

The Year of the Crucifixion

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Do we really know why we believe that Christ was crucified on a Friday in the year 31? It seems pretty simple and straight forward when we read passages from Scripture and Ellen White, but how do we answer the objections from all the naysayers who keep asserting and assuming there could not be a Friday Passover in 31? Well, let's look at why we believe what we do in the first place.

Let's deal with the year first. We understand that the going forth (or actual carrying out) of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25) happened in 457 BC. Artaxerxes received the throne in 464, and in the "seventh year" of his reign (Ezra 7:7-8), the decree was issued. Daniel 9:25 goes on to prophecy that Messiah would come to Israel 69 weeks (483 years) after 457. We believe that Heaven announced Christ's Messiahship in the year 27 AD, leaving one prophetic week to transpire before the time which was "determined for [the] people" (Daniel 9:24) closed. "In the midst" of that last week, or 3.5 years later, "Messiah was cut off" in the Spring of 31, leaving 3.5 more years until the 70th week ended in 34.

It is important to remember that the math works out quite perfectly from 457 BC to 27 AD because there is no zero year between 1 BC and 1 AD.

Ellen White says: "The commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, as completed by the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus (see Ezra 6:14; 7:1, 9, margin), went into effect in the autumn of B. C. 457. From this time four hundred and eighty-three years extend to the autumn of A. D. 27. According to the prophecy, this period was to reach to the Messiah, the Anointed One. In A. D. 27, Jesus at His baptism received the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and soon afterward began His ministry. Then the message was proclaimed. 'The time is fulfilled.'

"For seven years after the Saviour entered on His ministry, the gospel was to be preached especially to the Jews; for three and a half years by Christ Himself; and afterward by the apostles. "In the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." Daniel 9:27. In the spring of A. D. 31, Christ the true sacrifice was offered on Calvary. Then the veil of the temple was rent in twain, showing that the sacredness and significance of the sacrificial service had departed. The time had come for the earthly sacrifice and oblation to cease." {DA 233.1,2}

Ok, so it's pretty evident from the things we just saw that 31 was the very year of the crucifixion. The bigger problem though, is demonstrating that Friday was the very day. It has been asserted by many that there could have been no Friday Passover in 31. One main argument is that the moon's appearance came sooner rather than later after the conjunction of April 10th that year. It is said that the crescent moon appeared after sunset on the 11th, making the 12th new moon day, which would have allegedly begun the new year and the month of Abib. 14 days later was a Wednesday, and they say that is when Christ paid for our sins. This assumption of the timing of the moon's appearance is causing some to look at another year, and some others to settle on Wednesday if they are content with the year 31.

To get a good idea of what is going on here, take a look at the calendar for April 31 AD. Here you can see the days of that month: <http://www.hcidata.info/cgi-bin/calendar.cgi?year=31&sun-mon=&GJ=&ok=Generate+the+Calendar&.cgifields=GJ&.cgifields=sun-mon>

April is the only plausible month for that year because March's conjunction occurs too early for the moon's appearance to start the count to a Friday Passover. May's conjunction is too late. You can find conjunction dates for 31 AD here: <http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/phase/phases0001.html>

Looking at April, we see that the moon's conjunction was around 12 noon on the 10th, which was a Tuesday. Now, this is where it is important to have at least a basic awareness of the moon's characteristics, such as its cycle and the nature of its various positions in orbit. I say this because of the above mentioned assumption that the moon was visible on the evening of the following day. This assumption is causing a big problem. The thought is that the moon always appears within two days from its change (conjunction or darkness). But is this so? Let's look at some facts.

Anyone can easily find this information online by searching the phrase "moon phases" or "moon cycles." For the sake of explanation and as an aid to understand the remainder of the study, I will lay out the basic sequence of the phases of the moon.

Each month, the moon goes through a complete cycle. A full lunar cycle is an average of 29.5 days, sometimes 29, and sometimes 30 days in length.

"The term 'moon cycle' (or 'lunar cycle') refers to the moon's continuous orbit around the earth. As the moon orbits the earth, its appearance (the 'phase') changes and thus gives us an indication of the moon's progress in the cycle (the 'age').

"The sun always illuminates exactly one-half of the moon, but we see it at different angles as it rotates around the earth. With the naked eye, we can see only the part of

the moon that the sun is illuminating. For instance, a crescent moon is what we call the moon when we see only a small portion of its illuminated surface” (www.moonconnection.com).

Every month, the moon enters its point of complete alignment with the earth and sun. This phase is called conjunction and lasts for a period of about three to five minutes. When the moon is in this phase, it is directly between the earth and the sun, and because we always see only one side of the moon, our side is completely dark because the sun is perfectly behind it. The opposite side of the moon is fully illuminated because it is facing the sun, but we will not see it.

As the moon moves past the point of conjunction, it slowly becomes illuminated on our side. It can take anywhere from one to nearly four days for us to see the very first sliver of light with our eyes here on earth. This period is called the translation period. When we see this first sliver, the left side will be open and the horns will be pointing to the left, much like this parenthesis,) . This phase is called the waxing crescent. It will be first visible in the western sky very soon after sunset. Depending upon your location and the time of year, the waxing crescent may be shaped like a ‘U’ with the horns of the moon faced upward.

The waxing crescent then grows into the first quarter and past the first quarter to the full, when it is a complete and perfect circle of light. After the moon has passed the full phase, it begins to wane until it is in its last quarter, and then it moves on to the very last waning crescent, which appears in the eastern morning sky. This last waning crescent is open to the right and the horns are pointed to the right, like this: (. The waning crescent can also look like a ‘U’, but it will be slightly tilted up on its left side. After this phase, the moon disappears for a time and enters into conjunction soon after, and we cannot see it. The same process repeats each month.

It is these cycles of the moon that anciently determined when God’s feasts, such as Passover and Unleavened Bread were. It is also very important to recognize that the Jews began their months on the new moon, which appeared as a thin crescent in the western sky following sunset at evening. From the first day of the month of Abib (1st month in the Biblical year) they counted to the 14th for Passover.

Along these monthly cycles, there are two phenomena that play a part in delaying, or accelerating the appearance of the moon’s new crescent. They are called “apogee” and “perigee.” When the moon is in one of these locations, it will occur either at the time of the astronomical conjunction, or full moon. Apogee



and perigee will never happen in between, like at the first or last quarter.

When the moon is in apogee, it is farther from earth, and its face is rotating around earth slower. Its crescent will appear later rather than sooner, because it is taking longer to move away from direct alignment with the earth and sun and the sun begins to skim the outer brim. During apogee, the moon may be dark for up to nearly four days. Then, as the moon finally moves enough to be partially illuminated again, we can see the crescent with our eyes and we know a new month has begun! Likewise, when the moon becomes full later that month, it will remain full longer; about the same time it took to emerge as a crescent. If it took 3 days to appear, it will remain visibly full for about the same amount of time.

When the moon is in perigee, it is closer to earth, and its face is rotating faster. It will also appear bigger to us. Its crescent will appear sooner rather than later, because it is moving more rapidly out of alignment with the earth and sun. During perigee, the moon can appear within the same 24 hour period that conjunction occurred. That's pretty quick, but on average, the moon is visible around the second evening after conjunction. Likewise, when the moon becomes full later that month, it will move past its fullness more rapidly; about the same amount of time it took to emerge as a crescent. If it only took 1 day to appear, it will only remain visibly full for about a day.

So, the moon can enter into its conjunction with earth and sun, and be concealed in darkness anywhere from 1 day to almost 4 days before it emerges as a thin crescent which is visible to us here. When it takes this long to appear, the moon is in _____ (you get two guesses).

Now, using these points, we can get down to properly dissecting the events as they occurred.

Here is what happened. After its conjunction on the 10th, the moon did not appear until the evening of the 13th (Friday). The new moon was declared and the following day (14th) was the first day of the month Abib. Yes, the seventh day Sabbath was also new moon day. This means it took the moon almost 3-1/4 days to appear, which is well within the bounds of astronomical fact and pattern. The moon was in apogee at this time.

The 14th day from the 14th of April was Friday the 27th. The moon became full at around 9pm on Wednesday the 25th. At this time, there was a partial lunar eclipse and the moon had a blood red color. 24 hours later on Thursday night, in the Garden of Gethsemane, "The Passover moon, broad and full, shone from a cloudless sky." (DA 685)

Now remember, 24 hours after its astronomical fullness, the moon would still have appeared completely full. It more than likely still appeared full even as Christ was laid in the tomb before Sabbath began.

Ellen White called it the Passover moon because Thursday night was the beginning of the 14th day of the month. Friday, April 27, 31 AD was Christ's Passover. The facts shatter any doubt about the Friday crucifixion. It is because many don't know what the moon actually does, that they get sidetracked and start second guessing what has been laid down and established through Scripture and Ellen White.

In case we have forgotten, let's refresh ourselves with these accounts!

“And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.” Luke 23:54

“The Saviour was buried on Friday, the sixth day of the week. The women prepared spices and ointments with which to embalm their Lord, and laid them aside, until the Sabbath was past. Not even the work of embalming the body of Jesus would they do upon the Sabbath day. ‘And when the Sabbath was past, ... very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.’” Mark 16:1, 2. {SJ 157.3,4}

Now, all we really have to do is accept the accounts from Holy Writ and Inspiration when it comes to this issue. With all the false winds of doctrine that are blowing lately though, we should probably know exactly how to explain why these things are so by a good understanding of astronomy; or at least of the moon. For me, knowing exactly how and why Passover was Friday in the year 31, has just bolstered my confidence in Scripture and the resonating prophetic gift of Ellen White and our Adventist beliefs. Faith came first, and God showed me how the moon tells it all!

All of this evidence also confirms that the “high Sabbath” in John 19:31 really was a seventh day Sabbath which was the same day the Romans called Saturday. Jesus blessed the Sabbath again by resting in the tomb from His labor for mankind, to awake forevermore unto eternal life as the first fruits of humanity.

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