



VARIOLOGIES

PATREON-EXCLUSIVE BIBLE STUDY

WHEN DID JESUS DIE?

**Attempting to Determine Which Day of the Week
and Which Day of the Month Jesus was Crucified**

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• WHAT DAY OF THE WEEK DID JESUS DIE?

Most Christians believe that Jesus was crucified on a Friday and was raised back to life by God by the following Sunday morning. However, Jesus himself said:

“...for just as Jonah was in the stomach of the sea monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.” (Matthew 12:40, NASB)

From this verse, it seems that Jesus predicted that he would be dead for three full days and nights – approximately 72 hours. However, the traditional timeline of a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection doesn't align with this timeframe. This has led some to theorize that Jesus was actually crucified on a Wednesday or Thursday.¹ But what do the gospels themselves say about the timing of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus? Let's examine each gospel's passion narrative for clues about the specific days involved. As we go through these narratives, it's important to note that the gospel writers used a Jewish perspective on time, where a new day starts in the evening after sunset.²

• MATTHEW

Matthew indicated that Jesus died on “the day of preparation” by telling us that some of the chief priests and Pharisees met with Pilate the next day.

“Now on the next day, that is, the day which is after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate...” (Matthew 27:62, NASB)

In the narrative, Matthew then immediately moved to after the Sabbath, on the first day of the week, and some of Jesus' women disciples go to the tomb and find it empty.

“Now after 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 tomb.” (Matthew 28:1, NASB)

• MARK

Mark explicitly said that Jesus died on “the preparation day,” which he defined as “the day before the Sabbath.”

“When evening had already come, since it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath...” (Mark 15:42, NASB)

¹ Raymond Edward Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary of the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (New Haven, Conn. ; London: Doubleday, 1998), 1351.

² cf. Leviticus 23:32; Genesis 1:5

Mark immediately moved the narrative to after the Sabbath was over, having Jesus' women disciples finding the tomb empty on the first day of the week.

“When the Sabbath was over... And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.” (Mark 16:1-2, NASB)

• LUKE

Luke also explicitly said that Jesus was crucified on “a preparation day” with “a Sabbath about to begin.”

“It was a preparation day, and a Sabbath was about to begin.” (Luke 23:54, NASB)

I am uncertain as to why Luke did not say “the preparation day” and “the Sabbath,” but the next few verses seem to imply that the weekly Sabbath was meant. Luke told us that some of Jesus' women disciples prepared spices and perfumes for Jesus' burial, but then they rested on the Sabbath.

“Now the women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. And then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.” (Luke 23:55-56, NASB)

Luke then moved us in the narrative to the first day of the week, with the same women looking to bring the burial spices they prepared for Jesus' body, but instead found the tomb empty.

“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, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.” (Luke 24:1-3, NASB)

I think it's safe to infer that Luke wanted us to understand that the women went to Jesus' body at the first opportunity they had — they couldn't go during the Sabbath or even after the Sabbath was over (since it was night), but went as soon as the sun began to rise.

• JOHN

John reported that Jesus was crucified on “the day of preparation for the Passover.”

“Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover...” (John 19:14, NASB)

And he furthermore said that that Sabbath was a “high day.”

“...it was the day of preparation... (for that Sabbath was a high day)...” (John 19:31, NASB)

Why John mentioned Passover and designated that Sabbath as a “high” day will be covered later in this study, but it seems to me that John is not saying anything fundamentally different than what the other gospel writers said. Jesus was crucified on “the Jewish day of preparation,” which is the day the before the weekly Sabbath.

“...because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” (John 19:42, NASB)

And like the other gospels, John then moved the narrative to after the Sabbath, to the first day of the week, with — in this case — one of Jesus’ women disciples discovering the empty tomb.

“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 removed from the tomb.” (John 20:1, NASB)

• **What Day of the Week Did Jesus Die?**

What can we conclude from this brief survey of the gospels’ Passion narratives? It seems to me that all four gospels agree that Jesus was crucified on “the preparation day” before the weekly Sabbath began — meaning, Jesus was crucified and died on a Friday that week.