

BLOGS

7 clues tell us *precisely* when Jesus died (the year, month, day, and hour revealed)

BY Jimmy Akin

| Posted 4/10/13 at 11:47 PM

We recently celebrated Good Friday and Easter, the annual celebrations of Jesus' death and resurrection.

We all know that this happened in Jerusalem in the first century.

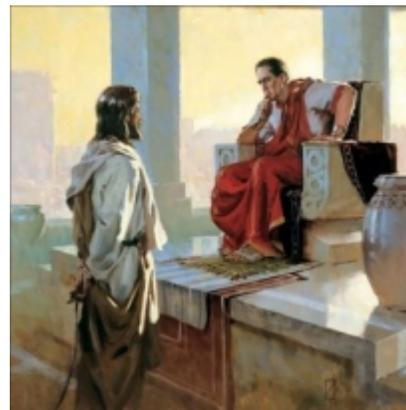
That separates Jesus from mythical pagan deities, who were supposed to live in places or times that none could specify.

Just how specific can we be with the death of Jesus?

Can we determine the exact day?

We can.

And here's how . . .



Clue #1: The High Priesthood of Caiaphas

The gospels indicate that Jesus was crucified at the instigation of the first century high priest named Caiaphas ([Matthew 26:3-4](#), [John 11:49-53](#)).

We know from other sources that he served as high priest from A.D. 18 to 36, so that puts Jesus' death in that time frame.

But we can get more specific. Much more.

Clue #2: The Governorship of Pontius Pilate

All four gospels agree that Jesus was crucified on the orders of Pontius Pilate ([Matthew 27:24-26](#), [Mark 15:15](#), [Luke 23:24](#), [John 19:15-16](#)).

We know from other sources when he served as governor of Judea--A.D. 26 to A.D. 36--so we can narrow down the range by several years.

But how are we going to get it down to a specific day and year?

Clue #3: After "the Fifteenth Year of Tiberius Caesar"

The Gospel of Luke tells us when the ministry of John the Baptist began:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar . . . the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness [Luke 3:1-2].

This picks out a specific year: A.D. 29.

Since all four gospels depict the ministry of Christ beginning after that of John the Baptist had begun ([Matthew 3](#), [Mark 1](#), [Luke 3](#), [John 1](#)), this means that we can shave a few more years off our range.

The death of Christ had to be in a range of seven years: between A.D. 29 and 36.

Clue #4: Crucified on a Friday

All four gospels agree that Jesus was crucified on a Friday ([Matt. 27:62](#), [Mark 15:42](#); [Luke 23:54](#); [John 19:42](#)), just before a Sabbath, which was just before the first day of the week ([Matthew 28:1](#), [Mark 16:2](#), [Luke 24:1](#), [John 20:1](#)).

We know that it was a Friday because it is referred to as "the day of preparation"--that is, the day on which Jews made the preparations they needed for the Sabbath, since they could not do any work on that day. Thus they cooked food in advance and made other necessary preparations.

The Jewish Encyclopedia states:

Friday, as the forerunner of Shabbat, is called "'Ereb Shabbat" (The Eve of Sabbath). The term "'ereb" admits of two meanings: "evening" and "admixture" (Ex. xii. 38); and "'Ereb Shabbat" accordingly denotes the day on the evening of which Sabbath begins, or the day on which food is prepared for both the current and the following days, which latter is Sabbath.

The idea of preparation is expressed by the Greek name *paraskeu *, given by Josephus ("Ant." xvi. 6,   2) to that day (compare Mark xv. 42; Luke xxiii. 54; Matt. xxvii. 62; John xix. 42). In Yer. Pesahim iv. 1 the day is called "Yoma da-'Arubta" (Day of Preparation) [*Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v., "Calendar"].

That eliminates six of the days of the week, but there were still quite a few Fridays between A.D. 29 and 36.

Can we figure out which one?

Clue #5: A Friday at Passover

The gospels also agree that Jesus was crucified in conjunction with the annual feast of Passover ([Matthew 26:2](#), [Mark 14:1](#), [Luke 22:1](#), [John 18:39](#)).

Here we encounter a momentary complication, because Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe the Last Supper on Holy Thursday as a Passover meal ([Matthew 26:19](#), [Mark 14:14](#), [Luke 22:15](#)). That would suggest that Good Friday was the day after Passover.

However, when describing the morning of Good Friday, John indicates that the Jewish authorities had not yet eaten the Passover meal:

Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium [i.e., Pilate's palace]. It was early. They themselves did not enter the Praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover. So Pilate went out to them [[John 18:28-29a](#)].

That suggests that the Passover would have begun on sundown Friday.

There are a number of ways of resolving this. For example, some have suggested that Jesus and his disciples used a different calendar than the Jewish authorities, and we know that there were different calendars in use in first century Judaism.

It's also possible that Jesus just *advanced the date* of the Passover celebration for him and his disciples. I mean, they were already convinced he was the Messiah and the Son of God. If he says, "We're celebrating Passover today," and it's a day earlier than most people, they'd just go with that. (Note that he made other modifications to the ceremony, such as instituting the Eucharist in the midst of it.)

And there are other solutions.

However, regardless of what Jesus' movement did, we can look to John's statement about the Jesus' captors as an indication of what the Jewish authorities or the mainstream Jewish practice was: They were celebrating a Passover beginning on what we would call Friday evening.

That lets us narrow down the range of possible dates to just a few. Here is a complete list of the days between A.D. 29 and 36 on whose evenings Passover began:

- Monday, April 18, A.D. 29
- **Friday, April 7, A.D. 30**
- Tuesday, March 27, A.D. 31
- Monday, April 14, A.D. 32
- **Friday, April 3, A.D. 33**
- Wednesday, March 24, A.D. 34

- Tuesday, April 12, A.D. 35
- Saturday, March 31, A.D. 36

As you can see, we have just two candidates left: Jesus was either crucified on April 7 of A.D. 30 or April 3 of A.D. 33. Which was it?

The traditional date is that of A.D. 33. You will find quite a number of people today advocating the A.D. 30 date.

Do the gospels let us decide between the two?

Clue #6: John's Three Passovers

The Gospel of John records three different Passovers during the ministry of Jesus:

- Passover #1: This is recorded in [John 2:13](#), near the beginning of Jesus' ministry.
- Passover #2: This is recorded in [John 6:4](#), in the middle of Jesus' ministry.
- Passover #3: This is recorded in [John 11:55](#) (and frequently mentioned afterwards), at the end of Jesus' ministry.

That means that the ministry of Jesus had to span something over two years. A fuller treatment would reveal that it spanned about three and a half years, but even if we assume it began immediately before Passover #1, the addition of two more Passovers shows that it lasted more than two years at a bare minimum.

That means the A.D. 30 date is out.

There is not enough time between the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar--A.D. 29--and the next year's Passover to accommodate a ministry of at least two years.

The numbers don't add up.

As a result, the traditional date of Jesus' death--Friday, April 3, A.D. 33--must be regarded as the correct one.

Can we be even more precise?

Clue #7: "The Ninth Hour"

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each record that Jesus died about "the ninth hour" ([Matthew 27:45-50](#), [Mark 15:34-37](#), [Luke 23:44-46](#)).

"The ninth hour" is what we, today, would refer to as 3:00 p.m.

This allows us to narrow down the time of Jesus' death to a very specific point in history: **around 3:00 p.m on Friday, April 3, A.D. 33.**

Of course, there are a lot of detailed arguments that I haven't taken space to deal with here. But this is the thrust of things.

This is when it happened.