

# What Day Was Easter?

## Is Tradition Accurate?

What day was Jesus crucified? Is tradition accurate? Did Jesus say "It is finished" on Good Friday?

How awesome are these words, *"Up from the grave He arose, With a mighty triumph o'er His foes, He arose a Victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever, with His saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!"* We know that Jesus rose from the dead forever conquering sin & death for all that believe. But what day did He die?

The teaching of the church is clear—Jesus died on Good FRIDAY. In my quest to free myself from any tradition that does not line up with Scripture, I think I've found very credible evidence that Jesus did not die on Friday. Why does this matter? Is this a meaningless exercise? I think not because this conclusion stands in opposition to the integrity of the Word of God. Did Jesus keep His word? Let's look at some of what Jesus stated prior to His death:

John 2:19 (ESV) *Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."*

Luke 9:22 (NKJV) *saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."*

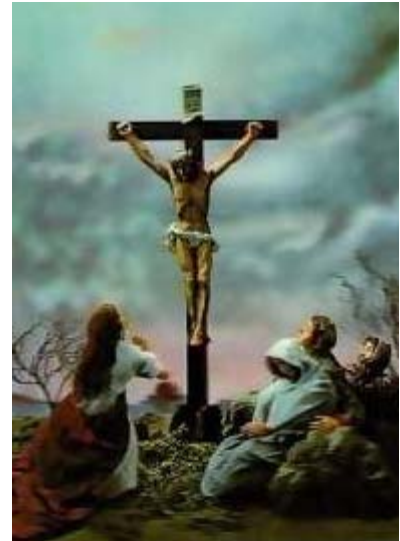
Mark 15:42-43 (ESV) <sup>42</sup> *And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath,* <sup>43</sup> *Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*

John 19:31 (ESV) *Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the 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.*

So far so good. There's nothing in any of those passages that would dispute a Friday crucifixion. But a wrinkle has been placed into the equation. Notice that the Sabbath was a "high day". If you are unfamiliar with the events surrounding the Passover let's look at [Leviticus chapter 23](#).

Leviticus 23:5-8 (NKJV) <sup>5</sup> *On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover.* <sup>6</sup> *And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; seven days you must eat unleavened bread.* <sup>7</sup> *On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.* <sup>8</sup> *But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.'*

*The above text confirms that the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread are annual Sabbaths, to be observed as a day of rest in addition to the weekly Sabbaths. These days would occur on the 15th and 21st of Abib/Nisan. The Passover meal was an important religious observance in which to remember that the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their houses kept them alive when the angel of death passed by, and that God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. The Passover is a perpetual observance to celebrate passing*



*from death to life. These ancient events foretold the blood of Jesus being spilled for our sins, and our passage from death to eternal life, by the everlasting covenant of the blood of Jesus. They also foretold that Jesus would die exactly on the 14th of Abib/Nisan and that the day following was an annual Sabbath.* (from "Good Friday is a Myth" by Roy A. Reinhold)

Are you beginning to see it? Notice that one time per year there were multiple Sabbaths, potentially in addition to the regular weekly Sabbath. But the question at this point remains—did either of these Sabbaths (high days) fall on the normal weekly Sabbath? Why would this have mattered? Because Scriptural integrity is hanging in the balance as we will read below. Let's look at a First Testament reference to the resurrection.

**Hosea 6:1-2 (NKJV)** *<sup>1</sup> Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. <sup>2</sup> After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight.*

At this point Hosea's divinely inspired account does not appear to be in conflict with tradition. Friday death, Sabbath (Saturday), Sunday He was raised on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. But when we come to Jesus' own words recorded by Matthew we begin to wade knee deep in quicksand.

**Matthew 12:40 (NKJV)** *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.*

**Jonah 1:17 (NKJV)** *Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

**Luke 11:29-32 (NKJV)** *<sup>29</sup> And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. <sup>30</sup> For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation. <sup>31</sup> The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here. <sup>32</sup> The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. (As an aside, it should not go without notice that the term "this generation" used repeatedly in this passage is the same phrase "this generation" of Matthew 24:34, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."*

Here's the problem. Jesus clearly said that his death, burial & resurrection would take 3 days & 3 nights. So now what do we do? If He died on Friday, then we have Friday night, Saturday night & Sunday night. How does this square with Scripture? This forces the resurrection to fall on the wrong day.

Well, at this point I will leave the punch-line for you to figure out. The hint is in the following accounts from all four Gospels. Let me know what day of the week you think Jesus died? I will say that it requires the piecing of all four accounts together.

*And they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared. and they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Luke 23:56, 24:1-2*

*Now late on the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came*

*and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.* Matthew 28:1-4

*And when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might anoint Him. And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large.* Mark 16:1-4

*Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. And so she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."* John 20:1-2

### He is risen! But when?

What remains to be determined, now that we have substantial evidence to prove that Jesus died on a Wednesday, is whether Jesus rose as the weekly Sabbath was ending or at sunrise on Sunday? Why again does this matter? Because we believe in the inspiration & integrity of Scripture & as per current tradition there is not the harmony within the Gospel accounts that there should be.

You'll notice through a comparison of the four gospels that Mary Magdalene and the disciples went to the tomb a number of times. In some it was still dark, and in some it was already light. It wasn't until it was light on Sunday that they actually discovered that He had risen; **in the first visits the tomb was empty.** The text in John 20, tells us of the first visit by Mary Magdalene when it was dark, the tomb was empty, and she had not been told that Jesus was risen, and only saw the stone rolled away.

*John 20:1-2 (ESV) <sup>1</sup> Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

I will leave it to you to compare the applicable verses in the four gospels to reconstruct the various visits to the tomb. However, there is one verse which seems to tell us that Jesus rose on the first day of the week.

*Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.* Mark 16:9

The above text would *seem* to conclusively prove that Jesus rose early in the evening on the first day of the week, what we would call Saturday night. Some commentators have speculated that verses 9-20 of this chapter were later added since they weren't in any of the early manuscripts. Whether or not that is true, we ought to know that the meaning of a verse may be altered by the addition of a comma or a deletion. The original Greek text did not have these punctuation marks, so they were added later. This is so important to realize and is a good lesson for us all when dealing with the Scripture. Translators have to deal with many interpretational issues. If a comma is added after risen, the verse takes on an entirely different meaning. *Now after He had risen, early on the first day of the week He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.*

This change is not altering scripture since it was not written with punctuation marks. This makes the verse consistent with all the four gospels, where Mary Magdalene visited the grave, shortly after the Sabbath ended, and saw the empty grave with the stone rolled away, but did not see an angel or see Jesus. It was later, when the sun had risen on Sunday morning that she came with Mary the mother of James and Salome back to the tomb, saw an angel who told her that he had risen, and then saw Jesus. One can imagine that Mary asked Mary Magdalene, "Who would roll away the stone?" as they approached the tomb, since Mary Magdalene had not mentioned that she had been there earlier and saw the empty grave. Then she went and told the disciples that she saw the angel and saw Jesus. What any reader should realize is that the Holy Spirit gave us the four gospels with fragments of the story in each, and it takes a study of all together, to arrive at the complete picture. The following verse clearly shows us that Mary Magdalene came to the grave as the weekly Sabbath was ending.

*Now late on the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave.* Matthew 28:1 (NASB)

*Bishop Papias was an early church bishop in Syria and he wrote that the book of Matthew was originally written in Aramaic, and then translated into Greek by the apostles. Irenaeus and Clement also mentioned seeing the original Aramaic of the book of Matthew. We have some precedence and evidence that at least some of the New Testament books were first written in Aramaic, and translated by the apostles into Greek, and Matthew is one of them. I say all of this because the Aramaic of Matthew 28:1 in Aramaic is much clearer than the Greek. A literal, word for word translation of the Aramaic directly to English is as follows (commas separate meaning of each word).*

*in the evening, at Sabbath, when went up, the beginning (the dawning), belonging, to the last of, in the Sabbath, arrived, Miryam, the Magdalene, and Miryam, the different (the other), came to see, the tomb (the grave).*

*It is obvious by repeating "the Sabbath" twice, that it is making the point that it was at twilight that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb. By stressing "the last of the Sabbath", the verse drives home the point that this was Saturday evening, but that the twilight period still belonged to the Sabbath. There were no streetlights then, and no flashlights, so if the full moon had not yet risen, then when it got dark, it got really dark, really fast. The 2 Mary's had just enough time to look around and leave. No one can read the Peshitta Aramaic of Matthew 28:1 and mistake it for any other understanding than that the Mary's arrived at the tomb at twilight on Saturday evening and the stone had already been rolled away. (From *Jesus Died on Wednesday*)*

Why didn't the 2 Mary's try to anoint the body of Jesus on Friday, since they had prepared the spices and perfumes on Friday before the weekly Sabbath began? It is because in Matthew 27:62-66, Pilate had given the Roman order to have the grave sealed on Thursday morning. They had put the Roman seal on it and posted guards until the 3 days were complete. Therefore, if the 2 Marys had tried to anoint the body on Friday, they would have broken the law and been arrested. They waited until after the 3 days, so as to avoid arrest. The apostles were all in hiding at the time, fearing possibly their own arrest, so it fell to the 2 Mary's to anoint the body.

It seems clear at least to me that the Last Supper took place on the evening of the fourth day of the week (we would say Tuesday evening). Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday and was in the grave 3 days and 3 nights. He rose from the dead late on the Sabbath. Finally, He revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene and the disciples on the first day of the week, shortly after sunrise. Of course this means that we have a Palm Saturday and not a Palm Sunday. It also means that Jesus performed the sign just as He had predicted.

Why does this matter? Any time you come to a conclusion that places tradition at odds with Scripture this question is asked. The simple answer is that truth matters a great deal & harmonizing God's Word is always a good thing.

In addition it should not go without notice that according to the inspired testimony of John the Baptizer, Jesus was "The Lamb of God".

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

Jesus was the antitype of the Passover lamb. Passover was celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan each year and it should not come as a surprise that Jesus would give Himself as the perfect ultimate sacrifice on the same day almost 2,000 after it was instituted.

*Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 1 Corinthians 5:7 (NASB)*

*but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 1 Peter 1:19 (NASB)*

As I mentioned earlier, none of this changes the fact that we serve a risen Savior! It only strengthens the accuracy by harmonizing God's Word. This information may not be new to any of you but these things do wonders for my faith, knowing that Scripture is clearly accurate at every point.

Any thoughts? I'd love to hear them. I leave you with this from the Apostle Paul.

**Ephesians 1:19-21 (NKJV)** <sup>19</sup> *and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power* <sup>20</sup> *which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,* <sup>21</sup> *far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is [about] to come.* "About" is a little Greek word, Mello, that means "about to" & is translated as "shall" or "will" most of the time. Unfortunately the translators have biases just like the rest of us...but that's another subject for another time.