

TIMING OF THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE MESSIAH

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PURPOSE

There are many differing views regarding the timing of the Last Supper, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of the Messiah, especially in relationship to the appointed times of Passover, Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits. Although much could be written about each of these events, the purpose of this discussion is to focus on their timing, especially in relation to each other. A proper understanding of timing is important not only because these events are so crucial to our faith, but also because of the commands to observe the appointed times on the days YHWH instructed His people to do so.

The first four appointed times are sometimes referred to as the “Spring Feasts”, and include Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot). The remaining three appointed times of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles, are sometimes called the “fall feasts” because they occur in the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. The Last Supper, the crucifixion, and the resurrection all occur during the time of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. There is, however, a wide variety of views as to exactly what happened when. Most of these views have significant conflicts with at least some portions of Scripture.

Starting with the belief that Scripture is inspired, accurate, and cannot contradict itself, it is hoped that a thorough study of the relevant Scriptures will not only lead to a better understanding of the timing of these events, but also will provide clarification on when these events are to be observed.

THE ONE OF THE SABBATHS

Many of the different views of the timing these events hinge on when the resurrection took place. The traditional view is that it took place on the first day of the week, but others have suggested it took place on the Sabbath. To help determine this question, we must understand the phrase **μία τῶν σαββάτων** /mia ton sabbaton/ “one of the sabbaths”, which is used in each of the Gospel accounts when speaking of the day of the resurrection:

Matthew 28:1

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the **one of [the] sabbath**, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

Luke 24:1

But on the **one of the sabbath**, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.

Mark 16:2

And very early on the **one of the sabbath**, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.

John 20:1

Now on the **one of the sabbaths** Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

First of all, we should note that the Greek **sabbaton** is a grammatically plural form, however a review of its usage in Scripture makes it clear that this plural form is also used for singular “Sabbath”. The context makes it clear whether **sabbaton** refers to singular “Sabbath” or plural Sabbaths”. For example, the following use of **sabbaton** is grammatically plural, although the meaning is clearly singular:

Luke 13:10

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the **sabbaton**.

Mark 1:21

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the **sabbaton** he entered the synagogue and was teaching.

Therefore Scripture shows that the Greek **sabbaton** can be used to mean either singular Sabbath or plural Sabbaths.

In regard to the meaning of the phrase **μία τῶν σαββάτων** /mia ton sabbaton/, there are three viewpoints that have been suggested:

1. It means the first part of the Sabbath.

This interpretation is not supported but the definition and use of the Greek use of **μία** /mia/. The Greek **mia** never means “early, or the first part of something”, but rather it means “one, the first one of something, or the first in a series”. So the Greek text simply does not support a rendering of the “first part of the Sabbath”. Thus, Viewpoint 1 is ruled out based on a linguistic / semantic understanding of the terms.

2. It means the first of a series of Sabbaths

This Greek text could support this rendering. In this case, some suggest it would refer to the first Sabbath in the series of seven Sabbaths counting until Shavuot (Feast of Weeks / Pentecost). Since Matthew 28:1 says “*after the Sabbath... on the one of the Sabbaths*”, there are clearly two Sabbaths under discussion. This could make sense, given that the resurrection took place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. So if we choose the definition “first of a series of Sabbaths”, we must do so with the implication that the first Sabbath of Matt 28:1 was the “high Sabbath” of Unleavened Bread (Abib 15), and after that (presumably the following day from the context of the Gospel accounts) came the first weekly Sabbath in the series of seven before Shavuot.

In this interpretation (Viewpoint 2), the resurrection took place sometime during the night or early morning of the weekly Sabbath (that is, Friday night or pre-dawn Saturday morning, by our Western reckoning).

3. It means the first day of the week

The Greek text could also support this rendering. The Greek **sabbaton**, as well as the Hebrew **shabbat** (plural **shabbatot**), can either be used to refer to last day of the week, or to the entire week. For example, in the following verses the usage clearly refers to the entire week, rather than just the last day of the week:

Luke 18:12

I fast twice **the sabbaton**; I give tithes of all that I get.’

Leviticus 23:15

“You shall count seven full **shabbatot** from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering.

Thus, there is no question that Scriptures sometimes use the term “Sabbath” to refer to an entire seven-day week, rather than just the seventh day of the week. In this interpretation (Viewpoint 3), the resurrection took place sometime during the night or early morning on the first day of the week (that is, Saturday night or pre-dawn Sunday morning, by our Western reckoning).

In order to choose between these two possible viewpoints (Viewpoint 2 and Viewpoint 3), it is necessary to examine the other occurrences of the phrase **mia sabbaton** in Scriptures:

Acts 20:7

On the **one of the sabbath**, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

The Acts 20:7 passage is especially interesting because it takes place between Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. Consider the context from the previous verse:

Acts 20:6

but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

And later in the chapter (Ac 20:16) we are told Paul was in a hurry because he wanted to be back in Jerusalem for Pentecost. So at first glance the passage would seem to support the possibility of interpreting the “**one of the Sabbaths**” to indicate the first in the series of seven Sabbaths counting from Unleavened Bread to Pentecost. The problem, however, is that a careful look at the timing shows that it is impossible for this to refer to the first in the series of Sabbaths. Since they departed after Unleavened Bread was finished, the journey took five days, they remained there for seven days, and the day before their departure was the “**one of the sabbath**”, this means the “**one of the sabbath**” referred to here had to be *at least* 11 days after the end of the Unleavened Bread. Therefore “**the one of the sabbath**” cannot refer to the first in the series of Sabbaths counting from Unleavened Bread until Pentecost. It would have had to have been the second, or possibly the third Sabbath in the series. Furthermore, note that Paul intended to leave the following morning. If this were the evening of a Sabbath, the following morning

would be the daytime period of the Sabbath. We know Paul would not have violated the Sabbath by departing on his journey on the day of the Sabbath.

The only explanation that makes sense is to recognize that “**the one of the Sabbath**” refers to the first day of the week. This also fits with what we know about first century Judaism. At the close of the Sabbath, it was traditional to meet a **havdalah** service, that would celebrate the end of Sabbath and the beginning of the new week. So it seems they were at a **havdalah** meeting, and Paul talked late into the night (the night beginning the first day of the week), intending to depart the next day, which would have been the daytime portion of the first day of the week.

Further support of this interpretation comes from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 16:2

On the **one of [the] sabbath**, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Here Paul is asking the people to set aside money for him on the “one of the sabbath”. Since he would not be asking them to handle money on the Sabbath, this verse also suggests that the proper understanding of “one of the sabbath” must be that it refers to the first day of the week.

For the sake of completeness, we should examine the only other occurrence in Scripture of the phrase “**one of the sabbaths**”, which occurs in John, just after the Yeshua appears to Miriam outside the tomb:

John 20:19

On the evening of that day, the **one of [the] sabbaths**, 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.”

The Greek **ὄψιος** /opsios/ is usually translated “evening”, but literally means “late”. So the first phrase of the verse is best translated “late in that day” rather than “on the evening of that day”. It was late in the same day as the prior events of the resurrection. This day was still the “**one of the sabbaths**”, as it was identified earlier in the chapter (John 20:1). The usage here does not add anything of significance to the discussion.

In summary, there are clear examples in Scripture where “one of the Sabbath” **cannot** mean “first in a series of Sabbaths”. And there **no** clear examples in Scripture where it does mean “first in a series of Sabbaths”. Furthermore, there are also clear examples in Scripture where Sabbath can refer to a seven-day week. Therefore, while there is no evidence to support the interpretation “first in a series of Sabbaths”, there is ample evidence to support the interpretation “first day of the week”. Thus, it seems there is fairly strong support that, according to Scriptures, the resurrection took place on the first day of the week.

RESURRECTION TIME OF DAY

Having concluded that the phrase **μὴ τῶν σαββάτων** /mia ton sabbaton/ “*one of the sabbaths*” is best translated “first day of the week”, we can now look at the time of the day at which the resurrection took place. Each of the four gospel accounts addresses this:

Matthew 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.

The Greek **ἐπιφώσκει** /epiphosko/ “dawn” can be understood in two ways. First, it can refer to the beginning of the first day of the week, which is the evening after the close of Sabbath day, according to Jewish reckoning. Second, it can mean the early morning of the first day of the week, according to Roman reckoning. So the text here is ambiguous on this point.

Luke 24:1

But on the first day of the week, **at early dawn**, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.

Luke’s term is **βαθὺς ὄρθρος** /bathys orthros/ “early dawn”. **Bathys** literally means “deep” (“deep sleep” in Acts 20:9, “deep well” in John 4:11, “deep things of Satan” in Rev 2:24). **Orthros** means “dawn, daybreak”, and is used in John 8:2 and Acts 5:21, where it appears to mean “dawn, daybreak, or early morning” and from the context probably does not refer to the prior evening. However, in combination with **bathys** “deep”, the meaning of the resultant phrase “deep dawn” is not entirely clear. Most scholars feel it means the very beginning of dawn. How early remains a matter of speculation. It is possible that it could mean at the very beginning of the day, indicating the prior evening, but there is no evidence to support this.

Mark 16:2

And **very early** on the first day of the week, **when the sun had risen**, they went to the tomb.

Mark has two relevant time phrases:

λίαν πρόι /lian proi/ “very early”. This phrase is self-explanatory, and unambiguous. It was very early on the first day of the week. But we don’t know how early.

the sun had risen. This phrase indicates that the sun had just risen, or at least that it was just in the process of rising.

John 20:1

Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb **early, while it was still dark**, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

John starts out using the same word as Mark, saying that Mary arrived at the tomb **πρόι** /proi/ “early”. John just says “early”, while Mark says “very early”. However John says “it was still dark”, while Mark says “the sun had risen”.

“A problem is posed by the fact that according to Mark 16:2 the sun had risen when the women reached the tomb. Several commentators suggest that the women came in groups, all arriving about sunrise. Those who were a little earlier would have arrived in darkness, those a little later when the sun was up. Another view is that John’s statement refers to the time of Mary’s departure from her home, Mark’s to the time of her arrival at the tomb.” [Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans, 1995].

It seems most likely that the event took place in those dark moments of early morning, when the sun is just beginning to rise. Also, with the tomb cut into the rock on the west side of the city wall, the physical environment could have blocked the first rays of the sun, keeping it dark at that location even longer than in the more open areas.

Were it not for Mark’s phrase “the sun has risen”, the Scriptures could support the conclusion that Mary went to the tomb in the evening after the Sabbath day was finished – that is, at the very beginning of the first day of the week according to Jewish reckoning. However the Mark’s phrase forces the conclusion that the visit to the tomb took place around dawn, as the sun was just beginning to rise, but the sky still remained dark. This is really the only conclusion that can be supported by all the Gospel accounts.

Therefore, according to Scripture, Mary visited the tomb and found the resurrection had occurred, just as the sun was rising on the first day of the week.

One could ask why the women didn’t go to the tomb in the evening, just after sunset, when the Sabbath was officially over. We don’t know the answer to that. It could have been because they were busy with the traditional **havdalah** service that takes place in the evening after the Sabbath. It could also have been because they had to finish procuring and preparing the spices to anoint the body, as suggested by Mark 16:1. That would have taken some time, and could have occupied their evening causing them to have to wait until early morning to visit the tomb with spices in hand. Whatever the reason, Scripture seems to make it clear that the women came to the tomb in the early hours of the morning, just around sunrise, and found the empty tomb at that time. We are given no indication of when the resurrection actually took place. It would have been before dawn, but really could have occurred at any time during the night.

DAY OF THE CRUCIFIXION

The Messiah was crucified during the Week of Unleavened Bread. Abib 14 was the day of the Passover. The following day, Abib 15, was the First Day of Unleavened Bread, referred to First Century Judaism as a “high Sabbath”. No ordinary work was to be done on that day. No one could be buried on that day. Nothing could be bought or sold on that day. In that light, we can understand the passage in John:

John 19:31

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.

The Sabbath that was a “high day” clearly refers to Abib 15, the First Day of Unleavened Bread. So according to John, Yeshua was crucified on Abib 14, and laid in the tomb late afternoon of that same day, prior to the evening which began the “high Sabbath”, the First Day of Unleavened Bread.

John uses the same term “day of preparation” earlier in the chapter:

John 19:14

Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!”

The events of John 19:14 take place about noon (the sixth hour), just minutes before Yeshua was crucified. Clearly this is on the same day as referred to in John 19:31. So the “day of preparation” prior to the “high Sabbath” in John 19:31 is the same as “the day of preparation of the Passover” in John 19:31. Both must refer to Abib 14.

Matthew’s account yields the same conclusion, although with different wording:

Matthew 27:57

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus.

The Greek ὄψιος /opsios/ is usually translated “evening”, but literally means “late”. So late in the day, Joseph or Arimathea requested the body of the Yeshua. We know from the other Gospel accounts that the body had to be in the tomb before sunset, which marked the beginning of the “high Sabbath”. So Joseph going to Pilate “late” in the day had to have meant late afternoon, shortly prior to sunset.

The next day, after Yeshua had been put in the tomb (that is, the day following the crucifixion), the chief priests and Pharisees gathered before Pilate. Matthew states it this way:

Matthew 27:62

The next day, that is, **after the day of Preparation**, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate

The day after the day of Preparation was the First Day of Unleavened Bread, which was the “high Sabbath” on Abib 15, but not the regular seventh day Sabbath. Matthew probably referred to it this way to avoid confusion with the regular seventh day Sabbath. So again we see agreement from Scripture that the crucifixion took place on Abib 14, with the Messiah placed in the tomb very late that day, just prior to sunset marking the beginning of the First Day of Unleavened Bread on Abib 15.

Mark introduces the event of Joseph of Arimathea this way:

Mark 15:42–43

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

As with Matthew’s account, evening is the Greek ὄψιος /opsios/ “late”, so the phrase “when evening had come” is translated literally as “when it had become late”. Mark clarifies what Matthew left implicit – that the day of Preparation is the day before the Sabbath, actually the “high Sabbath” of Unleavened Bread.

Luke does not say Joseph of Arimathea went “in the evening”, or “late in the day”. He just states that Joseph went to Pilate and asked for the body, and then laid it in the tomb. The next verses, however, indicate that the time of the event had to be at the end of Preparation day, just as the Sabbath was beginning:

Luke 23:54–56

It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Note that the women rested on the Sabbath according to the Torah. They could not go to the tomb to anoint the body on a Sabbath day. That is why they went on the first day of the week, as soon as the Sabbath (or Sabbaths) was over.

So we have agreement from all four Gospel accounts that Yeshua was crucified on the day of Preparation of Unleavened Bread, which would have been Abib 14. He was placed in the tomb late that same day, just prior to sunset, marking the beginning of the “high Sabbath” on Abib 15. The next thing we are told is that the women go to the tomb with the spices on the first day of week, after the Sabbath (or Sabbaths) is over.

TWO “SABBATHS”

Scripture instructs regarding the observance of Unleavened Bread as follows:

Leviticus 23:4–8

“These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. In the first month, **on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD’s Passover**. And **on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread** to the LORD; **for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread**. On the **first day you shall have a holy convocation**; you shall not do any ordinary work. 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.”

Thus the First Day of Unleavened Bread and the Last Day of Unleavened Bread are special days of “holy convocation” on which no “ordinary work” was to be done. Although nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures are these days ever referred to as “Sabbaths”, as discussed earlier, by the first century it was common in Judaism to refer to them as Sabbaths, or as “high Sabbaths”, since no work was to be done as on the weekly Sabbath. So by the time the Gospels were written, we see John making reference to this term when speaking of the First Day of Unleavened Bread:

John 19:31

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.

We know from John’s account (as well as other rabbinic sources) that the First Day of Unleavened Bread (Abib 15) was referred to as a Sabbath in first century Judaism.

Unleavened Bread lasted a full 7 days, from Abib 15 through Abib 21. So there had to be one weekly Sabbath at some point in that seven-day period. But it is unclear from Scripture just when that regular weekly Sabbath occurred. Scripture does not appear to specifically mention this Sabbath, but jumps directly from Yeshua being in the tomb just prior the “high Sabbath” of Unleavened Bread to the women hurrying to the tomb **on the first day of the week**. So clearly there had to be a regular weekly Sabbath the day before the women went to the tomb.

There are really only three possibilities of arranging the days:

1. The high Sabbath and the regular weekly Sabbath happened to fall on the same day that year – Abib 15, with the resurrection occurred on Abib 16.
2. The high Sabbath and regular weekly Sabbath were on consecutive days that year – Abib 15 and Abib 16, with the resurrection occurring on Abib 17.
3. The high Sabbath and regular weekly Sabbath were separated by one day that year – Abib 15 and Abib 17, with the resurrection occurring on Abib 18.

I will argue that Scripture most strongly suggests that #2 is correct, so that will be considered last, after first pointing out the weaknesses in #1 and #3.

#1 - Concurrent Sabbaths

This is the traditional Christian view that both Sabbaths occur on the same day, resulting in the following timeline:

Friday	Abib 14	Around noon	Yeshua is crucified
Friday	Abib 14	Just before sunset	Yeshua put in tomb
Saturday	Abib 15	Weekly Sabbath & First Day of Unl. Bread	Yeshua in tomb
Sunday	Abib 16	Sometime before dawn	Yeshua is resurrected

This results in Yeshua being in the tomb for about 36 hours, but for parts of three days, if a “day” is considered to be a 24 hour period:

Friday	Abib 14	day	Less than a couple hours
Saturday	Abib 15	night	Entire period
Saturday	Abib 15	day	Entire period

Sunday Abib 16 night Less than 12 hours

Note that the Jewish reckoning of days are being used here. For example, Saturday, Abib 15, begins with sunset at the end of the day on Friday.

One of the major problems with this scenario is that Yeshua is in the tomb only parts of two days and two nights, with the total time in the tomb only being approximately 36 hours. There are several Scriptures that speak to the length of time the Messiah will be buried:

Mark 8:31

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and **after three days rise again.**

Mark 9:31

for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, **after three days he will rise.**”

Mark 10:33–34

saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. **And after three days he will rise.**”

So three times in Mark we see the Messiah teaching that he would be killed and **after three days** he would rise. Furthermore, Matthew, Mark and John all record the Messiah teaching that the temple (referring to his body) would be destroyed and rebuilt in 3 days:

John 2:18–21

So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and **in three days I will raise it up.**” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

For similar references to this teaching, see also Matt 26:61, Matt 27:40, Matt 27:63, Mark 14:48, and Mark 15:29.

It is hard to reconcile a mere 36 hours in the grave with Scriptures that clearly state “after three days I will rise”. While it can be claimed that Yeshua was in the tomb for parts of three different days, it seems unduly forced to try and stretch 36 hours into three days. This scenario is even more unlikely when we look at Yeshua’s statement concerning the sign of Jonah:

Matthew 12:40

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Here we have a clear statement that Yeshua will be in the grave for three days and three nights. At best, in our current scenario, we have Yeshua in the grave for parts of two days and two nights only.

Therefore, the traditional scenario of the concurrent Sabbaths does not meet the requirements of Scripture.

#3 – Sabbaths Separated by One Day

Another suggested scenario is that there was a full day separating the two Sabbaths. In this case we have the following:

Wednesday	Abib 14	Around noon	Yeshua is crucified
Wednesday	Abib 14	Just before sunset	Yeshua put in tomb
Thursday	Abib 15	First Day of Unl. Bread	Yeshua in tomb – Day 1
Friday	Abib 16	Day between Sabbaths	Yeshua in tomb – Day 2
Saturday	Abib 17	Weekly Sabbath	Yeshua in tomb – Day 3
Sunday	Abib 18	Shortly after sunset	Yeshua is resurrected
		Around dawn	Woman find empty tomb

This results in Yeshua in the tomb for three 24-hour periods, plus a short time before and after. This would seem to satisfy the Scriptures that speak of Yeshua raising after three days, and also being the earth for 3 days and 3 nights. Proponents of this scenario would suggest that Yeshua was resurrected shortly after the close of the weekly Sabbath,

perhaps in the evening that begins the first day of the week. This would complete a full 3 days and 3 nights in the earth. Later, around dawn, the women would arrive at the tomb and find that Yeshua already been resurrected.

There is one significant problem with this scenario. Surely the woman, who were waiting to anoint the body because there was no time prior to the beginning of the Sabbath, would have gone immediately the day after the Sabbath. Why would they have waited an extra day, knowing that the following day would be yet another Sabbath (the regular weekly Sabbath), resulting in a unnecessary delay of two additional days? Proponents of this scenario suggest that the woman needed to use the day between the Sabbaths to purchase and prepare the spices, but it is unlikely that would have taken that much time.

The gospel accounts seem to differ slightly on the details of when the spices were purchased. Luke implies that the spices were prepared immediately after they saw Joseph lay the body in the tomb, at the end of the day of Preparation just before the Sabbath began:

Luke 23:52–56

This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. **Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.** On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Mark's account seems to indicate that the women bought spices after the Sabbath was over, and then took them to the tomb around dawn:

Mark 16:1–2

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome **bought spices**, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.

The scenario of two Sabbaths separated by one day requires the women to spend an entire evening and then an additional entire day preparing the spices. This seems highly unlikely. Note that in John's account, Nicodemus, with very little preparation time at all, is able to come up the necessary spices:

John 19:38–40

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

So it is doubtful the woman would have needed a full 24 hours for this. And if indeed the regular weekly Sabbath was the following day, they would most certainly have been in hurry to make sure and accomplish the task prior to this, so they would not have to delay yet another day.

#2 - Consecutive Sabbaths

The most likely scenario, and the one that fits best with Scripture, is that the two Sabbaths were on consecutive days.

It is interesting that Matthew uses the plural ***Sabbaths*** in his account:

Matthew 28:1

Now after the Sabbath [**lit. Sabbaths**], toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

Since there are times when the plural form seems to be used even when referring to a singular Sabbath, the usage here is not definitive of multiple Sabbaths, but it is at least an indication that it *could be plural*. The woman rested on the both Sabbaths in accordance with the commandments (Luke 23:56). Then, as soon as they could after both Sabbaths were over, they went to the tomb. The sequence of events would be as follows:

Thursday	Abib 14	Around noon	Yeshua is crucified
Thursday	Abib 14	Just before sunset	Yeshua put in tomb In tomb part of first day
Friday	Abib 15	First Day of Unl. Bread	Yeshua in tomb full day & night

Saturday	Abib 16	Weekly Sabbath	Yeshua in tomb full day & night
Sunday	Abib 17	Sometime before dawn	In tomb part of third night Yeshua is resurrected

This scenario correctly fulfills the Scriptural prophesy that Yeshua will rise after three days. He was put in the tomb on the 14th, and was resurrected on the 17th, three days later. It also correctly fulfills Yeshua's statement in Matt 12:40 regarding the sign of Jonah, as he was buried in the earth for portions of three days and portions of three nights.

We can also review the apparent contradiction in the two Gospel accounts regarding the preparation of spices. As previously mentioned, Luke's account has the woman preparing the spices prior to the Sabbath, while Mark has them buying the spices after the Sabbath:

Luke 23:56

Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Mark 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.

This poses a timing problem for a scenario which posits one day in between the two Sabbaths (like #3 above), since one would expect the woman to have had ample time to prepare the spices on the day in between Sabbaths, and go to the tomb on the same day rather than waiting and actually going on the following Sabbath day. But that timing problem is resolved when the two Sabbaths are seen as consecutive.

In this view, it is quite possible for both Mark's and Luke's accounts to be true without any contradiction. As Luke 23:56 states, the women began their preparation before the First Day of Unleavened Bread. But they were unable to finish their preparation because apparently they were in need of additional spices. With Unleavened Bread beginning, they rested according to Torah, and also did the same on the next day, which would have been the weekly Sabbath. As soon as evening came marking the end of the weekly Sabbath, they purchased what they still needed to finish the preparation of the spices (Mark 16:1). Then, early the following morning they went to the tomb, expecting to anoint the body, but finding the Yeshua has been raised from the dead.

Thus, the "two consecutive Sabbaths" view seems to provide the only scenario that fits well with all the relevant Scriptural passages.

YESHUA'S PASSOVER MEAL

It seems that Yeshua ate the Passover meal with disciples in the evening, just before they took him to be crucified. This was the day of Preparation (Abib 14), before the high Sabbath (Abib 15) marking the beginning of the seven-day feast of Unleavened Bread. As set forth in Leviticus, Passover and Unleavened Bread are two distinct appointed times:

Leviticus 23:5-8

In the first month, on the **fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's Passover**. And on the **fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread** to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. 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."

By the first century, Jewish tradition more or less merged these separate appointed times into one, referring to them jointly as "Unleavened Bread". Luke uses the phrase "the day of Unleavened Bread" to mean "the period of Unleavened Bread", inclusive of Passover:

Luke 22:7-8

Then came the **day of Unleavened Bread**, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it."

Both Matthew and Mark have similar accounts (Matt 26:17-20 and Mark 14:12), which at first glance can be confusing since they seem to equate the First Day of Unleavened Bread with the daytime period **prior** to the evening

of the Passover meal. This would be the daytime period of Abib 13, when the disciples ask where they go to prepare a place for the Passover meal. See, for example, Matthew's account:

Matthew 26:17–20

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?” 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.’ ” And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. **When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve.**

This is somewhat problematic regardless of one's perspective on the timing of events. The best explanation is simply that first century Judaism apparently broadened their use of Unleavened Bread to include the day of Preparation (Passover) and perhaps even the daytime period of Abib 13 prior to the Passover meal, which would have been to prepare for the Passover meal. It seems that all the activities associated with Passover and Unleavened Bread were simply referred to as “Unleavened Bread”.

Regardless of uncertainty with which First Century Judaism used the term “First Day of Unleavened Bread”, what is clear is that Yeshua ate the Last Supper with his disciples the night he was betrayed. That night and the following morning was his trial, with his crucifixion at noon, and his burial in the tomb prior to sunset. All these events took place on the “day of preparation” (Abib 14), prior to the real First Day Unleavened Bread (Abib 15). Therefore, according to Gospel accounts, Yeshua had the Passover Meal in the evening that began Abib 14. Using the “two consecutive Sabbath” scenario previously discussed, we would have the following timeline:

Wed evening	Abib 14	Passover begins at sunset	Last Supper / Passover Meal
Thursday	Abib 14	Around noon	Yeshua is crucified
Thursday	Abib 14	Just before sunset	Yeshua put in tomb In tomb part of first day
Friday	Abib 15	First Day of Unl. Bread	Yeshua in tomb full day & night
Saturday	Abib 16	Weekly Sabbath	Yeshua in tomb full day & night
Sunday	Abib 17	Sometime before dawn	In tomb part of third night Yeshua is resurrected

At this point it should be stated that an entirely different interpretation is that Yeshua did not really eat the Passover Meal with his disciples. He may have eaten the “Last Supper” but that was not the Passover meal. This reasoning comes from Yeshua's statement in Luke 22:

Luke 22:15–16

And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

This can be interpreted as “*I wanted to eat the meal with you, but I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*” One problem is that not all ancient manuscripts agree on this wording. Some manuscripts say “I will never eat it *again* until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God”, indicating that Yeshua did eat the meal.

However, a careful reading of Scripture seems to support the reading that Yeshua did, in fact, eat the Passover meal:

Luke 22:13–14

And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him.

Luke states that after the disciples prepared the room for the Passover meal, “when the hour came”, Yeshua reclined at the table with his disciples. “When the hour came” clearly refers to the hour of the Passover Meal. While we don't know for certain how much of the meal he ate with his disciples, we can conclude that he sat with them at the time designated for the Passover meal at the table prepared for that purpose.

The question of whether or not Yeshua actually ate the Passover meal is discussed in a later section, when considering whether the Passover meal was eaten at the end of the Abib 14.

“BETWEEN THE TWO EVENINGS”

The underlying reason causing some to question whether or not Yeshua ate the Passover meal has to do with the timing of the meal. The Gospel accounts make it clear that the meal of the Last Supper took place in the evening beginning Abib 14. However, traditional Judaism currently celebrates the Passover meal in the evening following (at the end of) Abib 14, which is actually the beginning of Abib 15.

The original Hebrew in the “Old Testament” Scriptures are ambiguous as to the exact time of the Passover meal:

Leviticus 23:5

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month **at twilight** [literally, **between the two evenings**], is the LORD’s Passover.

Each verse of the Hebrew Scriptures that refer to the time of Passover uses the term בֵּין הָעֶרְבַּיִם /ben ha’arbayim/ “**between the two evenings**” on the fourteenth day of the first month (see Ex 12:6, Lev 23:5, Num 9:3, Num 9:5, and Num 9:11). Some suggest this phrase means twilight; others that it may refer to the period between late afternoon and twilight; still others that it means the midpoint between noon and sunset.

In addition to the verses surrounding the time of Passover, the phrase “**between the two evenings**” is used when the people of Israel were complaining of being hungry and YHWH promised them quail:

Exodus 16:12–13

“I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘**At twilight** [literally, **between the two evenings**] you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’ ” In the **evening** quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp.

YHWH promised they would be eating meat “**between the two evenings**”, and then he sent the quail in the “**evening**”. So “**between the two evenings**” must either occur after “**evening**”, or least it must include “**evening**”, since they quail had to arrive prior to the people eating them. This account, however, does not really add more clarity to the period time referred to by “**between the two evenings**”. In fact it points to even more ambiguity, since we really don’t know for sure what time of day “**evening**” refers to in Biblical Hebrew. It is not uncommon for languages to use a single term that encompasses mid-to-late afternoon as well as early evening. So if the Hebrew for “**evening**” itself is unclear in meaning, how much more so is the term “**between the two evenings**”.

Perhaps the one passage of Scripture that provides the most help in understanding the meaning of the phrase is the following:

Exodus 30:7–8

And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps **at twilight** [literally, **between the two evenings**], he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations.

Here we see that Aaron sets (or lights) the lamps the Holy Place of the Tabernacle “**between the two evenings**”. It makes most sense for this to be done at twilight, after the sun is set but before it became dark.

If we assume that the most probable meaning of “**between the two evenings**” is twilight, it is still not clear from Leviticus 23:5 (or Num 9:3-5) whether the Passover passages refer to the twilight at the beginning of Abib 14, or at the end of Abib 14 (which would be just before the beginning of Abib 15). To clarify this, it is helpful to look at the original Passover in Exodus.

The Exodus passage states the lambs are to be killed “between the two evenings” on the Abib 14, which seem to indicate around twilight at the beginning of Abib 14:

Exodus 12:6–8

and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs **at twilight** [literally, **between the two evenings**]. “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh **that night**, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it.

This passage also indicates that the meat was to be eaten **“that night, roasted on the fire”**. So it seems that in the original Passover, the lambs were killed around twilight at the very beginning of Abib 14. They were immediately roasted on the fire, and eaten later that very night.

The Exodus account seems to be in complete harmony “New Testament” Scriptures, since it is clear from the Gospel accounts that the Passover meal Yeshua ate with his disciples took place at the beginning of Abib 14.

So in summary, even though there is some uncertainty as to the exact meaning of **“between the two evenings”**, it seems that both the Exodus Passover meal and the Passover meal of Yeshua and his disciples in the Gospel accounts took place in the evening beginning Abib 14. That would have been Wednesday evening, according to the timeline suggested above for the Passover associated with the crucifixion of Yeshua.

UNLEAVENED BREAD

Although the appointed time of Unleavened Bread has been discussed throughout the previous sections, it is worthwhile to consider the Scriptures which define this period of time. There are passages in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel which when considered together clarify the timing of this seven day period:

Exodus 12:15–18

Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 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. 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. And you shall observe the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. In the first month, **from the fourteenth day of the month at evening**, you shall eat unleavened bread **until the twenty-first day of the month at evening**.

Leviticus 23:4–8

“These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. In the first month, **on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD’s Passover**. And **on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread** to the LORD; **for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread**. On the **first day you shall have a holy convocation**; you shall not do any ordinary work. 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.”

Numbers 28:16–25

“On the **fourteenth day of the first month is the LORD’s Passover**, and on the **fifteenth day of this month is a feast**. Seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. **On the first day there shall be a holy convocation**. You shall not do any ordinary work... **And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation**. You shall not do any ordinary work.

Ezekiel 45:21–25

“In the first month, **on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall celebrate the Feast of the Passover**, and for **seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten**... In the seventh month, **on the fifteenth day of the month and for the seven days of the feast**, he shall make the same provision for sin offerings, burnt offerings, and grain offerings, and for the oil.

From Lev 23:6 and Ezek 45:25 Scripture states that Abib 15 marks the beginning of the seven-day feast of Unleavened Bread. So if it starts on Abib 15, it would continue through the end of Abib 21, in order to have seven full days.

Exodus 12:18 states that **“from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening”**. So here we have the seven-day feast beginning on the Abib 14 in the evening. This is not a contradiction, but really just another way of stating the same period of time. The evening of Abib 14 is the very end of Abib 14, marking the boundary of Abib 14 and Abib 15. There are seven full days between the evening of Abib 14 and the evening of Abib 21. It is the same as saying the feast begins on Abib 15 and goes through 21. Both demarcate the same seven day period.

A comparison of these verses makes it clear that the term **“evening”**, at least in this case, is marking the end of the day. In other words, “the fourteenth day of the month at evening” refers to the very end of the 14th day.

From Lev 23:5 as well as other passages, it is clear that Passover begins on Abib 14 **“between the evenings”**. So the question is whether **“between the evenings”** can refer to the beginning of the Abib 14, even though **“evening”** in Exod 12:18 refers to the end of Abib 14. Since we don’t really know the meaning these terms had 3000 years ago, it would seem the answer could be “yes”. Between the evenings could refer to twilight period beginning the day (that is, the 24-hour period referred to in Scripture as the day), while “evening” could refer to the period at the end of that day. Furthermore, there could have been ambiguity in the language itself, allowing these terms to refer either or both, depending on the context. So based on an a study of this term alone, we simply cannot know for sure what time it refers to. That being the case, we will look at each of the two possibilities – the Passover meal taking place at the end of Abib 14, and the Passover meal taking place at the beginning of Abib 14.

PASSOVER MEAL ENDING ABIB 14

If we assume Passover was at the end of Abib 14, then we have the following interpretations and consequences:

1. “Evening” would be sometime in the late afternoon. Some suggest “evening” could be the entire period from when the sun begins its decline (noon) until the completion of sunset, in which case the two evenings would refer to the beginning of the decline, and the end of the sunset, and then “between the two evenings” would refer to the midpoint of these two boundaries – mid-afternoon.
2. The Passover lamb is killed “between the evenings”, perhaps mid-afternoon on Abib 14, corresponding to the time of afternoon sacrifice.
3. Unleavened bread was to be eaten at the Passover meal. This meal marked the beginning of the seven-day period of Unleavened Bread, as in Ex 12:18.
4. Yeshua’s “Last Supper” could not have been the Passover meal since it was eaten 24 hours before the time of the Passover meal. Recall that He said he could not eat [again?] Passover with them (Luke 22:15).
5. In Exodus, the death of Passover would have occurred on midnight of Abib 15, with the people departing immediately in the morning of Abib 15, which seems to be what is implied by the account of the exodus account in Scripture.

The traditional Christian view, in agreement current Judaism, is that the Passover meal was at the end of Abib 14. And the traditional Christian view would hold that Yeshua’s Last Supper was the Passover meal. However both these statements cannot be true, since this would require the trial and crucifixion to take place on Abib 15, the First Day of Unleavened Bread. Scripture is clear that this was not the case. The crucifixion was the day of Preparation, the day before the First Day of Unleavened Bread, on Abib 14, also called the day of Passover in Scripture. This reveals a significant gap in the view commonly held by traditional Christianity.

If the Passover meal was at the end of Passover day (the end of Abib 14), then the Last Supper was not the Passover meal. It was something else... just a final meal together perhaps. The problem is that Scripture makes it clear that Messiah asked them prepare the Passover meal, and they did according to his request. Consider Luke’s account:

Luke 22:7–14

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, **on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed**. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and **prepare the Passover** for us, **that we may eat it**.” They said to him, “Where will you have us prepare it?” He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, **where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?**’ And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.” And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they **prepared the Passover. And when the hour came**, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him.

Yeshua tells his disciples to “prepare the Passover for us that we may eat it.” He then instructs his disciples to tell the master of the house that he will “eat the Passover” with his disciples. If he was really not going to eat the Passover, then He would have been lying to His disciples, and would also have been instructing them to lie to the master of the house. Furthermore, after they “prepared the Passover”, Luke says “when the hour came” he came to the table with the disciples. “The hour” clearly refers to the anticipated time of the Passover meal.

If the true Passover were not for another 24 hours, they killed the lamb on the wrong day, and prepared the Passover meal 24 hours in advance.

A further problem with this view is that if the Passover lamb was sacrificed during the daytime period of Abib 14, and the meal was eaten at night, then the Passover meal was actually eaten on Abib 15 and not on the day of Passover. Matthew records it this way:

Matthew 26:19–20

And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. **When it was evening**, he reclined at table with the twelve.

Mark 14:17 has similar wording. It seems that “the hour” of the Passover meal was “when it was evening”. In this scenario, evening would have been the beginning of the next day, Abib 15, the First Day of Unleavened Bread.

It makes sense that the Passover lamb was eaten at night, since the instructions for the first Passover in Exodus make it clear that the meal was eaten “at night”:

Exodus 12:8

They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it.

So they killed the lamb “between the evenings”, and ate the lamb later “that night”. It was still later, at midnight, when the actual “Passover” of YHWH took place, and the destroyer was sent to strike down all the firstborn not covered by the blood of the sacrificed lamb:

Exodus 12:23

For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will **pass over** the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.

Exodus 12:29

At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock.

So the Passover lamb was killed “between the evenings” on Abib 14, the Passover meal was eaten later that night, and true “pass over” of YHWH occurred still later, at midnight. So when taking the view that the Passover meal was eaten at the end of Abib 14, the result is that the actual Passover meal and the subsequent time of the true Passover (midnight) would all have had to happen on Abib 15, which is no longer the day of Passover.

PASSOVER MEAL BEGINNING ABIB 14

Seeing that the previous view is plagued with some serious problems, we will examine the alternative view. If we now assume Passover was at the **beginning** of Abib 14, then we have the following interpretations and consequences:

1. “Between the evenings” refers to the twilight period at the beginning of “a day”; between sunset and dark. Sunset marks the beginning of “a day”, so twilight would be that time just as the sun sets but before it is dark.
2. The Passover lamb was killed at twilight, and roasted over the fire later that night, all on Abib 14.
3. Even though unleavened bread was to be eaten at the Passover meal, the feast of Unleavened Bread did not begin until Abib 15. The 15th was the day on which all leaven was to be removed from their dwellings.
4. Yeshua ate the Passover meal as his “Last Supper” at the correct appointed time - at the beginning of Abib 14. He said he would not eat it *again* until all was fulfilled.
5. Yeshua was able to celebrate the Passover on Abib 14, and was also crucified and buried while it was still Abib 14, still on Passover day.

There are potentially some problems with this scenario as well, although they are relatively minor and seem to have solutions which are not in contradiction to Scripture.

First of all, some would argue that the Messiah could not eat the Passover meal at the “appointed time” and also die as the Passover sacrifice. The sacrifice of the lamb came before the meal. So he could not eat the meal at the right time, and then be sacrificed later. In other words, He can’t be the sacrificial Lamb and also eat the sacrificial lamb at the same time.

Probably the best answer to this criticism is to realize that the day of Passover, as an appointed time, was a 24 hour period. He was able to eat the Passover meal near the beginning of that 24 hour period, and He also was killed as

the Passover Lamb on that same day, near the end of that 24 hour period. So both events did happen on the appointed time of Passover.

Some would argue that the Passover lamb was to be killed in the middle of the afternoon, and define “between the evenings” as the midpoint of the initial decline of the sun (just after noon) and the setting of the sun (around 6 PM). Thus between the evenings would be around 3 PM, precisely the time of Yeshua’s death. This timeline has appeal at first glance, however the consequences are all the problems previously discussed in association with having the Passover meal at the end of Abib 14.

In the proposed view of the Passover meal at the beginning on Abib 14, although Messiah’s death did not occur at the exact time the Passover lambs were killed, His death did occur at the exact time of the regular daily temple sacrifice which was at the 9th hour (~3 PM).

The other apparent problem with this view is in reconciling the timing of events with those of the Exodus account. If the Passover lamb was not killed until sunset, some would argue it would take too long to prepare the lamb for dinner yet that evening. I would suggest that this apparent problem is really a problem of our incorrect perception based on viewing the situation with our modern lifestyle in mind, rather than with the Biblical lifestyle of that time. To us it may seem like a huge task to butcher an animal and prepare a meal. But it was not so in Biblical times. We read of Abraham meeting the three visitors and quickly butchering a calf and preparing a meal for them:

Genesis 18:6–8

And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.” And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

And we read of Jacob and Rebecca and getting two lambs and preparing a meal for Isaac, who (thinking it was Esau who had shot game for meal), wonders at how it had been prepared so quickly:

Genesis 27:9,20

Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves... Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “Because the LORD your God granted me success.”

Butchering and cooking the meat over a fire was routine for people of that time. It did not take long. It would have been straightforward to butcher an animal at sunset and be eating the meal later that evening.

An additional consideration in reconciling the timing of Passover events with the Exodus account has to do with the timing of the Exodus itself. We are told that after the destroyer came at midnight, Pharaoh rose in the night, and summoned Moses and Aaron, and told them to depart from Egypt:

Exodus 12:30–31

And Pharaoh **rose up in the night**, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. Then **he summoned Moses and Aaron by night** and said, “Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said.

So in the proposed scenario, this would have been the night of Abib 14. However we are told that the actual departure from Egypt occurred on Abib 15:

Numbers 33:3

They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the **fifteenth day of the first month**. On the day after the Passover, the people of Israel went out triumphantly in the sight of all the Egyptians,

When reading the Exodus account, there is no mention of any activity on the day of the 14th. Moses was summoned by Pharaoh and ordered to leave in the night of the 14th. And then they leave on the 15th. Assuming they leave at in the morning, it would have been over 24 hours from when Moses was summoned by Pharaoh. Yet they were being urgently pressed to leave, as Exodus says:

Exodus 12:33–34

The Egyptians were **urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste**. For they said, “We shall all be dead.” So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders.

So the problem, some would argue, is why the Israelites did not leave on the day of the 14th rather than waiting an extra day until the 15th.

Perhaps the solution is seen when considering the logistics of mobilizing such a large group of people:

Exodus 12:37–39

And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about **six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.** And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

It is hard to imagine how Moses was able to communicate to that many people, let alone mobilize all of them, with women and children in addition to their flocks and herds. It is within reason to expect that it would take one day at the very least just to communicate and quickly get everyone organized for departure the following morning. By all reckoning, an exodus of that magnitude with only 24 hours' notice would have to be considered as a departure made in great haste.

So in summary, YHWH instructed the people to prepare the Passover lamb “between the two evenings”. Although we are unable to define that phrase with any certainty, we can be fairly certain from a study of the relevant Scripture passages that the Passover meal was eaten at the beginning of Abib 14 rather than at the end of Abib 14. Therefore, the Passover lamb would be sacrificed around sunset at the beginning of Abib 14. Thus, “between the evenings” seems to define that period of twilight that begins just as the sun sets. The Passover meal was eaten just as soon as the lamb was prepared, later in the evening of Abib 14. In the original Passover of Exodus, the destroyer came later yet, at midnight. The Israelites were ordered to leave Egypt still later that same night, and would have spent the daytime period of Abib 14 communicating the plan and organizing their departure, leaving the on the 15th, presumably at first light, although Scripture does not specifically state this.

FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

In addition to Passover, there is another appointed time associated with the period of Unleavened Bread. This is known as the feast of Firstfruits, or the Waving of the Sheaves. In Leviticus 23, immediately after the section discussing the appointed times of the Passover and the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread, and just prior to the section about the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot / Pentecost), are the verses describing the feast of Firstfruits:

Leviticus 23:10–14

“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 firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, 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. And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

The appointed time for the feast of Firstfruits is “**on the day after the Sabbath**”. However there is some ambiguity regarding which Sabbath this refers to. There seem to be three possibilities, based on the context of the prior Scripture verses:

1. The special Sabbath of Abib 15
2. The special Sabbath of Abib 21
3. The weekly Sabbath during Unleavened Bread

Present-day Judaism holds to Option 1 – the special Sabbath of Abib 15. Historically, however this was an open issue of debate, mainly between Options 1 and 3. For unknown reasons, Option 2 seems never to have been argued strongly for.

Consider the context of this passage by looking at the verses on the Passover and Unleavened Bread immediately prior to the section on Firstfruits:

Leviticus 23:4-8

“These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD’s Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. 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.”

With this context in mind, an unbiased reading of Scripture would lead one to choose Option 3, based on the following reasons:

- a) Neither Abib 15 or Abib 21 are ever referred to as a “Sabbath” in the Hebrew Scriptures. They are referred to as a “holy convocation”. The people are commanded to do no ordinary work on these days, hence they became known in Judaism as “Sabbaths”, however the Hebrew Scriptures do not call them Sabbaths.
- b) The most logical Scriptural reference to Sabbath in the section preceding Firstfruits would be the Sabbath during the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread. Since it was seven days long, there is always one and only one Sabbath occurring during that festival.
- c) If it were not the weekly Sabbath during the festival of Unleavened Bread, and instead were one of the “holy convocation days” of Abib 15 or Abib 21, there would be no way to know which of those two holy convocation days to choose. From the Text, there is nothing to distinguish Abib 15 from Abib 21 – no reason to choose one over the other.
- d) If it were either Abib 15 or Abib 21, then the Sabbath would be on the same date each year. Consequently, “the day after the Sabbath” (Lev 23:11) would always be a fixed date as well – either Abib 16 or Abib 22, depending on the choice. So in that case, it would have made more sense for Scripture to simply list the date instead of using the phrase “the day after the Sabbath”. The use of the phrase “the day after the Sabbath” is a good indicator that the date is not fixed, as would be the case if it referred to the weekly Sabbath during Unleavened Bread.

Based on these arguments, it seems that the Sabbath referred to in Lev 23:11 is most likely the weekly Sabbath that falls during the festival of Unleavened Bread.

In that case, the appointed time of the Firstfruits would be “the day after the Sabbath”. During the Unleavened Bread associated with the crucifixion of Yeshua, we have the following time schedule:

Wed evening	Abib 14	Passover begins at sunset	Last Supper / Passover Meal
Thursday	Abib 14	Around noon	Yeshua is crucified
Thursday	Abib 14	Just before sunset	Yeshua put in tomb In tomb part of first day
Friday	Abib 15	First Day of Unl. Bread	Yeshua in tomb full day & night
Saturday	Abib 16	Weekly Sabbath	Yeshua in tomb full day & night
Sunday	Abib 17	Day of Firstfruits Sometime before dawn	In tomb part of third night Yeshua is resurrected

It is no coincidence that the Messiah was resurrected the appointed time of Firstfruits. Yeshua is the very first offering being lifted up before the Father. Paul refers to this in his letter to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: **Christ the firstfruits**, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Yeshua was killed as the spotless unblemished sacrificial Lamb on the appointed time of Passover. His body, the unleavened bread of life, was buried in the tomb just as the First Day of Unleavened Bread was about to begin, like a seed planted before it sprouts new life. Three days later, on the appointed time of Firstfruits, He was resurrected as the Firstfruits from among the dead.

There is still another argument supporting the conclusion that Firstfruits is on the day after the weekly Sabbath. That argument is based on the instructions from Leviticus regarding the timing of Shavuot, and will be discussed in the next section.

SHAVUOT / PENTECOST

The first instructions regarding the appointed time of Shavuot “Feast of Weeks”, (also referred to Pentecost in the Acts 2:1) are found in Exodus:

Exodus 23:14–16

Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. You shall keep the **Feast of Harvest**, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the **Feast of Ingathering** at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor.

This Exodus passage uses the name “Feast of Harvest” rather than Shavuot “Feast of Weeks”, however the latter term is most often used in Scripture. See for example a similar verse in Deuteronomy, as well as another passage in Exodus:

Deuteronomy 16:16

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**, at the **Feast of Weeks**, and at the **Feast of Booths**. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.

Exodus 34:22

You shall observe the **Feast of Weeks**, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year’s end.

As with some of the other appointed times, this day was also to be a day of “holy convocation” in which no work was to be done:

Numbers 28:26

“On the day of the firstfruits, when you offer a grain offering of new grain to the LORD at your **Feast of Weeks**, you shall have a **holy convocation**. You shall **not do any ordinary work**,

The timing of Shavuot is intrinsically linked to the timing of Firstfruits:

Leviticus 23:15–16

“You shall **count seven full weeks [lit. Sabbaths]** from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. 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.

Deuteronomy 16:9–10

“You shall **count seven weeks**. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall keep the **Feast of Weeks** to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you.

The date of Shavuot is exactly seven weeks from the day of Firstfruits, which was the day after the Sabbath. Alternatively, they could count 50 days from Firstfruits to the day after the seventh Sabbath. It is 50 days rather than 49 because the according to the conventional way of Hebrew counting, the beginning and ending days of a given period are included.

The ambiguity that usually exists with regard to the date of Shavuot arises from the uncertainty of the date of Firstfruits. When the date of Firstfruits is determined, it is clear that Shavuot occurs exactly seven weeks later, on the same day of the week.

As discussed in the previous section, it makes most sense that “the day after the Sabbath” refers to the first day of the week, rather than the day after either of the two days of “holy convocation” marking the beginning and end of Unleavened Bread. This conclusion is based on the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures never referred to the appointed times as Sabbaths. It also resulted in Firstfruits exactly coinciding with the day of resurrection of the Messiah, although that wasn’t the driving factor in the argument for interpreting Sabbath as the seventh day of the week.

The wording in Leviticus also seems to lend further support to this conclusion:

Leviticus 23:15–16

“You shall count **seven full weeks [lit. Sabbaths]** from the **day after the Sabbath**, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the **day after the seventh Sabbath**.”

There are actually two different instructional statements in this passage:

Instruction 1. Count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath

Instruction 2. Count 50 days to the day after the seventh Sabbath.

A careful analysis will show that the “seventh Sabbath” in the second instruction has to refer to the seventh *weekly* Sabbath and not the seventh full week. If it referred to the seventh full week, we would have a conflict in the two instructional statements in this passage. The first instruction says to count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath (that is, the day of Firstfruits). Seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath would also end on the day after the Sabbath. To be more precise, it would end on the day after the *seventh* Sabbath. But if “the seventh Sabbath” in the second instruction refers to the “seventh full week”, that statement would instruct us to count to the *day after the seventh full week*, which would be one day more than the instruction given in the first statement.

To further clarify, assume that Firstfruits was on the first day of the week, as is being proposed. Counting one full week would take you to the first day of the second week. Counting seven full weeks would take you the first day of the seventh week. According to the first instruction, Shavuot would be on this day – the first day of the seventh week. But according to the second instruction, Shavuot is the day after the seventh Sabbath. If Sabbath here refers to the *weekly* Sabbath, then the day after the seventh weekly Sabbath is the same day as the first day of the seventh week. However if the “day after the seventh Sabbath” meant “the day after the seventh full week”, and we already determined that counting seven full weeks took us to the first day of the week, then that would place Shavuot on the second day of the week. Therefore the only way to avoid conflict between these two instructional statements is to accept that the “seventh Sabbath” must refer to the seventh *weekly* Sabbath.

Since the seventh Shabbat of Lev 23:16 has to be referring to the seventh weekly Shabbat, then Shavuot must occur on the first day of the week. And if Shavuot is on the first day of the week, then Firstfruits would also have to occur on the first day of the week.

Because this is a critical argument in relationship to the timing of both Shavuot and Firstfruits, it is important that it be understood clearly. Let’s assume for the moment that Firstfruits does not fall on the first day of the week, and then see where that leads us as we apply the rules of Lev 23:15-16. So for the purpose of argument, we will assume that Firstfruits occurs the day after First Day of Unleavened Bread, which would be Abib 16. To make the argument easier to follow, we will also arbitrarily assume that Abib 15 happens to be on a Thursday, meaning Firstfruits would be on a Friday. We now calculate the day of Shavuot using each of the two instructions in Lev 23:15-16:

Instruction 1. Count seven full weeks from Firstfruits -- This would take us to a Friday, seven weeks later. Therefore this instruction places Shavuot on Friday in our assumed scenario.

Instruction 2. Count 50 days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. There are now two choices. Either the “seventh Sabbath” refers to the seventh weekly Sabbath, or it refers to the seventh full week. If we choose the weekly Sabbath, the result is that Shavuot would have to fall on the first day of the week, which is not Friday as given in the first instruction. It is also not 50 days, no matter how you count them, so clearly this would not work. Therefore we choose that the seventh Sabbath must mean the seventh full week. The instruction is then to count until the day *after* the seventh full week. From our calculation in Instruction 1, we already know that the seventh full week ends in a Friday. So the day after the seventh full week has to be on the Sabbath. Therefore Instruction 2 results in Shavuot being on the Sabbath, a day later than Instruction 1 which placed in on a Friday.

The only way to avoid this conflict is to recognize that the “seventh Sabbath” of Lev 23:15 must refer to the weekly Sabbath. And since there is exactly seven full weeks separating Shavuot and Firstfruits, this means that Firstfruits must also occur on the day after the weekly Sabbath. This is a strong argument, and is independent of the other arguments which led to the same conclusion in the previous section discussing the timing of Firstfruits.

SUMMARY

The following chart summarizes the conclusions proposed as a result of this study.

Timing of the Death & Resurrection of the Messiah

