambs were killed. Again, the Lord died at the time the sacrifices began. Also, John 19:31 tells us that the oncoming Sabbath was a high day. This is what is known in Judaism as a High Holy Day. There are various Jewish celebrations but the main High Holy Days are the two New Year celebrations: Passover in the spring; Rosh Hashanah in the fall; and following ten days later, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). In the year that Jesus was crucified, the Passover that the Jews were celebrating fell on Friday, since of course Christ died on Thursday, the Preparation Day, as discussed earlier. Therefore in that year, 30 AD, the high Sabbath and the regular seventh-day Sabbath were on consecutive days.

A lot of people think that the references “after the Sabbath” and “when the Sabbath was past” in Matthew 28:1 and Mark 16:1, respectively, refer strictly to the regular Sabbath. However, in the Greek the form of the word there is plural. Yes, there is disagreement among Bible scholars as to what exactly this refers to, but it should be quite obvious that if there was more than one Sabbath—in this case, Passover (a High Holy Day) followed by a regular Sabbath, then the rendering should be Sabbaths, referring to two *literal* Sabbaths. You could say “after the Sabbaths” and “when the Sabbaths were past.” I do not say this lightly or flippantly, for the Bible warns us to take care not to add to or take from its words (*Revelation 22:18-19*). God will give grace, however, when one’s motive is to render a word or a phrase earnestly and sincerely from the Bible. Does this translation issue contradict the earlier contention that the Bible is inerrant? Certainly not! It just means that when humans translate they sometimes make mistakes. Those Bible manuscripts which have not been tampered with are inerrant, therefore the bedrock of the Bible is inerrant, meaning that the Bible itself is inerrant. Case closed.

Where does the term “Easter” come from? In the writings of Bede, a monk who lived in the eighth century, states that it came from a pagan goddess named Eostre, the goddess of spring. However, no archaeological evidence exists for this goddess and the worship of her. It is possible that he could have

extrapolated this from the name of the month, Eosturmonath, which is what it was called in parts of western Europe including Germany during his time. Eosturmonath was the name for April, called in that time also “Paschal month” because the Passover occurs in April in most years. We know it did in the year that Jesus was crucified. A nineteenth-century folklorist named Jakob Grimm assumed that Ostara, Old High German for Easter’s German name of Ostern, may have been the name of a German goddess, although like Bede he made no definite link between the name of the month and pagan worship. Thus, Grimm’s conclusion was based on conjecture and speculation, so we do not really know for sure where the term Easter comes from. However, we *can* know the connection between it and Passover.

One might understandably wonder how we as Christians came to observe Easter, given the fact that Jesus Christ was so heavily connected to the Passover. After all, He was born and raised as a Jew, and He died at the exact time the slaughter of the Passover lambs began in the Temple. More on that last point when the final part of the lesson is discussed. Over the nearly three centuries between Christ’s ascension back to heaven and the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, peoples’ attitudes toward the Jews changed in a most unfavorable manner. There was outrage against the religious leaders for their part in conspiring to have Christ railroaded on false accusations and then having Him crucified. When the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, a number of persons viewed these acts as divine judgment for what was done to Jesus. The Lord Himself prophesied about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple about forty years before it happened:

Matthew 23:37-24:2: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ ” Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came out to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”

By the time of Constantine, the ruler who legalized Christianity throughout the Roman Empire in 313 AD, there was a lot of anti-Semitic sentiment among believers. Parallel to the growing angst against the Jews over these several centuries was a debate among believers about Passover and the commemoration of Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection. Early on, the Christians had a custom of observing the Lord’s Supper (the Eucharist) as the Jewish Passover (Pesach), starting on the eve of Nisan 14. This practice is called quartodecimanism. Polycarp (AD 69-155), a disciple of John the Apostle, practiced this, and according to such early church fathers and historians as Irenaeus and Eusebius, he derived this practice from John himself. Variations of the practice of the observance, which we will not detail, existed in Christendom until the First Council of Nicaea.

At this ecumenical council, worldwide uniformity of observance of this holiday and independence from the Jewish calendar were established, but no definite rules were given to determine the date, so variations on the date of observance continued, with a number of believers opting to continue the observance on 14 Nisan. It was not until the middle 600’s to early 700’s that the modern computation method was adopted, placing Easter on the Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal (spring) equinox. That is why the date changes each year. The Orthodox churches still use the Julian calendar for ecclesiastical purposes, so their dates for Easter and other holidays are somewhat out of sync with those on our Gregorian calendar. Yes, we as Christians do observe a holiday distinct from the Jewish Passover, but this does not change the fact that Jesus is the Lamb of God slain for our sins. One of the things the families of the children of Israel were each supposed to do as the time of their exodus from Egypt drew nigh was to sacrifice a lamb and brush the lamb’s blood onto the doorposts and lintels (overhead portion) of their doorways with a

hyssop branch (*Exodus 12:21-23*). Having struck the land of Egypt with nine plagues already, God was about to unleash His tenth and final plague upon the land, the death of the firstborn, after which the Israelites would be released from their captivity. By seeing the blood on the doorposts and lintels, the destroyer God sent would not kill any of the Israelites' firstborn of people and animals, only those of the Egyptians. There is some very strong symbolism here.

The children of Israel were God's people, and each family would be protected by the blood of a lamb. The lamb foreshadowed the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. His blood, shed upon Calvary, is the atonement for our sins, and when we are saved we are washed clean in the blood of Christ. When God sees us His saints, he sees the blood of Jesus, and His wrath no longer abides on us. Furthermore, we are protected from divine judgment, a protection not afforded those who are outside of Christ, just as those ancient Egyptians were not protected because they, likewise, were not of God's people. In fact, the various sacrifices for sins were all pictures of the coming once-for-all atonement that Jesus provided (*Hebrews 7:20-8:6*). The Passover lamb, though, is of special significance as you have just seen, Christ being the Lamb of God slain for us. The Scriptures affirm this:

1 Corinthians 5:7: Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

John 1:29: The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Revelation 5:11-14: Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power *be* to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

Revelation 7:13-14: Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

We celebrate Easter—Resurrection Sunday—for more reasons than the fixing of the date on the Sunday of each year that meets the formula requirements discussed earlier. Even in the Church's beginning, believers were meeting on the first day of the week (Sunday) (*Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2*). We are not celebrating a pagan holiday by meeting on Sunday, nor did the Catholics change the Sabbath to Sunday. As Gentiles we were not subject to the ceremonial laws to start with, and now under the new covenant there is no compunction to worship on Saturday. We gather on Sundays because Sunday was the day of the week that Jesus rose again. We celebrate Easter because of its connection not so much to Passover as because of its connection to Jesus Christ our Passover lamb, the Lamb of God who paid for our sins with His blood. Jesus Christ was crucified on a Thursday, rose again on a Sunday, and regardless of whether you accept our conclusion or not, no one can afford to neglect what Jesus did for us that week. We must be saved from our sins, and Jesus is the only One who can save us (*John 14:6; Acts 4:8-12*).