

THE CHRONOLOGY OF PASSION WEEK

I. Introduction

A. The Importance

1. Due to the release of the Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of The Christ*, understanding the events surrounding the death of Christ is of supreme importance to believers who endeavor to understand a fuller meaning of Christ's death and to share that meaning with unbelievers.
2. Understanding the chronological elements of Christ's death enables us to stand in awe as we see how His death perfectly fulfilled the typology and prophecy of the Old Testament.
3. A proper understanding of the events of Passion Week leads us to worship our Lord who alone is worthy of our worship.

B. Problems Harmonizing the Gospels

1. The skeptics see the accounts of Passion Week in the Gospels as a being hopelessly contradictory. For example, the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) seem to indicate that the Last Supper was a ritual Passover meal, whereas the Gospel of John seems to show the Last Supper as being eaten before to the Passover: *Now before the feast of the Passover....* (Jn. 13:1). See also: Jn. 13:29; 18:28; 19:14, and 19:31.
2. Solutions to the chronological problems of Passion week can usually be found by recognizing the many different ways of reckoning time during the NT period. For example, the Romans had one way, the various Jewish parties (Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes) had different ways, and we today reckon time differently than they. The Galileans may have even differed from those living in Judea. For the Romans, 6:00 AM was the first hour of the day. The Old Testament reckons sundown as the beginning of a new day (see Gen. 1). We, begin our day at midnight. Some groups in NT times used a solar calendar; others used the lunar method of calculation.

II. The Day of Christ's Death

- A. Modern research is continually plowing new ground in the area of NT chronological studies with the aid of computers and computer-aided

astronomical studies.

B. The day of Christ's crucifixion. There are three different days of the week that are proposed as the day of Christ's crucifixion:

1. The Wednesday view: Christ died Wednesday evening, and exactly 72 hours later (Sunday morning), arose from the dead. This view was proposed by W. Graham Scroggie and others as a result of a literal, westernized interpretation of Matthew 12:40.
2. The Thursday view is suggested by the Greek scholar, B. F. Westcott. This view is not widely held and has some of the same difficulties as the above view.
3. The Traditional, or Friday View, is not only held by most Bible scholars, but is also the most defensible. The oriental mind counted a part of a day as a whole day. Jesus was in the tomb part of Friday, all day Saturday, and a part of Sunday. There are other Biblical examples of this kind of reckoning (see Gen. 42:17,18; I Kings 20:29; I Sam. 30:12,13.). This is also confirmed in rabbinical literature.

C. The Day of the Month of the Crucifixion.

Passover occurred during the month of *Abib*, the first Jewish month of the year. After the exile this month was called *Nisan*. This corresponds to March or April in our calendar. Passover lambs were to be slain on *Nisan* 14 between 3 and 5:00 PM and then eaten after sundown (see Ex.12). Jesus died about 3:00 PM, or the ninth hour according to Galilean and Roman reckoning (see Mk. 15:33). A problem appears when two passages in John's Gospel (18:28; 19:36) indicate that some had still not eaten the Passover the day after Jesus had already eaten it with His disciples. John's account seems to be in conflict with that of the Synoptics (See above: I,B.) Some evangelical scholars today believe the accounts can be reconciled due to the different ways of reckoning time. Jesus, the Galileans, and the Pharisees reckoned days began at sunrise. The Sadducees, who had authority over the temple, reckoned days from sunset. Thus the problem can be eliminated if the Synoptics reckon one way and John's Gospel another. Hence: *Jesus both ate the Passover and was immolated as our Passover Lamb* as Paul says in I Cor. 5:7.

D. The Year of Christ's death

We know for certain that Christ died somewhere between 26 and 36 AD. If we are settled that He died on a Friday, then by astronomical calculation we know that in the years 30 and 33 AD Friday occurred on *Nisan* 14. There are good arguments for both dates. Of late, the 30 A.D. date is gaining in popularity because it would make Jesus about 30 when he began His ministry. If Jesus was born on Sept. 11, 3 BC on the Jewish Feast of the Trumpets (see Outline #19), He was about 33 years old at His death.

III. The Chronology of Passion Week

A. Introduction

Jesus and His disciples began their trip to Jerusalem from Galilee. They traveled south on the eastern side of the Jordan River. They traveled through the city of Jericho where Zaccheus met Jesus. On Friday they then arrived at Bethany, a little village just east of Jerusalem. They more than likely stayed with His friend, Lazarus, and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. This family not only supported Jesus financially, but their home was His home whenever He was in the area. The chief priests and pharisees hoped that Jesus would come to the feast, and had laid plans to arrest Him (Jn. 11:55-12:1). They were apparently offering a reward of 30 pieces of silver for information leading to His arrest.

B. Friday Evening--Six days before the Passover, Mary (sister of Lazarus) anoints Jesus' feet with costly perfume (John 12:2-11).

C. Saturday. Jesus keeps the Sabbath in the traditional fashion with His friends.

D. Sunday. The Triumphal Entry (Mt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk. 19; Jn. 12).

1. Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey fulfilling an ancient prophecy (Zech. 9:9). The people welcome Him with "Hosanna" and the words of Psalm 118:25-26.
2. Jesus, at this moment is officially presenting Himself to the nation as the Messiah. This date according to the Jewish calendar, was *Nisan* 10, *the day pilgrims presented their paschal lambs for examination*.

E. Monday. Cleansing of the Temple (Mt.21; Mk.11; Lk.19).

On this day Jesus returns to Jerusalem (He spends each night in Bethany). On

the way He curses the fig-tree, a highly symbolic act. He then enters the Temple and chases out the corrupt money-changers. This shows His Messianic authority (*My Father's House*) and fulfills another prophecy that implies the Messiah will appear there suddenly and take possession of it. (See Mal. 3:1). They then return to Bethany. On the way home they see the withered fig-tree.

F. Tuesday. The Day of Controversy and Teaching in Parables.

On this day Jesus personally confronts the authorities and defends His claims to be the Messiah. The occasion for their questions was His violent action the previous day. Mark's gospel gives the most detailed account (Mk. 11:27-13:37). The day ends with Jesus pronouncing a curse on the city and announcing that the Kingdom will be taken away from the nation (explains the significance of the cursed fig-tree). See Matt. 23. On the return to Bethany the Disciples are loaded with questions. Jesus stops at the Mount of Olives overlooking the temple, and gives the Olivet Discourse. See Matt. 24,25; Lk.21:5ff. The Olivet Discourse is a detailed prophecy largely about the coming destruction Jerusalem and the temple due to the rejection of Jesus as Messiah by the Jewish authorities.

G. Wednesday. The Silent Day.

After an exhausting day of controversy, Jesus more than likely spends this day resting and visiting with His intimate friends.

H. Thursday. Day of Preparation and Passover in the Evening.

1. On this day (and perhaps on the previous day) preparation is made for the Passover. Judas may have also utilized this time for his betrayal (Matt. 26:1-5; 14-16; 17-19).
2. The Passover is celebrated on Thursday evening (Friday by Jewish reckoning) in an upper room. Tradition has it that it was owned by Mark's parents. At the end of the Jewish feast, Jesus institutes the Last Supper (Matt. 14:12-26; Lk. 22:17-23).
3. The Last Supper is followed by the Upper Room Discourse (Jn. 13-17).
4. Sometime in the evening, after the Passover, Jesus and His disciples leave the Upper Room and go to Gethsemane, a place near the Mt. of Olives where it was a custom for Jesus to Pray (Matt. 26:36-46).

5. While in the Garden, Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested by the temple guards (Jn. 18:2-12).
6. The Trials begin. Before dawn Jesus is tried twice before Annas and then Caiaphas. Everything about these trials is illegal.

I. Friday. Trials, Crucifixion, Death, and Burial.

1. Jesus' third trial is held early in the morning before the Sanhedrin. The first three trials were before the religious authorities where He is found guilty.
2. Jesus is then taken before Pilate (the fourth trial) where He is found innocent. He is subsequently taken to Herod who also finds Him innocent (the fifth), and then back to Pilate who again finds Him innocent (the sixth) but relents under pressure, perhaps fearing an uprising.. He notes on the sign on the cross that His crime was being *the King of the Jews*. He probably did this to avoid trouble with Rome (No king but Caesar).
3. About 9:00 AM. Jesus is crucified on a hill called *The Skull* outside the city. While we cannot know for certain it is likely that this is the site where God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Issac. At noon, the sky becomes dark, either due to supernatural darkness or because of an eclipse. In either case, the darkness is highly symbolic of the Father turning His back on the one He had earlier called *My beloved son*. During that time the Savior experienced hell for us. *Hell is to be utterly forsaken by God*.
4. At 3:00 PM Jesus utters the most important words to believers when he cries with a loud voice: *It is finished*. The phrase literally means *Paid in full* The spotless Son of God became sin for us! Isa. 53:5,6. Jesus gives up His life and fulfills the typology of the Passover Lamb at exactly the time the lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple. The veil is rent in the Temple (Mk. 15:38). Jesus was on the cross 6 hours.
5. Jesus is laid in Joseph's tomb before the Sabbath began at sunset, or around 6:00 PM.

J. Saturday. Jesus' body lies in the tomb. After 6:00 PM the Sabbath is over and His body is treated with spices (Mk. 16:1).

H. Sunday. Resurrection Day. The Father raises the Son from the dead sometime early Sunday morning, possibly before dawn. In doing so, He

fulfills the typology of the Firstfruits (I Cor. 15:23. Matt. 28:1-13). Through His death believers are justified, that is, the perfect righteousness of the Son is imputed to sinners, and through His resurrection we can be assured that the sacrifice of the Lamb of God was accepted by a Holy God, and therefore, our resurrection is certain.

For Further Study:

Morgan, G. Campbell. *The Crisis of the Christ*. See Book V.

Piper, John . *The Passion of Jesus Christ*

Shepard, J. W. *The Christ of the Gospels*. See Part VII.

Thomas, Robert L., and, Gundry, Stanley N. *A Harmony of The Gospels*. See appropriate chapters and the appendixes.