

WHEN WAS JESUS CRUCIFIED? OR, WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT GOOD FRIDAY?

Introduction

When was Jesus crucified? The customary and apparently obvious answer has been: Friday, the day before the Passover Sabbath. But is this answer in fact correct? What follows is an argument for choosing a non-traditional day of the week — specifically Wednesday — as the answer. The case presented is based upon an accumulation of evidences principally from Hebrew and Christian scriptures, Jewish tradition, and selected secular sources. Beginning with a brief look at the problems encountered in properly calculating the year of the crucifixion, we shall move on to evaluate several accounts of the Passion Week itself. It will be seen that traditional attempts to derive the day from any calculation of the year can only fail, and that settling upon Friday as the day of the crucifixion was actually neither the first, nor provides the best, reading of the received accounts of that Week.

Dating the crucifixion

The year of the crucifixion has not been passed down to us through church tradition. Indeed, given the fitful development of what is now our accepted calendar, it would have been a minor miracle had a significant date survived to be remembered.¹ The years proposed are thus open to wide variation: since NT scholars, for example, continue debates regarding such important time periods as the length of Jesus' ministry (1, 2 or 3 years?), it is doubtful whether consensus will ever be reached on this issue.

In addition, because of numerous errors in the calculation of various calendars during their development over the centuries and the lack of historically reliable information concerning pivotal events such as the census noted by Luke (2:1-2), we do not really know when Jesus was born. Thus, even were there agreement concerning Jesus' age at the time of the crucifixion, we could not know or calculate with certainty the year of his death.

Some argue from traditional datings (assuming a birth within the period now calculated as 6 – 4 BCE and a two or three year period of public ministry) that the time of the crucifixion is likely to be April 6/7 CE 30.² Others, like Robert Anderson in his popular *The Coming Prince*, argue prophetically from the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 that the date for the Passion Week commences with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on April 6, 32. These sorts of arguments

¹ Competing dating systems have existed side-by-side in the West as recently as the 16th century, when Pope Gregory XIII devised in 1582 what is now called the Gregorian calendar as the base for a uniform dating system. [I leave aside the Eastern European penchant for maintaining the Julian calendar, such as in Russia until the Bolshevik Revolution this century, and the problems this engendered.] Even today various calendars, usually religious in nature, co-exist with this modern astronomically-corrected solar-year version. During the early days of the Roman Empire no fewer than three separate calendar systems were in everyday use, and at least two of these in revised versions were important for religious and secular purposes in the life of the early church until some consistency was achieved by the calculations and corrections of Dionysius Exiguus in CE 533. For an excellent overview of these varied classical calendars and their methods of calculation, see E.J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World* (NY: Cornell University Press, 1968/rev.ed 1980).

² See e.g. the chronology provided by Fr Dockx settling on a birth in 5/4 BCE; baptism in April, CE 28; a 2-year ministry; the Last Supper on April 6, 30; and a crucifixion of April 7, 30. S. Dockx, *Chronologies neotestamentaires et vie de l'Eglise primitive: recherches exégétiques* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1976).

often refer to the continuing and unchanging character of the Jewish lunar calendar. Working backwards astronomically, they argue that it is possible to reconstruct this Palestinian calendar, thereby assuring a conclusive answer to "when?" for both year and day.³

The problem with this type of retrospective solution — even were dates for Jesus' birth, length of ministry, and year of death widely agreed today — is that the Jewish priestly council which set the Temple calendar from month to month in Jesus' day did not work with such mathematical-astronomical or even simple lunar precision. The Jewish calendar was not precisely so fixed until the 4th century of our era, when it began to be developed as a semi-lunar or luna-solar system of dating, a system which linked lunar months and related seasons to the solar year. In the meantime . . . in Jesus' time, the first day of the month was set by official recognition of the new moon, which phase marked the end of one month and the beginning of the next in the Jewish lunar calendar.⁴

Every twenty-six to thirty-two days, the high priest and his officers or representatives would scan the heavens. If witnesses could not agree on the time and circumstances of their sighting of the new crescent or could not see the new moon (perhaps due to cloudy conditions), the high priest may have waited another day or more to set the new month running despite any assumed astronomical necessity. It was within his power to set the month as he saw fit — quite

³ Were one to accept three traditional datings as follows — 4 BCE for year of birth and a 3-year ministry begun within one year of Jesus' 30th birthday — astronomical calculations put the new moon preceding the vernal equinox at March 22nd (viz. Nisan 1) which would fix the Passover date at April 5th, a Wednesday, for CE 29. More on this point in the next section. Also see footnote 24 and accompanying text below.

⁴ See e.g. 1 Sam 20, esp. vv.18-27. This is not to say there was no linkage sought between lunar months and solar years prior to this later fixing. Unlike strictly lunar calendars such as we find in Islam where set feasts and fasts "migrate" unconcerned through the cycling solar seasons, Jewish festivals were tied to specific agricultural seasons as well as particular lunar months. Hence, some accommodation like introduction of "leap months" was no doubt utilized even prior to Jesus' day. But we have too little information to know with what regularity these devices were used. The fact that the need for astronomical fixing was recognized and agreed centuries later strongly suggests the ad hoc nature of the prior adjustments. Cf. the "Calendar" entries by E.J. Wiesenberg, Jacob Licht, and EJ editorial staff in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol.5, with the "New Moon" entry by Aaron Rothkoff, in Vol.12 (NY: Macmillan, 1972).

literally, "as he saw it." He had to decide, for example, whether to count a previous cloudy day as the first of the month or to begin from the day of a confirmed sighting.⁵ In addition, months were sometimes deliberately prolonged or shortened to avoid having a festival fall immediately before or after a weekly Sabbath. Only after this decision-making process were messengers sent out to proclaim the new month to the people.⁶ Such method did not greatly affect the yearly cycle of the calendar because each month was individually set according to the sighting of a new moon. In this way, errors would not accumulate to interfere significantly with any feast's proper seasonal setting, while still permitting some leeway for dating festival observances.

Thus, even if *we* today could all agree on the necessary dates, it does not logically follow that we would be in necessary agreement with the high priest and the actual days for the Passover celebration in any given year prior to the fixing of the calendar. We simply cannot know.

⁵ To speak of the high priest as though he were acting alone is of course unsustainable; decisions were made by a council — though there is dispute about just who comprised it. What can be said with some certainty is that Sadducees and Pharisees together made such decisions and agreed when messengers could be sent out in his name thereby to set the feasts.

⁶ See the detailed description for sightings and witnesses required as given in the *Mishnah*, in Rosh ha-Shana 1:3 – 2:8. Too, since we are speaking of one of the most important pilgrim festivals in the Jewish calendar, it is frankly irrelevant speculatively to posit numerous and conflicting calendars in use by varied groups in the Near East at this time; they would have made not a whit of difference to the sacred use of the Temple precincts for Passover at the prescribed time set by the council for all Jews. Those with different calendars, like the Qumran community, could so live just because they were not tied to the Temple. See E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), esp. pp.332-335 & 360-361.

Day of the crucifixion

If we cannot know with certainty the year of the crucifixion, can we not at least fix the day of the week on which it occurred? In fact, we meet a surprising array of accounts concerning the actual day of the crucifixion. Although there are a variety of accounts detailing the Passion Week,⁷ two are considered the traditional interpretations for the crucifixion and resurrection:

- (1) Jesus was crucified on Friday, the Passover Sabbath falling on Saturday, and arose on Sunday morning; or
- (2) Jesus was crucified on Friday, that day being the Passover Sabbath, and arose on Sunday morning.

The only difference between these accounts is the day posited as the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.⁸ Both traditional theories begin with the assumption of a Friday crucifixion. One strength of these two accounts is that they are in fact "traditional"; that they incorporate a view passed down through some 19 centuries is no small factor for us to consider. Too, they both identify the same day of the week, even if for different reasons. In short, Good Friday has been with us a long, long time.

Why is Friday the traditional day? The first interpretation of the days of the Passion noted above is based upon the assumption that a Passover Sabbath is to be equated with the weekly Saturday sabbath. Therefore, since Jesus was crucified on the preparation day of Passover (Mt 27:62; Mk 15:42; Lk 23:54; and Jn 19: 14, 31), it has been assumed that he must have been crucified on Friday.

⁷ See e.g. Haim Cohn, *The Trial and Death of Jesus* (NY: Harper & Row, 1971); Eugen Ruckstuhl, *Chronology of the Last Days of Jesus: a critical study* [trans. V. Drapela] (NY: Desclee Co., 1965); and the works by Marshall and Torrey cited in footnote 16, below.

⁸ Though strictly speaking distinguishable, the name Pesach/Passover will herein be used as a synonym for this Feast. But see Ex 12:1-27 and Lev 23:4-6. This combined usage has historical precedent: cf. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14.2.1 and 17.9.3 where similar conflation is practiced.

However, there has been a misconstrual of *sabbath* here. Though one might understandably equate the one sabbath with the other, it is not necessary for the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread to fall on a Saturday. In fact, it almost never falls on the weekly sabbath day. This is true under the present fixed calendar, and much more so when set at the high priest's discretion, for the yearly feasts and weekly sabbaths were kept separated if at all possible "to add to the holiness of the season."⁹ The first and last days of the Feast are sabbaths, no matter the weekday on which they fall (Ex 12:16; Lev 23:7-8).¹⁰

In addition, there are Biblical problems encountered with a Saturday Passover Sabbath that year. John speaks of Jesus coming to Bethany some six days before the Passover (Jn 12:1-2). There he ate a supper, served by Martha, with Lazarus. We are also told that the following day was His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (traditionally, Palm Sunday; Jn 12:12-13). If he entered Jerusalem on Sunday, then that supper was a Sabbath supper.

It is of great interest that this meal should be a sabbath meal, for the sabbath preceding Passover is called *Shabbat ha-Gadol*, the Great Sabbath. It is at this meal that the head of the house prepares and rehearses for the upcoming Passover celebration. That the Greek work for "supper" in verse 2 is *deîpnon*, which signifies the principal or evening meal, is good evidence

⁹ Although this thought and its very phrasing carry all the indicia of a quotation, I provide it from memory as taught by my dear rabbi Marcus Simmons (may he rest in peace). I have never located a citation for it, but do not doubt he taught it as part of received oral tradition.

¹⁰ This confusion/conflation of the weekly Saturday with festival sabbaths is perhaps understandable, given the occasional disagreements evidenced within Jewish understandings of what it meant to be faithful to the commands of these texts during the Second Temple period. As required in Lev 23:11, the wave offering and the start to counting of the seven weeks from Passover to Shavuot (= Pentecost) must begin "the day after the sabbath." The Boethusians (a 1st century BCE sectarian group), for example, held that this sabbath reference concerned the Saturday after the first day of Passover. Thus, the offering and counting would always begin on a Sunday, with the result that Shavuot would likewise always fall on a Sunday seven weeks later. The rabbis, led by Hillel, argued that this sabbath referred to the day of "holy convocation" of the first day of Passover itself. Thus, any day of the week on which the Passover began was understood to be a sabbath day, with the offering to be made and counting to begin the day immediately after. This latter interpretation became the received tradition and informs exegetical praxis today. For general background information, see D.M. Feldman's entry on the "Omer," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol.12 (NY: Macmillan, 1972).

for assuming this meal was the Friday evening sabbath meal of the Great Sabbath. This interpretation is further strengthened by the use of the participle *anakeimenon*, signifying that the supper guests were reclining at table — a significant feature of both weekly sabbath and Passover meals.¹¹ If one counts six days from this meal (skipping that sabbath day, itself, of course), one discovers that Passover could not have been later than the following Friday.

The second traditional theory noted above attempts to take this possibility into account by responding, "Yes, this is true; but there is still no reason to move the day of the crucifixion. He was crucified on Friday, the first day of the Feast." While this is a reasonable response, there are two major and two minor weaknesses to be explored.

The first minor weakness to note is the problem of the women and their burial spices. Mark has Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome buying spices after the sabbath (16:1). Luke has the women preparing the spices between sabbaths, i.e. the Passover Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath (or, at least, after the crucifixion and before the first day of the week, per 23:54-56). The problem arising concerns the time available for the women to do what they are reported to have done: when did they buy and prepare the spices? If the first day of the Feast was Friday and it was a sabbath day, and the next day was the weekly sabbath, then (a) there would have been no shops open for buying spices,¹² and (b) the women would have had to break the sabbath(s) either in buying spices even if a shop had been found, or in preparing the spices even if they had had already spices in their possession; yet, both Mark and Luke make clear that they observed sabbath rest.

¹¹ For etymological studies of these terms, see their Greek entries in G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [G.W. Bromiley, trans. and ed.] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

¹² It is likely even Gentile-owned businesses would have been closed due to the priests' general control over the business of the city during religious festivals, besides which the uncleanness the women would incur by using gentile shops counts strongly against the option.

The other minor point to notice is that of Jesus being in the heart of the earth three days and three nights (Mt 12:40). I call this a minor point because the accounts are admittedly ambiguous (for example, Matthew does not repeat the point in chapter 16 where Jonah is invoked again, and Luke gives a slightly different account of what appears to be the same conversational allusion in his chapter 11).¹³ Still, all texts bear similar witness: "be raised the third day" (Mt 16:21); "set guard against the third day" (Mt 27:63-64); "third day he shall rise again" (Mk 10:34 and Lk 18:33); "third day since these things were done" (Lk 24:21); and "in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19). In reply, it might be noted that while this may be authentic enough, the Jewish people then, and we today, sometimes count even one hour of any day as a countable "day" — the meaning is dependent on context. Accordingly, the argument continues, he *was* in the grave three days: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Nevertheless, there are two problems associated with this sort of response. First, perhaps three *days* can be squeezed-in, but there seems no way to conjure three *nights* between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. Second, the resurrection accounts cast doubt upon being able to count on Sunday as one of the days. While Mark and Luke indicate that the women came "very early in the morning" that Sunday (Mk 16:2; Lk 24:1), Matthew has the women coming "as it began to dawn" (Mt 28:1), and John places Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre "early, when it

¹³ Consequently, one ought not hang too much weight on an exact application of the prophetic sign being linked to respective literal days and nights in the belly of the whale/earth. On the other hand, the fact that the focus is arguably the comparative character of the prophets involved does not mandate dismissing the days and nights as irrelevant or merely symbolic either: the "third day" formula is iterated consistently across all four gospel accounts (and duplicated in Acts and 1 Corinthians) in contexts where something like a literal understanding is the more natural contextual intention. One need not insist on this line of thought to support the arguments here, but the inability of any account to accommodate a straightforward application of this formula does raise serious concern.

was yet dark" (Jn 20:1). Thus, it is highly unlikely that one can reasonably count Sunday in any calculation. There does not appear to be any time in which he was in the grave Sunday "day."¹⁴

Passing to the major weaknesses, the first is simply that designation of the day of crucifixion as the first day of the Feast runs counter to a proper understanding of the accounts in all four gospels. As previously noted, all indicate that the crucifixion was on the day of preparation. (See, too, Mk 14:1-2 and parallels.)¹⁵ Thus, either all the Evangelists must be in error, or Friday was *not* the first day of Passover.

The second major weakness is related to the first. If Friday could not both be the preparation day and the first day of the Feast, and Saturday is not the first day (by the counting of John 12), then perhaps Friday *is* the first day and Jesus was crucified on the preparation day, being Thursday. This resolution is an alternative that has been proffered. And it does appear to resolve some problems, like those mentioned above. You can get three days and nights, using the method cited, from Thursday – Friday – Saturday supplying the needed days and nights. It doesn't, though, resolve all the queries, like the puzzle of the women and their spices.

Neither does it solve the problem of Friday as the first day. Why is this still a problem? Recall the discussion of the supper Jesus ate with Lazarus in Bethany on the Great Sabbath. If it was, as is reasonable to suppose being in accord with Jewish tradition, a Friday night meal, why skip that sabbath when counting? As already noted, it was and remains common to count from the day on which a statement is made if even one hour's time is involved. It is consequently not only possible but quite logical to begin counting with that Saturday: six days from that sabbath

¹⁴ Recall that in Jewish reckoning, sunset-to-sunset constitutes one day; and not various of the Roman or modern reckonings of midnight-to-midnight. It should likewise be noted that these two minor points concerning the spices and the days apply with equal force to the first traditional account noted in the text.

¹⁵ That Jesus was crucified on the preparation day also appears to have been the common understanding of those outside the Christian community. See e.g. one of a handful of references to Jesus in the Babylonian *Talmud*: "On the eve of the Passover Yeshu [the Nazarean] was hanged" (Sanhedrin 43a).

yields Thursday as the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. From this, one can infer that Jesus was, in fact, crucified on Wednesday — the preparation day for Pesach that began on Thursday.

What are the strengths of a Wednesday crucifixion? First, it is consistent both with the synoptic Gospel accounts and with the account in John, and even helps us reconcile some purported discrepancies still generally accepted as existing between them.¹⁶ Second, it answers the problem concerning the women buying and preparing their spices for the body of Jesus. With Thursday as the Passover sabbath, Friday would have been an intermediate, and thus less restricted, festival day to buy and prepare since only the first and last days of the Feast are sabbaths (besides of course any intervening weekly sabbath days). Finally, it more satisfactorily answers the problem of three days and nights with full days and full nights. This would mean that Jesus was in the grave Wednesday – Thursday – Friday nights, and Thursday – Friday – Saturday days. This would place the resurrection sometime after sundown Saturday evening. While this last point may be objectionable to some, in no scripture passage will you find Jesus rising on Sunday morning. What we are told is that by Sunday morning he had already risen. Jesus did not need the angels to roll away the stone to escape the tomb anymore than he needed one of the disciples to open the door so that he could enter the upper room (Jn 20:19). The stone was rolled away to *reveal* the resurrection, not to permit it.

¹⁶ A widely held view is that the Synoptic accounts require a Passover meal/crucifixion on the evening/day (respectively) of the Passover sabbath, while John's account requires a pre-Passover meal for the Last Supper and subsequent crucifixion on the day of preparation. Representative of work incorporating this view is I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1980), where it is argued that a reconciliation of these accounts is tenable only if one posits the use of different calendars within the Gospels. But cf. Charles C. Torrey, "The Date of the Crucifixion According to the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol.50 (1931), pp.227-241, where it is argued that John's account can be reconciled with the Synoptic accounts on customary linguistic grounds and without introducing imaginative but nonetheless speculative theories of conflicting calendar usage by Jesus, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Galileans, and the Qumran sect. My concern is not strict harmonization of the Gospels, but *pace* Torrey, this essay too argues for such reconciliation, albeit one where the Synoptics can best be read against the account in John rather than vice versa.

The weakness inherent in this last argument for a Wednesday crucifixion is that it is grounded at least in part on a traditional setting for Jesus' triumphal entry on Palm Sunday. If tradition has wrongly placed the crucifixion, why not the entry into Jerusalem? What if it wasn't on Sunday, after all? I admit to having no conclusive response to this challenge. But it should suffice to emphasize that if one is prepared to set aside a traditional interpretation, one is responsible to provide an alternative story that nonetheless maintains consistency with the gospel accounts and other settled traditions. The claim is that the Wednesday crucifixion account given above is just such an alternative. It best provides an interpretation of the Passion Week given the biblical accounts we do have at hand, and in fact does little damage to other received traditions. How better conceive, for example, the coincidence of the ash of Ash Wednesday?¹⁷ As for the "good" of Good Friday, I would suggest it originally intimated the Great Sabbath of Jesus' supper with Lazarus prior to Passover, but became confused with/transferred to the day of the crucifixion as a predominantly Gentile church lost touch with its Jewish heritage.¹⁸

But if the gospels are to be taken so seriously (i.e. worryingly literally), how can Jesus both (1) have had a Passover meal with his disciples, and (2) have been crucified on the preparation day? For an observant Jew, this is not as difficult as it may first appear.¹⁹ During

¹⁷ This is not meant to suggest that there in fact exists a demonstrable, conscious historical coincidence between the liturgical choice of a 40-day ante-Palm Sunday Lenten observance and a Wednesday crucifixion account. But it is suggestive of a conceptual harmony which does call for further historical and theological investigation.

¹⁸ There is good historical evidence suggesting that prior to the Council of Nicea, the Quartodecimans (those celebrating the crucifixion and resurrection according to the Jewish lunar calendar and its migrating days for Pesach) influenced the setting and reception of set feast days or days of remembrance, particularly in the eastern churches. See Bernhard Lohse, *Das Passafest der Quartadecimaner* (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1953); and F.C. Burkitt, "The Christian Church in the East," *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol.XII, ch.XIV (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1939). Note is further made of this mode of celebration and ultimate western church intolerance of the practice in the subsequent chapter, "The Christian Church in the West," by Hans Lietzmann. Also see note 24, below.

¹⁹ I leave aside here the more involved discussions by scholars such as Joachim Jeremias concerning what we might conjecture based upon Jesus' words and actions at the supper, and the foods mentioned. See his *Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 4th ed. 1967). For a condensed but insightful

pre-Passover season, it was not uncommon for a family to have several Passover-type meals or *Seders* prior to the evening of the 14th of Nisan. It was in fact quite common to hold such a meal during the evening on which all *chametz* (leavened products) are begun to be cleared from the home.²⁰ The entire meal would virtually be the same as the coming Passover dinner; the only difference is the lack of roast lamb (the Passover sacrifice), since the lamb would not be sacrificed until the afternoon of the 14th at the Temple. Since preparation day begins on the evening of the 13th of Nisan, there is nothing inconsistent with Jesus having had such a Passover-type meal on Tuesday evening²¹ — the beginning of the day of preparation, and then been crucified Wednesday — the afternoon of the day of preparation for the Thursday Passover.²² There is no need to conjecture a day of rest (Wednesday) by some implied silence in the canonical record and then posit an entire day (Thursday) taken up preparing and eating a Passover meal, as the two traditional accounts require.²³

argument that what is recorded is clearly "some kind of" or "quasi-Passover meal," see N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (MN: Fortress Press, 1996), pp.554-559 (original italics for quoted phrases).

²⁰ The *Mishnah* notes this may come as late as 1 day prior to Pesach. More common was for the cleaning to occur in preparation for the Great Sabbath, and so was within one week of Passover (Pesahim 1:1).

²¹ Cf. the 3rd-century Syriac *Didascalia* which chronicles a Tuesday evening Passover meal. This document is noted by Marshall (op. cit. at p.73), though it is unfortunately and quickly dismissed as of little historical value. A useful English language edition can be found in R. Hugh Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum: The Syriac version translated and accompanied by the Verona Latin fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929/1969).

²² This accounting also helps us better understand and harmonize apparent intra- and inter-gospel confusions, such as Matthew's and Luke's placing the Last Supper at the "first" of the Feast (Mt 26:17; Lk 22:7-8) seemingly implying a crucifixion on the first day of the Feast, while still later indicating that the crucifixion in fact took place on the day of preparation (Mt 27:62; Lk 23:54).

²³ This accords with Jaubert's assessment of the beginning of the Passion week, whence she argues that Jesus celebrated the meal with his disciples and was then arrested on Tuesday evening/Wednesday morning. But the further speculation that the meal was designated a Passover meal because liturgical reference is being made by the gospel writer to an alternative Essene calendar is both unwarranted and, as argued in this essay, unnecessary. Her claims are most clearly laid out in A. Jaubert, *La date de la Cene: calendrier biblique et liturgie chretienne* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1957). For brief discussion and dismissal of Jaubert's claims, see Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: an examination of contemporary scholarship* (MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975), pp.139-141.

In fact, a sampling of the Easter/Passover calendars covering the last three decades of this 20th century reveal 10 years (i.e. one-third of the 30 years surveyed) in which this preferred pattern fits: 1972, 1975, 1976, 1979, 1982, 1986*, 1989*, 1996, 1999, 2000. For each of these years, you will find that the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a Thursday, the Great Sabbath falls on the previous Friday, the preparation day is on Wednesday, and Easter is celebrated the following Sunday. That this often repeated pattern would have obtained during Jesus' lifetime is virtually certain; that it was the pattern in the year of Jesus' crucifixion is not only plausible, but highly probable.²⁴

²⁴ Permitting priestly adjustment of merely one day's time, thereby fixing the first day of the Feast on Thursday, April 6th, the traditional crucifixion date of CE 29 similarly becomes very plausible. See footnote 3, above, regarding traditional datings.

The two dates marked by an asterisk indicate those years wherein the Jewish Pesach and the western Christian celebration of Easter do not actually coincide. For 1986, Pesach began on Thursday, April 24th, but Easter Sunday was celebrated on March 30th; for 1989, Pesach began on Thursday, April 20th, while Easter Sunday fell on March 26th. In fact, lack of concurrent dates for Easter and Passover in the western church's liturgical year is unfortunately all too frequent. This is due to the rejection of the Jewish calendar by Emperor Constantine, who was convener and head of the Council of Nicea in CE 325. For the sake of uniformity in the church calendar and so that celebration of the resurrection would always occur on a Sunday, the name Easter was chosen (up to and until that Council's time the title of a pagan spring festival) to represent the first Sunday after the vernal equinox as the day of the resurrection. The Council's specific determinations are lost to us, but Eusebius quotes from a letter by the Emperor to the churches admonishing acceptance of this festival change from the third day following the beginning of Pesach to the newly-calculated Easter, lest "in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin" [*The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, III, xviii (London: S. Bagster & Sons, 1845)]. I reckon it sad that this touch of anti-Jewish sentiment continues to taint the celebration of the resurrection even today.