

## Good Friday

On Good Friday (which is the Friday before Easter) it is traditional for people to commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This is done because most Christians believe that on that day in history our Lord Jesus was crucified. However, was Jesus actually crucified on a Friday? It may come as a surprise to many, but there is strong evidence that Jesus did *not* die on that day of the week.

Before we can demonstrate this, it's important to understand that by the time Sunday morning came around Jesus had already risen from the dead. We can see this from a number of passages:

**Matthew 28:1:** "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

Here we can see that Mary Magdalene and Mary went to the tomb of Christ on the *first day of the week*, where they met an angel that told them that Jesus was risen from the dead. This same story is repeated in Mark:

**Mark 16:1:** "And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment, and they were affrightened.

6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrightened: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him."

Aside from a bit of additional detail, this passage tells the same story that Matthew does. A small group of women went to the Lord's tomb early on Sunday morning and discovered that His tomb was empty. This means that Christ must have risen from the dead either early Sunday morning or late Saturday night. In either case, by the time Sunday morning rolled around His tomb was already vacant.

The reason this is important is because Jesus said that He would be dead for three days *and three nights*. This can be found in Matthew:

**Matthew 12:38:** "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh

after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:  
40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

(As an unrelated aside, the word translated "whale" in verse 40 is actually a generic word that simply refers to a great sea creature. The exact type of aquatic creature was not specified.)

Verse 40 clearly says that Jesus will be in the grave ("in the heart of the earth") for three days and three nights. However, there are only *two* nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning (specifically, Friday night and Saturday night). If Jesus was "in the heart of the earth" for three days *and* three nights then He could not possibly have died on Friday. It doesn't matter if you are using modern 24-hour days, or Jewish days, or Roman days; there is no system of days that allows for three nights (or even a *part* of three nights) between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. Therefore, Jesus *did not die on a Friday*. It is far more likely that He died on a Thursday. This would allow for three days (part of Thursday, Friday, and Saturday) and three nights (Thursday night, Friday night, and Saturday night).

As a side-note, some have argued that Christ actually died on a Wednesday. This would allow for three full Jewish days between His crucifixion and resurrection. Jewish days begin in the evening and continue until the next afternoon (as it says in Genesis 1:5, "and the evening and the morning were the first day.") The days would be: Wednesday night to Thursday afternoon, Thursday night to Friday afternoon, and Friday night to Saturday afternoon, with the resurrection sometime Saturday night. This is also a distinct possibility.

## **The Mysterious Sabbath**

One might ask, what about the Sabbath? The Bible says that Jesus was crucified the day before the Sabbath. We can see this in a couple different passages:

**Mark 15:37:** "And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

...

42 And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath..."

Mark clearly says that the day after Jesus was crucified was the Sabbath. Luke says the same thing:

**Luke 23:46:** "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

...

54 And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.

55 And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid.

56 And they returned, and prepared spices, and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment."

So, if the day after Christ's death was the Sabbath, and the Sabbath is Saturday, wouldn't that mean that Christ must have died on a Friday?

The key to understanding this is that the seventh day of the week *is not the only Sabbath on the Jewish calendar*. In Leviticus 23 a whole list of holy days is defined, one of which is the seventh day of the week:

**Leviticus 23:1:** “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,  
2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts.  
3 Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings.”

In Leviticus 23:3 we see that the seventh day of the week is set aside to be a “holy convocation”, or what we call a Sabbath day. However, look at what verses 5 through 8 have to say:

**Leviticus 23:4:** “These are the feasts of the Lord, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.  
5 In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover.  
6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread.  
7 In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.  
8 But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.”

We are told that on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the Jewish calendar is the Passover. On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month (in other words, on the day after the Passover) is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasts for 7 days. The first day of that feast is set aside as a “holy convocation.” It is declared to be a Sabbath and *no work can be on that day*.

The reason this is important is because Jesus was offered as our Passover Lamb. In fact, at the Last Supper Jesus celebrated *the Passover* with His disciples – right before He was taken to be crucified *on the day of Passover*. We can see this in Matthew:

**Matthew 26:17:** “Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?  
18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.  
19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.  
20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.”

Keep in mind that Jewish days go from evening to afternoon. The Passover did not actually begin until that evening (compare Matthew 26:20 with Leviticus 23:5). Jesus was arrested that night and crucified the next day, but according to the Jewish calendar it was still the Passover because a new day did not begin until the *following* evening. As we've just established, the Passover is followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread – and the first day of that Feast is always a *Sabbath* no matter what day of the week it falls on. No work can be done on that day. In Luke 23:56 when the Bible says that they rested “according to the commandment,” it is not referring to Exodus 20:8-10 (“Remember the sabbath

day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: ..." but Leviticus 23:7!

What this means is that while the day after Jesus was crucified was indeed a Sabbath, it was *not* the seventh day of the week. It was actually the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In summary, the Bible says that Jesus was in the grave for three days and three nights. Since there are not three nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning, Christ could not have been crucified on a Friday. It is far more likely that He was crucified on either a Wednesday or Thursday. The Sabbath that followed His crucifixion was not the seventh day of the week but the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.