

The Biblical Spring Feasts in a New Light

Martin Zahn

1 Introduction

The Passover and the Day of Firstfruits as well as the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) were given new meaning through Jesus in the year of his death. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus was crucified on the day when the Passover lambs were slaughtered (Nisan 14), and according to the other Gospels one calendar day later (Nisan 15). We explain in detail that the Gospels do not contradict each other, but complement each other in a wonderful way by showing different perspectives. Jesus ate the Passover meal and died at the hour when the other Passover lambs were being sacrificed.

There are many Passover customs that point prophetically to Jesus. In this article we will only look at time-related aspects and point out their significance. To this end, we briefly explain the timeline of the Passover feast as given by Moses in the following section. We then highlight the analogies between the Passover and Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his crucifixion. In a brief digression, we consider the question of who wrote the Gospel of John. The resurrection of Jesus was on the Day of Firstfruits, because he is the first to rise from the dead. We also pay particular attention to the fact that Jesus was dead "three days and three nights". The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) took on a new meaning when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. The commonly used Jewish way of counting the Omer, i.e. counting the days until Pentecost, unfortunately contradicts the Bible and the Books of Moses, the Torah. We provide the dates for all these biblical feasts until year 2030 before concluding with a brief summary.

The Bible quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) translation unless noted otherwise. Others: New International Version (NIV), New International Reader's Version (NIRV), King James Version (KJV). All notes on Hebrew and Greek are from the Bible Hub: www.biblehub.com/interlinear

2 The Passover Ordinance

The Passover is also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lk 22:1). It was to take place in the first month of each year (Ex 12:2; Lev 23:5). The first month was initially called "Abib" (ESV, KJV) or "Aviv" (NIV, NIRV) (Ex 13:4; Ex 23:15; Ex 34:18; Deut 16:1). The name

“Nisan” was later used in reference to the Babylonian calendar (Neh 2:1; Est 3:7).

By the way, the first day of the seventh month is celebrated as New Year’s Day, the so-called Rosh HaShanah (literally “head of the year”). In the Bible, this day is not called New Year’s Day, but the Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:24; Num 29:1). Celebrating the New Year in fall can be understood as follows: The biblical day begins and ends at sunset (Gen 1:5; Lev 23:32; Neh 13:19; Mk 1:21-32). However, the hours of the day are not counted from sunset, but from sunrise. The first hour of the day begins early in the morning at sunrise, the seventh begins at noon when the sun is at its highest point and the twelfth hour ends at sunset (Jn 11:9). Similarly, the year begins in fall (corresponding to sunset), followed by winter (corresponding to night) and the first month begins in spring (corresponding to the first hour).

On the 10th day of the first month, a lamb without blemish should be taken for each family (Ex 12:2-5). It was then sacrificed at twilight at Passover (Nisan 14), in Hebrew it is written more specifically that it should be killed between or in the midst of the two evenings of the 14th day (Ex 12:6; Lev 23:5; Num 9:3+5+11). To understand this unusual timing, let us have a look at some background information: The hours of a day are divided into two periods: The morning period spans the first six hours and the evening period the other six, i.e. the time from the seventh to the twelfth hour. The time between the two evenings is the middle between the end of the morning period at noon and the evening itself, i.e. in the middle of the afternoon towards the end of the ninth hour.¹ In the evening the lamb was eaten with bitter herbs (Ex 12:8), on the so-called Seder evening. The Hebrew word “Seder” means “order”, because the procedure of this festive meal is regulated by many rituals.

From the 15th to the 21st of the month it was forbidden to eat leavened bread, and on both the 15th and the 21st one was not allowed to work and a holy assembly had to be held (Ex 12:15-18; Lev 23:6-8; Num 28:16-25).

¹ Eddie Chumney: Die sieben Feste des Messias, medialworldwidewings, 2011, page 37

First Month (Nisan)											
10	11	12	13	14 Seder	15 Passover I	16 Passover II	17 Passover III	18 Passover IV	19 Passover V	20 Passover VI	21 Passover VII
Take lamb				Sacrifice lamb	Not to eat leavened bread and to rest on the first and seventh day						
Ex 12 ² ... It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ ... on the tenth day of this month every man shall <u>take a lamb</u> according to their fathers' houses... ⁵ Your lamb shall be <u>without blemish</u> , a male a year old...				Ex 12 ⁶ and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall <u>kill their lambs</u> at twilight. Lev 23 ⁵ In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the Lord's <i>Passover</i> .	Ex 12 ¹⁵ Seven days you shall <u>eat unleavened bread</u> . On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶ On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you... ¹⁸ In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening , you shall <u>eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening</u> . Lev 23 ⁶ And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the <i>Feast of Unleavened Bread</i> to the Lord; for seven days you shall <u>eat unleavened bread</u> . ⁷ On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work . ⁸ But you shall present a food offering to the Lord for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work .						

3 The Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and his Crucifixion

In the following subsection, we will first present the chronological sequence of events as described in the Gospel of John. We will then look at the other Gospels before clarifying the presumed contradiction regarding the date of Jesus' death.

3.1 The Events according to the Gospel of John

"Six days before the Passover" Jesus came to Bethany (Jn 12:1). Does "Passover" (Greek "pascha") refer to the day on which the lambs were slaughtered, or to the days that followed on which no leavened bread was allowed to be eaten? To answer this question, let us consider that Jesus was crucified on the "day of Preparation of the Passover" (Jn 19:14). A preparation day is the day immediately before a non-working day, i.e. the day on which arrangements are made for the feast day. The "day of Preparation of the Passover" is therefore Nisan 14, because work was not allowed on Nisan 15. Thus, "Passover" refers to the first day of rest of the Passover feast, i.e. Nisan 15 (Passover I). Since Jesus came to Bethany six days earlier, it must have been on Nisan 9. The next day Jesus was coming to Jerusalem (Jn 12:12-15), i.e. on Nisan 10. The people cheered him as he sat on a donkey walking on cloaks and branches of palm trees.

Before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus had supper with his disciples (Jn 13:1-2). On this occasion he washed their feet (Jn 13:3-12), he identified his betrayer Judas (Jn 13:21-26), he taught various things to his disciples (Jn 13:31 to Jn 16) and said the High Priestly Prayer (Jn 17). Then he was arrested (Jn 18:12) and questioned by the high priest Caiaphas (Jn 18:19-24).

Early in the morning, Jesus was led to the governor’s headquarters. The Jews themselves did not enter that place, “so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover” (Jn 18:28). Because if someone was unclean, they were not allowed to celebrate the Passover (Num 9:6-13). This shows that for the council and therefore also for the general population of the Jews it was on Nisan 14. John agreed with this and called this day “the day of Preparation of the Passover” (Jn 19:14). Jesus was crucified and buried on this day of preparation for a Sabbath that was a “high day” (Jn 19:31). The “high day” was the first day of unleavened bread (Passover I), which fell on the weekly Sabbath, as we will see later.

It is interesting that the Gospel according to John does not say that Jesus ate the Passover meal, and there is also no reference to the institution of the Lord’s Supper. This is logical because the Passover lambs had to be slaughtered on Nisan 14, while Jesus was being crucified. Accordingly, no Passover meal should have been eaten the day before.

First Month (Nisan)						
9	10	11	12	13	14 Seder	15 Passover I
Jn 12 ¹ Six days before the Passover , Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.	Jn 12 ¹² The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that <u>Jesus was coming to Jerusalem</u> . ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” ¹⁴ And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, ¹⁵ “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”			Jn 13 ¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover , when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During <u>supper</u> ...	Jn 18 ²⁸ Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor’s headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor’s headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover ... Jn 19 ¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover . It was about the sixth hour... ¹⁸ There they <u>crucified</u> him... ³¹ 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... ⁴² So because of the Jewish day of Preparation , since the <u>tomb</u> was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.	

3.2 The Events according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke

The Gospel according to Mark contains most of the details about the timeline. Jesus entered Jerusalem and went out to Bethany at evening (Mk 11:11). The following day he left it again (Mk 11:12) and went to the temple in Jerusalem (Mk 11:15). Jesus taught there and towards evening he left the city (Mk 11:19). The next morning, he went back to the temple in Jerusalem (Mk 11:20+27), where they tried to trap him in his talk (Mk 12:13; Mt 22:15; Lk 20:20). Jesus was therefore tested to see whether he was really without guilt and without sin, just as the Passover lambs were examined from Nisan 10 to 14 to see whether they were really without blemish.

Jesus then went to the Mount of Olives (Mk 13:3; Mt 24:3) and there he gave his end-time sermon (Mk 13:5-37; Mt 24:4-51). And that was “two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread” (Mk 14:1). As explained above, the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on Nisan 15. Thus, it took place on Nisan 13. Matthew mentioned in his Gospel that Jesus said on this occasion on the Mount of Olives that the Passover was in two days (Greek “pascha”) and that he would then be delivered up to be crucified (Mt 26:2).

Then came the “first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb” (Mk 14:12). This translation is somewhat misleading, because one might think that the “first day of Unleavened Bread” could refer to Nisan 15. The Greek adjective “protos”, translated here as “first”, also means “most important” or “before”. John the Baptist used it in this sense when he said that Jesus had been before him (Jn 1:15+30). So this refers to the most important day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is the day before when the lambs were sacrificed, i.e. Nisan 14.

On that day Jesus had the Passover lamb prepared for himself and his disciples and they ate it in the evening. Jesus himself called this evening meal “Passover” (Lk 22:15). According to his understanding it must have been the evening of Nisan 14 when he instituted the Lord’s Supper (Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-28; Lk 22:19-20). So we cannot follow the theory that Jesus celebrated something similar with his disciples the day before the actual Passover so that his disciples could then take the Passover with their families the following day.

After the Passover meal, Jesus was arrested that very night in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:43-46; Mt 26:50; Lk 22:47-54). Early in the morning, Jesus was interrogated by the whole council (Mk 14:53-64; Mt 26:57-66; Lk 22:66-71). Then they handed him over to Pilate (Mk 15:1; Mt 27:1-2; Lk 23:1), who had him crucified at the third hour (Mk 15:25). From the sixth to the ninth hour there was darkness and then Jesus died (Mk 15:33-37; Mt 27:45-50; Lk 23:44-46). And that was exactly at the time when the other Passover lambs were slaughtered at the ninth hour (as explained above).

Jesus was laid in the tomb on the “day of Preparation” (Mk 15:42; Mt 27:62; Lk 23:54). This preparation day refers to the preparation day for the weekly Sabbath, because the preparation day for the Passover had already been one day earlier.

First Month (Nisan)				
11	12	13	14 Seder	15 Passover I
Mk 11 ¹¹ And he <u>entered Jerusalem</u> and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.	Mk 11 ¹² On the following day , when they came from Bethany... ¹⁵ And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple... ¹⁹ And when evening came they went out of the city.	Mk 11 ²⁰ As they passed by in the morning ... ²⁷ And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple... Mk 12 ¹³ And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to <u>trap him in his talk</u> ... Mk 13 ³ And as he sat on the <u>Mount of Olives</u> opposite the temple... Mk 14 ¹ It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread ...	Mk 14 ¹² And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb , his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?"... ¹⁶ And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover . ¹⁷ And when it was evening , he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And as they were reclining at table and eating... ²² ... he took bread... and gave it to them, and said, "Take; <u>this is my body</u> ." ²³ And he took a cup... ²⁴ And he said to them, " <u>This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many</u> ..."	Mk 15 ¹ ... it was morning ... ²⁵ And it was the third hour when they <u>crucified</u> him... ³³ And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice... ³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and <u>breathed his last</u> ... ⁴² And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath ,
Mt 21 ¹⁰ And when he <u>entered Jerusalem</u> , the whole city was stirred up...	Mt 22 ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to <u>entangle him in his words</u> .	Mt 24 ³ As he sat on the <u>Mount of Olives</u> ... Mt 26 ² "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and <u>the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified</u> ."	Mt 26 ¹⁷ Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover ?" ¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover .	Mt 27 ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"... ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and <u>yielded up his spirit</u> ... ⁶² The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation ...
Lk 19 ²⁸ ... he went on ahead, going up <u>to Jerusalem</u> ...	Lk 19 ⁴⁷ And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him... Lk 20 ²⁰ So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might <u>catch him in something he said</u> ...		Lk 22 ⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed ... ¹³ ... they prepared the Passover ... ¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer..."	Lk 23 ⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour , and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour ... ⁴⁶ Then Jesus... <u>breathed his last</u> ... ⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation , and the Sabbath was beginning.

3.3 Comparing the Gospels – Was Jesus crucified on Nisan 14 or 15?

The events are summarized in the following table. The first line shows the date according to the Council, the common people of the Jews and the Gospel of John. The Passover lambs were taken on Nisan 10 and killed on the 14th of the month.

In the second line are the dates according to Jesus' understanding, as described in the other three gospels. Jesus was coming to Jerusalem on the very day when the Passover lambs were taken. He was tested in Jerusalem on the following days and celebrated his last Passover meal with the disciples on the evening before his crucifixion.

As we noted earlier, Jesus was laid in the tomb on the day of Preparation before the weekly Sabbath. The Sabbath (Saturday) is the seventh day of the week. So Jesus died on the sixth day of the week (Friday). This implies that he entered Jerusalem on the second day of the week, i.e. not on Palm Sunday but on Monday.

	First Month (Nisan)					
Council & John	10 Take lamb	11	12	13	14 Sacrifice lamb / Seder	15 Passover I
Jesus & Mt, Mk, Lk	11 Entry into Jerusalem	12	13	14 Sacrifice lamb / Seder	15 Passover I / Crucifixion	16 Passover II
Weekday	2	3	4	5	6	7 Sabbath

So what is the correct date of Jesus' death? Was he crucified on Nisan 14 or 15? The astonishing answer is this: Jesus was crucified on both Nisan 14 and 15, both of which are correct. But before I confuse you even more, let me give you some background on the biblical calendar before I explain the answer in detail.

A biblical month is a lunar month, because God "made the moon to mark the seasons" (Ps 104:19). The Hebrew word "chodesh" can mean both "month" (e.g. in Ex 12:6+18) and "new moon" and then denotes the first day of the month (e.g. in 1Sam 20:5+18+24+27; 2Kgs 4:23; Am 8:5). If the new moon is seen in the evening, then the next day is the new moon day and therefore the first day of the next month, the so-called Rosh Chodesh (literally "head of the month"). In the middle of the month there is a full moon and towards the end the moon is not visible at all.

At the end of the month, in the evening the people kept watch and then reported to the council the next morning when they had seen the new moon. It was then up to the council to proclaim the new month according to the testimony of the witnesses. However, if the

month already lasted 30 days, the next day was declared the first day of the next month even if the new moon had not yet been seen due to the clouds. It could also happen that for several months it was so cloudy that it was impossible to see the new moon. This could have meant that there could have been many consecutive months with 30 days and then the new moon could have been seen already on the 28th day, for example. To avoid this, the council could declare the new month after 29 days in such cases, even though the new moon had not yet been seen. This means that a month always has 29 or 30 days, because in average the phases of the moon are 29.53 days long.

Most years have 12 months and every two to three years there is a leap year, which is 13 months long. (The solar year, which is 365.25 days long, has 12.37 moon phases ($365.25 : 29.53 = 12.37$). A year with 12 months is therefore 0.37 moon phases shorter, which causes a leap year every 2.7 years ($1 : 0.37 = 2.7$). This ensures that the first month of Nisan is always in spring.)

Not all Jews agreed with the council's decisions, and also today not all follow the calendar as published by the rabbis in Israel. Regarding leap years, there is a rule that over a period of 19 years, the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th year should be a leap year. On the other hand, there are Jews who only decide towards the end of the year in spring whether the current year is a leap year or not, depending on how far the grain in Israel has already ripened.

At least since the fourth century, it has also been customary to defer the beginning of certain months by one day, so that in particular the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) does not fall on a Friday or Sunday. This is because several Jews want to avoid having to observe two consecutive days of rest, whereas others strictly follow the astronomical dates.

The writers of the Gospels obviously had a different understanding of when the month had begun. For Jesus, the month had begun one day earlier than for the others. Jesus certainly ate the Passover meal on the evening of Nisan 14, otherwise he would have violated the Mosaic Law and would have sinned. It was certainly easy for our heavenly Father to show Jesus the new moon one day earlier. It is also plausible that Jesus did not agree with the council's decision for another reason. For it is possible that the council was well aware of the appearance of the new moon, but set the beginning of the month one day later.

God arranged it in such a way that the council declared the beginning of the month one day later than Jesus. This made it possible for Jesus to celebrate the Passover meal with his disciples what he earnestly desired (Lk 22:15) and also to institute the Lord's Supper, before he died as our Passover lamb, precisely at the time when the Jews were sacrificing their Passover lambs.

Let's come back to the question of whether Jesus was crucified on Nisan 14 or 15. According to the calendar of the council, he was crucified on Nisan 14 and according to Jesus' reckoning on Nisan 15. Both dates are correct.

4 Who wrote the Gospel of John?

In a brief digression, let us consider the question of who wrote the Gospel of John. In it, Jesus' last Passover meal is not labeled as such, but as a "supper" (Greek "deipnon"; Jn 13:2; Jn 21:20). This also explains how he could write that some of the disciples would have thought that it could have been possible for Judas to buy something (Jn 13:29). It would have been impossible to buy anything on the evening of a Passover meal, because shopping was not allowed on a day of rest (Neh 10:32; Neh 13:15-21; Am 8:5).

On a Sabbath, i.e. on a day of rest, it was also forbidden to carry loads (Jer 17:21-22; Neh 13:15-19; Num 15:32-36; Jn 5:10), and therefore also not on the first day of rest of the Passover (Passover I), on which Jesus was crucified according to his understanding. Jesus, of course, did not transgress the Law of Moses and so Simon of Cyrene had to carry the cross for Jesus (Mt 27:32; Mk 15:21; Lk 23:26). But the Gospel of John says that Jesus was "bearing his own cross" (Jn 19:17). The Greek verb "bastazó" for "to carry" was occasionally used metaphorically (Mt 20:12; Jn 16:12; Acts 15:10; Rom 15:1; Gal 6:2+5; Gal 5:10; Rev 2:2-3), but I think that this is one of several minor discrepancies between the Gospels and that the author assumed that Jesus had to carry his cross himself as a convict, as was common practice at the time.

The author of the Gospel of John apparently had no knowledge that Jesus was celebrating the Passover with his disciples and, according to his understanding, was crucified on the first day of rest of the Passover (Passover I). This is astonishing because he described the events of this Seder evening in great detail in five chapters, beginning with the washing of the feet (Jn 13:1-17) and ending with Jesus' high priestly prayer (Jn 17). The writer also had very profound revelations, for example that Jesus is the Word (Jn 1:1). Further, he explained the Lord's Supper in that Jesus' body and blood are to be eaten and drunk (Jn 6:32-59). Additionally, we find the seven "I am" words in this Gospel (Jn 6:35; Jn 8:12; Jn 10:9; Jn 10:11; Jn 11:25; Jn 14:6; Jn 15:1). This shows that even if we have very profound revelation from God in some areas, this can only be a partial revelation, and that our brothers and sisters have knowledge of other valuable things. For we only know in part (1Cor 13:9+12).

Was the author one of the twelve disciples of Jesus? The Twelve were taught directly by Jesus and they heard him speak in particular during the Passover meal: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Lk 22:15). So they knew directly from Jesus that he died on Nisan 15 according to his understanding. If one of them had later written that he was crucified on Nisan 14, then he would have had to intentionally turn away from Jesus' teaching. He would therefore have had to assume that Jesus was mistaken. This definitely cannot be assumed. We must therefore conclude that the Gospel of John was not written by any of the twelve disciples.

Towards the end of the Gospel it is written: “This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things” (Jn 21:24). The most common view is that this refers to “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn 21:20). This supports the idea that this Gospel was written by one of the twelve disciples. But many Bible scholars assume that the last chapter has a different author than the previous ones. This is supported by the fact that the second-last chapter already has a closing word: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book...” (Jn 20:30-31). And this is similar to the one in the currently last chapter: “Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (Jn 21:25)

5 The Resurrection of Jesus

Jesus died on the day of Preparation for the weekly Sabbath, i.e. on the sixth day of the week (Friday), as we explained above. And after the Sabbath, he rose again on the first day of the week (Sunday) as we may read in all four Gospels.

Weekday		
6	7 Sabbath	1
Crucifixion		Mt 28 ¹ Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week , Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb...
		⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has <u>risen</u> , as he said...”
		Mk 16 ¹ When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week , when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb...
		⁶ ... Jesus... has <u>risen</u> ...
		Lk 24 ¹ But on the first day of the week , at early dawn, they went to the tomb...
		⁶ He is not here, but has <u>risen</u> ! ...
		Jn 20 ¹ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark...
		¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week , the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

5.1 Jesus was dead “three days and three nights”

According to the prophecies, Jesus was to be dead for three days (Mt 12:40; Mt 26:61; Mt 27:40+63; Mk 8:31; Mk 15:29; Jn 2:19-20). And he was to rise again on the third day (Mt 16:21; Mt 17:23; Mt 20:19; Mt 27:64; Mk 9:31; Mk 10:34; Lk 9:22; Lk 18:33; Lk 24:7+46; Acts 10:40; 1Cor 15:4).

When doing the math, bear in mind that according to the biblical counting method, parts of days are counted in full. The first day of death is therefore the sixth day of the week (Friday), Jesus lay in the tomb on the seventh day, the Sabbath (Saturday), before he rose from the dead on the first day of the week (Sunday). He was therefore dead for three days and rose from the dead on the third day. This counting method can also be found in some other places in the Bible:

- Queen Esther fasted for three days and then went to the king on the third day (Est 4:15 to Est 5:1).
- The people asked Rehoboam to make the hard service easier and he told them to come back after three days (1Kgs 12:5; 2Chr 10:5). And then the people returned on the third day (1Kgs 12:12; 2Chr 10:12).
- Joseph put his brothers in custody for three days and on the third day he spoke to them and set them free (Gen 42:17-20).

Jesus had prophesied that he would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”, just as “Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish” (Mt 12:40). This is a figure of speech that refers to a period of three days including the nights in between. This becomes clear when we look at the following scriptures:

- For forty days, Jesus fasted in the wilderness and was tempted by Satan, as we can read in the Gospels according to Mark and Luke (Mk 1:13; Lk 4:1-3). And these were “forty days and forty nights”, as we read in Matthew (Mt 4:2). The period of “forty days” is therefore exactly the same as that of “forty days and forty nights”.
- David and his men found an Egyptian man who had “not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights” (1Sam 30:12), and this was from the time he “fell sick three days ago” (1Sam 30:13). So it is about a period of three days.
- Moses was “forty days and forty nights” on the mountain with God (Ex 24:18; Ex 34:28; Deut 9:9+11). It would be unrealistic to assume that Moses ascended or descended the mountain at night. A period of forty days is therefore meant.
- Job’s friends “sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights” (Job 2:13). Here, too, we can assume that they did not come or leave during the night.

The addition of “three”, “seven” or “forty nights” is for emphasis. So Jesus was dead “three days and three nights” according to the biblical parlance. And this is by no means inconsistent with the fact that he was only dead for two nights according to our current way of expression.

6 The Day of Firstfruits

Immediately after the Passover rules, the Book of Leviticus provides instructions for the offering of the firstfruits. This sacrifice was to be offered by the priest on the day after the Sabbath (Lev 23:10-11). This refers to the weekly Sabbath during the Feast of Passover. If the firstfruits had been offered on a later Sabbath, it would have been necessary to return to the temple in Jerusalem, because sacrifices could only be made there. People would have had to travel to the temple four times a year and not just three times, as it was commanded, because they had to come to the temple for the Passover anyway (Deut 16:16).

On this very day, when the firstfruits were offered, Jesus rose from the dead. This is certainly no coincidence, because Jesus was the first to rise from the dead and Christians who have died will be raised from the dead when Jesus returns (Acts 26:23; 1Cor 15:20-23).

Weekday		
6	7 Sabbath	1
Crucifixion		Resurrection
		Lev 23 ¹⁰ Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the <u>firstfruits</u> of your harvest to the priest, ¹¹ and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it... ¹⁴ And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God...
		Acts 26 ²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the <u>first</u> to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.
		1Cor 15 ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the <u>firstfruits</u> of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the <u>firstfruits</u> , then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

6.1 Alternative Determination of the Day of Firstfruits

Many Jews believe that the Sabbath, after which the firstfruits offering was to be made, is not the weekly Sabbath, but the first day of rest of the Passover (Passover I) on Nisan 15. This is why many people celebrate the Day of Firstfruits always on the second day of Passover (Passover II), i.e. on Nisan 16. The word “shabbath”, Hebrew for Sabbath, was derived from a verb “shabath” meaning “to rest” or “to cease” from something. There are only two exceptions in the entire Old Testament where this does not refer to the weekly Sabbath: First, the Sabbath Year (Lev 25:2-8; Lev 26:34+43; 2Chr 36:21) and second, the Day of Atonement, which was to be a “Sabbath of solemn rest” (Lev 16:31; Lev 23:32). In Hebrew, in the context of the Day of Atonement the word for Sabbath is followed by the noun “shabbathon”, which means “Sabbath observance”. This was also derived from the verb “shabath”. The very same two Hebrew words “shabbath” and “shabbathon” were also used several times to refer to the weekly Sabbath (Ex 16:23; Ex 31:15; Ex 35:2; Lev 23:3). According to this, the weekly Sabbath is no less holy than the Day of Atonement.

On the days of rest of the Passover (Passover I + VII) people were not allowed to work, but these days were not labeled as Sabbaths in the Bible (Ex 12:16; Lev 23:7-8). Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the Sabbath in question refers to one of these days of rest. And if this were the case, then it would have to be assumed that the seventh and not the first day of the Passover was meant, because this is the day of rest mentioned just before the ordinance for the Day of Firstfruits whereas the first day of rest (Passover I) is subject of the preceding verse (Lev 23:7).

It is also evident from an account in the Book of Joshua that such interpretations cannot be correct: The Israelites entered the promised land and kept the Passover on the evening of Nisan 14, and “the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain.” (Josh 5:10-11). The day after the Passover is Nisan 15 (Passover I), because the Passover is on Nisan 14 (Lev 23:5) and in another biblical account it is explicitly stated that the day after the Passover is Nisan 15 (Num 33:3). If the “produce of the land” they ate had been from the previous year, they would have had to get it from the inhabitants of the land. Based on the biblical account, however, this cannot be assumed, especially as they were hostile and “melted away” before them (Josh 2:9-11+24; Josh 5:1). The manna also ceased the very next day, because they no longer needed it, as “they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year” (Josh 5:12). This means that the Israelites ate the freshly harvested grain on Nisan 15. Please note that they were not allowed to do so before the Day of Firstfruits (Lev 23:14). So in this year the Day of Firstfruits cannot have been after Nisan 15.

Therefore, the practice of celebrating the Day of Firstfruits always on the second day of Passover (Passover II) is not in accordance with the biblical scriptures. Further evidence that the Day of Firstfruits is to be celebrated on the day after the weekly Sabbath can be found in the regulations for the Feast of Weeks.

7 The Ascension of Jesus and the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)

Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days after his resurrection and then ascended to heaven (Acts 1:3-9). This was on the fifth day of the week (Thursday). Depending on whether the first month had 29 or 30 days, according to the calendar of the council, Jesus' ascension was on the 25th or 26th of the second month, which is called “Ziv” in the Bible (1Kgs 6:1) and “Iyar” by the Israelites today. On Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus and many other believers were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).

Immediately after the regulations for offering the firstfruits, the Book of Leviticus provides instructions for the Feast of Weeks (Lev 23:15-21). This feast was to take place seven weeks after the Day of Firstfruits and again on the first day of the week, that is on the 50th day after the offering of the firstfruits. When counting the 50 days, the first day is included again, the Day of Firstfruits. The English

word “Pentecost” is derived from the Greek word “pentēkosté” which means “fiftieth”. On Pentecost it was not allowed to work and a holy convocation was to be held (Lev 23:21; Num 28:26). Depending on the length of the previous two months, the feast of Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection was on the 5th, 6th or 7th of the third month, which is called “Sivan” (Est 8:9).

	First Month (Nisan)		Second Month (Iyar)		Third Month (Sivan)
Council	16 Passover II	...	25 or 26	...	5, 6 or 7
Week-day	1	...	5	...	1
	Resurrection		Acts 1 ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God... ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was <u>lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.</u>		Acts 2 ¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived... ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all <u>filled with the Holy Spirit</u> and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.
	Day of Firstfruits				Lev 23 ¹⁵ You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. ¹⁶ You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the Lord... ²¹ ... You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work...

7.1 Alternative Calculation for the Feast of Weeks, wrong Counting of the Omer

Many Jews always celebrate the second day of Passover (Passover II) as the Day of Firstfruits. We have already shown above that this is not in line with the Bible. Consequently, they count the fifty days from this day until the Feast of Weeks. This is the so-called Counting of the Omer. The following should be considered:

There are to be seven Sabbaths from the Day of Firstfruits to the Feast of Weeks (Lev 23:15). Here, the Hebrew word “shabbath” was translated exceptionally as “week”. This translation is questionable. Nowhere in the Old Testament does the Hebrew word for Sabbath mean “week”. The Greek word in the New Testament for Sabbath, namely “sabbaton”, is derived from the Hebrew “shabbath”. This Greek word occasionally refers to a week, but always to a period from Sunday to Saturday (Sabbath), i.e. not to any period of seven days (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:2+9; Lk 18:12; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1+19; Acts 20:7; 1Cor 16:2). But such an arbitrary period of seven days would have to be meant here by the Hebrew “shabbath” in order to be able to count this seven times until the Feast of Weeks. This is also questionable because there is the Hebrew word “shabua”, which stands for a period of seven days, which does not have to correspond to a week from Sunday to Saturday (Gen 29:27-28; Lev 12:5; Ezek 45:21).

The Day of Firstfruits should therefore be celebrated on the day after the weekly Sabbath. Another indication for this comes from the analogy with the Year of Jubilee. Every seven years was a Sabbath Year to allow the land to rest (Lev 25:2-8). After seven Sabbath Years, in the following fiftieth year, was to be the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:8-12). The land should also be at rest this year. The analogy is as follows: The seven weekly Sabbaths stand for seven Sabbath Years. The Feast of Weeks corresponds to the Year of Jubilee, in which the land was to rest again. In addition, the Year of Jubilee should follow directly after the seventh Sabbath Year. God definitely wanted two years of rest immediately after each other and he especially pointed out that the harvest of the year before would last for three years (Lev 25:21-22). This strongly supports the argument that people should also rest for two days without interruption, particularly on the seventh Sabbath after the Day of Firstfruits and on the following day, the Feast of Weeks. Two days of rest should be a blessing for the people. Unfortunately, some Jews see the Sabbath as a burden because of their own laws that were not given by God. Therefore, I suspect that these Jews were looking for an alternative interpretation of the scriptures in order to avoid this as much as possible.

The Jewish scribes and teachers of the law had long ago falsified the word of God with their interpretations. Jeremiah already reported that they had “made it into a lie” (Jer 8:8). And Jesus also criticized them for not keeping God’s commandments, but their traditions and commandments of men (Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:8-13). It is therefore not surprising that some Jews today have a different view.

8 The Dates until Year 2030

As already mentioned, the beginnings of the months, i.e. the days of the new moon, are sometimes shifted slightly in the Jewish calendar which is generally used today. In particular, this avoids the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) falling on the day before or after the weekly Sabbath. The Day of Atonement is a day of rest that should be celebrated on the 10th day of the seventh biblical month (Lev 23:26-32). According to the astronomical dates, for example, it falls on Friday, 29 Sep 2028 and Sunday, 10 Oct 2027. By shifting the start of the month, this avoids having to keep two days of rest in a row without interruption. So the question arises as to whether one wants to follow the astronomical data or the declarations of the rabbis in Israel.

Jesus determined the beginning of the month according to his observation, i.e. according to the astronomical dates, and did not follow the council. Because I follow Jesus, I also follow the astronomical dates, so that sometimes in the following table there is a deviation of one day from the Israelite calendar. Two separate lines again refer to the calendar of the council and of Jesus. I have noted the third day after the crucifixion as the day of Jesus’ resurrection and the 40th day after as Ascension Day. This day of resurrection is not at the Day of

Firstfruits. Remember that Jesus rose from the dead on the Day of Firstfruits, because in the year of Jesus' crucifixion both dates fell on the same day.

Which days should be celebrated on the occasions of the crucifixion and the resurrection? For example, in 2024 there were three days that could be celebrated as the Day of Resurrection, namely April 25, April 26 and April 28, the Day of Firstfruits, and if you do not strictly follow the astronomical data, but the Israelite calendar, then there are even other dates. I think it is a good idea to simply celebrate the biblical feasts, in particular weekly Sabbaths and other days of rest – remembering every day what Jesus has accomplished for us.

Many Christians today celebrate Easter from Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday. This custom goes back to the time of Emperor Constantine I, when the date for Easter was set differently from the date for Passover. So Easter is celebrated instead of Passover. This is comparable to Sunday being celebrated today instead of the biblical day of rest, the Sabbath. I discuss this in more detail in the section “How about celebrating the Sunday as the Sabbath?” in my article “What commandments should Christians keep?” The issues outlined there apply accordingly.

	First Month (Nisan)												...	Second Month (Iyar)		...	Third Month (Sivan)
	10	11	12	13	14 Seder	15 Passover I	16 Passover II	17 Passover III	18 Passover IV	19 Passover V	20 Passover VI	21 Passover VII					
Council	Entry into Jerusalem			last Seder evening	Crucifixion		Resurrection							Ascension			Pentecost
Jesus		Entry into Jerusalem			last Seder evening	Crucifixion		Resurrection							Ascension		Pentecost
2024	Fri 19 Apr	Sat 20 Apr	Sun 21 Apr	Mon 22 Apr	Tue 23 Apr	Wed 24 Apr	Thu 25 Apr	Fri 26 Apr	Sat 27 Apr	Sun 28 Apr Firstfruits	Mon 29 Apr	Tue 30 Apr	...	Mon 3 Jun	Tue 4 Jun	...	Sun 16 Jun
2025	Tue 8 Apr	Wed 9 Apr	Thu 10 Apr	Fri 11 Apr	Sat 12 Apr	Sun 13 Apr Firstfruits	Mon 14 Apr	Tue 15 Apr	Wed 16 Apr	Thu 17 Apr	Fri 18 Apr	Sat 19 Apr	...	Fri 23 May	Sat 24 May	...	Sun 1 Jun
2026	Sun 29 Mar	Mon 30 Mar	Tue 31 Mar	Wed 1 Apr	Thu 2 Apr	Fri 3 Apr	Sat 4 Apr	Sun 5 Apr Firstfruits	Mon 6 Apr	Tue 7 Apr	Wed 8 Apr	Thu 9 Apr	...	Wed 13 May	Thu 14 May	...	Sun 24 May
2027	Sat 17 Apr	Sun 18 Apr	Mon 19 Apr	Tue 20 Apr	Wed 21 Apr	Thu 22 Apr	Fri 23 Apr	Sat 24 Apr	Sun 25 Apr Firstfruits	Mon 26 Apr	Tue 27 Apr	Wed 28 Apr	...	Tue 1 Jun	Wed 2 Jun	...	Sun 13 Jun

2028	Wed 5 Apr	Thu 6 Apr	Fri 7 Apr	Sat 8 Apr	Sun 9 Apr	Mon 10 Apr	Tue 11 Apr	Wed 12 Apr	Thu 13 Apr	Fri 14 Apr	Sat 15 Apr	Sun 16 Apr Firstfruits	...	Sat 20 May	Sun 21 May	...	Sun 4 Jun
2029	Sun 25 Mar	Mon 26 Mar	Tue 27 Mar	Wed 28 Mar	Thu 29 Mar	Fri 30 Mar	Sat 31 Mar	Sun 1 Apr Firstfruits	Mon 2 Apr	Tue 3 Apr	Wed 4 Apr	Thu 5 Apr	...	Wed 9 May	Thu 10 May	...	Sun 20 May
2030	Sat 13 Apr	Sun 14 Apr	Mon 15 Apr	Tue 16 Apr	Wed 17 Apr	Thu 18 Apr	Fri 19 Apr	Sat 20 Apr	Sun 21 Apr Firstfruits	Mon 22 Apr	Tue 23 Apr	Wed 24 Apr	...	Tue 28 May	Wed 29 May	...	Sun 9 Jun

9 Summary

The following table summarizes the analogies between God's spring feasts and Jesus' ministry.

Take Passover lamb	Jesus' entry into Jerusalem
Sacrifice Passover lamb	Jesus' death
Day of Firstfruits	Jesus' resurrection, he is the first to rise from the dead
Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)	The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit

It is remarkable how wonderfully God has arranged all this. It rarely happens that the Day of Firstfruits is the third day after the day on which the Passover lambs had to be sacrificed. But God arranged it that way for the year in which Jesus died, our Passover lamb. And in his wisdom, he also arranged the feasts and directed the events in such a way that Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples and instituted the Lord's Supper, and yet died at the very hour when the other Jews were sacrificing their Passover lambs.

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus was crucified on Nisan 14 and according to the other Gospels on Nisan 15. But this is not a contradiction, because according to the calendar of the council the crucifixion took place on Nisan 14 and according to Jesus' reckoning it was already Nisan 15, because the month began for Jesus one day earlier. It is not important whether this was because God had shown him the new moon one evening earlier than the others, or whether there was another reason why Jesus did not follow the declaration of the council. They may have intentionally delayed the start of the month by one day.

Author

Please address questions and feedback to:

Martin Zahn

Herbert-Ewe-Str. 18

18435 Stralsund

Germany

E-Mail: contact@mzahn.eu

Website: <https://mzahn.eu/en>