

## 10. Appendices

### 10.1. The Jewish Calendar

#### Main Sources

I am indebted to Remy Landau for much of the information concerning the current Jewish calendar. A precise technical description of its idiosyncrasies is to be found at his website: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/1584/> - *Hebrew Calendar Science and Myths*. Remy was also kind enough to provide me with further information via email correspondence.

Jewish/Gregorian date conversions were achieved by using an internet program developed by Alan D. Corré, Emeritus Professor of Hebrew Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Site: <http://www.uwm.edu/~corre/calendar.html> - *The Jewish/Civil Calendar Program*. Professor Corré also communicated via email.

Also I have found useful information in a cookbook for Jewish festivals; *In the Jewish Tradition*, by Judith B Fellner.

#### Summary of the Jewish Calendar

The first year of the Jewish calendar is approximately 3,762 years BCE. (I say 'approximately' because of certain conventions concerning calendars, which I won't go into here.) This date is based on the date of the creation of the world, as described in Genesis, and extrapolated using Biblical information. Hence the Jews do not have a Jewish BCE, although some of their cosmologists might have other ideas.

The Jewish month and its relationship to the year is quite a complex matter. The month is a lunar month, precisely defined as starting at new moon. New moon is an exact and easily determined astronomical phenomenon. (It's when the crescent flips from one side of the moon to the other. Of course it's not so easy to observe during cloudy weather.) Originally the date of the start of the month was determined by observations at Jerusalem and the results were promulgated to surrounding regions. This was necessary to decide the exact date of festivals which usually occurred two weeks later on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. Two weeks would give plenty of time to advise Jews in Palestine however those in the Diaspora were permitted a day's leeway because of the extra time taken to advise them, and this is a situation which pertains to this day.

My observation, from reading the Bible, is that the months are given numbers from one to twelve (in Hebrew) rather than specific names. The first month is actually called 'Nisan' which is derived from the Babylonian name for 'first' and

dates from the Babylonian exile. (Nisan is about March which is in Spring-time in the northern hemisphere.)

The lunar month is 29 1/2 days plus about 45 minutes in length. The original Jewish astronomers, when they began observing lunations, would deduce that months alternated 29 and 30 days with an occasional occurrence of two consecutive 30 day months. Hence they would mostly be able to predict the start of the month by calculation rather than observation. The tricky part would be to determine where the two 30 day months occurred.

Another problem they had was in relating lunar months to the solar year so that festivals and harvest could be held in the proper season. Twelve lunar months is about eleven days short of a solar year hence if you took twelve months to a year you would cycle through the seasons approximately once every thirty-three years. In order to compensate for this an extra month was added to the year at (roughly) three year intervals. This was a repetition of the month of Adar.

It is not exactly certain how this was done originally. The Passover festival, as defined in Leviticus, was related to a Spring festival. On the first day after Pesach was the festival of First Fruits where sheaves of barley were waved before the altar. (Barley was harvested in Spring.) (*LEVITICUS: 23:10* “*Speak to the Israelites and tell them: When you come into the land which I am giving you, and reap your harvest, you shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest, 23:11 who shall wave the sheaf before the LORD that it may be acceptable for you. On the day after the sabbath the priest shall do this.*”) This indicates that there must have been some method of adjusting the calendar to the seasons as far back as the time of Moses. It is possible that this may have been a usage of the principles of Egyptian astronomy.

The current Jewish calendar was developed over a period of time by Jewish mathematicians and first published in 356 CE. It is important to note that it is not known precisely what system was in use at the time of Jesus, although it is thought that most elements of the modern calendar were in place. Professor Corré described the situation in personal correspondence.

*It is entirely possible that at the period which interests you the Jews were using an ad hoc calendar, i.e. when the new moon was sighted it was the beginning of the month, and if there were no signs of spring in the month of Adar, a second Adar was intercalated. We cannot be sure just what the decisions may have been in particular years; the moon may have been covered by clouds, or bad weather may have delayed the spring. In addition, the calculated calendar contains “delays” to avoid certain conjunctions of festivals with certain days in order to avoid some religious problems. I don’t think we know when this delaying tactic started. The upshot is that although my calendar correctly, so far as I know, equates the two calendars I mentioned, we cannot be entirely sure what the situation was on the ground, so to speak.*

It is quite possible that the two calendars coincided, one being based on observation, the other on calculation. This is something we will never know with certainty.

The system is based on the ‘nineteen year cycle’. This is an astronomical oddity discovered, by a Greek astronomer, about 400 BCE. To quote Remy’s website:

*“The ancient Greek astronomer Meton (c. 4th cent. b.c.e.) observed that 235 lunation periods brought back the solar year into very close synchronisation with the lunar years. Thus, our scholars created a calendar cycle of 19 years consisting of 12 years of 12 lunar months each and 7 years of 13 lunar months each for a total of 235 lunar months.”*

By inserting the extra month in specific years in the cycle, and by adding an odd day to certain months under certain conditions, the system ensures that each month starts at a new moon. Another necessity was that, for doctrinal reasons, certain festivals could only occur on specific days of the week. There was a certain amount of adjustment necessary in order to make this happen. At first glance it may seem difficult to understand how a system could be devised to synchronise both the start of the month and the day of festivals, however it can be done. It all depends on where the extra month is placed within the year and within the nineteen year cycle and on variations in the length of certain months. (The ‘delays’ mentioned by Professor Corré above.) All this complexity of mathematics designed to emulate nature. I note that, if the current calendar were in force at the time of Jesus, Passover (or ‘Pesach’) could not possibly occur on a Friday. (We’ll come to that later.)

There are (and always were) seven days to the week, in line with the system in force throughout the world. The first day of the Jewish week is Sunday (as it is indeed elsewhere.) The days were generally referred to by their number i.e. ‘first’, ‘second’ etc up to ‘seventh’ (in Hebrew of course.) Two of the days were given specific names in addition to their numbers. The seventh day (Saturday), which was set aside for rest and religious observance, was also called ‘Sabbath’ (or ‘Shabbat’ in Jewish usage), the name being derived from the Hebrew word for ‘rest’. The sixth day (Friday) was also called ‘Preparation Day’ (I am unaware of the Hebrew equivalent) because this was the day on which you prepared for the Sabbath. The Jewish day commences at sunset, although for formal calendrical calculations this has been regularised to six PM. Thus we can note that all the events of the Passion, from last supper to crucifixion, took place during the course of one (Jewish) day.

## 10.2. The Dates of the events in Jesus' life.

### Date of Birth.

Nothing can be said with certainty concerning the date of birth. There are inconsistent nativity narratives in Matthew and Luke which place the birth of Jesus during the reign of Herod the Great. These are considered by many New Testament scholars to be fabrications. Apparently these are mostly a midrashic re-working of Old Testament stories, although there may be some influence from a lost oral tradition. Even the lineage to David and the birth in Bethlehem are discounted by one passage in John:

*7:40 Some in the crowd who heard these words said, "This is truly the Prophet." 7:41 Others said, "This is the Messiah." But others said, "The Messiah will not come from Galilee, will he? 7:42 Does not scripture say that the Messiah will be of David's family and come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?"*

Both infancy narratives place the birth of Jesus in the time of Herod (the Great) who died in 4 BCE. As a consequence the year 4 BCE is often taken as being the year of Jesus' birth. (The reason for Jesus being born four years 'BC' is because of a simple mathematical error perpetrated by one Dionysius Exiguus, the person who first performed the calculations.)

As for the day and month of birth nothing is certain. Our celebration of Christmas on 25th December is based on a Pagan rite which was taken over by the early church.

### Start of Ministry

Some indication is given by two passages in Luke:

*3:1 \* In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, 3:2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, \* the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. (Follows some indication of the teaching of John.)*

*NAB NOTE Tiberius Caesar: Tiberius succeeded Augustus as emperor in A.D. 14 and reigned until A.D. 37. The fifteenth year of his reign, depending on the method of calculating his first regnal year, would have fallen between A.D. 27 and 29.*

This gives us the start of the ministry of John. Whether it also indicates the date of the baptism of Jesus or whether John's ministry lasted for a few years before this is impossible to tell. I feel that it is justifiable to take this date as

approximately the start of Jesus' ministry although there will always be a question over it.

*3:23 When Jesus began his ministry he was about thirty years of age. He was the son, as was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, (Then follows the genealogy.)*

If Jesus was thirty in 29 CE he would have been born after the death of Herod the Great which is in contradiction to the nativity stories in Mark and Luke. Herod's death occurred in 4 BCE and accepting this as the birth date gives us a year of about 27 CE for the start of the ministry. (That is correct. The Gregorian calendar does not have a year zero.) If we accept 29 CE as being the more likely date then Jesus would have been born about 2 BCE. However if he was thirty-two or three when he commenced his ministry he would have been born within the reign of Herod.

### The date of the Passion.

The one certain fact we have is that it occurred during the tenure of Pontius Pilate. Pilate was the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judaea. His rule began in 26 CE and lasted until early in 37 CE. Thus the Passion must have occurred between the years 26 to 36 CE. (Pilate actually left before Nisan in 37 CE.) I think that we can accept the implication from the gospel of John that Jesus' ministry lasted for about three years. (The synoptics truncate this to about one year.)

Also, we have noted above that information in Luke that the ministry commenced in 29 CE. Accepting John's chronology of three years for the ministry this gives us 32 CE for the passion.

Another estimate can be obtained by inspecting calendrical information and assuming that the current calendar was in force at the time of Jesus. The calendar is so devised that Passover can only occur on a Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday (Sabbath). For reasons which I discuss below, I believe that Passover occurred on the Saturday in the year of the Passion. According to Professor Corré's calendar conversions there were three years during the period 26 to 36 where this happened - 26, 33 and 36.

I would discount 26 completely. It is not even certain if Pilate was in Judea by Nisan of that year. In any case the gospels show him as a man in charge (in spite of their misrepresentations) which he would not be so if he had just started in the job. Also the date seems too early according to our approximations above. 33 and 36 are both within the realms of possibility with a preference for 33 CE as it is closer to the estimate of 32 above, based on date of birth etc.

The above treatment is all based on assumptions, none of which can be substantiated. Every book on the subject of the Passion will give it a different date and every esteemed professor will be certain that he or she is right. All I can

do here is state the facts as I know them and my conclusion that nothing with certainty can be said concerning the exact year of the Passion, or indeed of any other year in Jesus' chronology.

### 10.3 The Last Supper

There is some confusion, particularly in the synoptics, concerning the events surrounding the Last Supper. This confusion is made worse by the blind beliefs of the Church. As the Catholic Encyclopedia says:

*Since Christians, accepting the inspiration of the Scriptures, cannot admit contradictions in the sacred writers, various attempts have been made to reconcile the statements.*

One should read the article in the Encyclopedia on The Last Supper. It is quite instructive. The Encyclopedia is further confused by not fully understanding that the Jewish day commenced at sunset, not at midnight.

My belief is that this confusion was caused by Simon Peter's failing memory when he told the story to Mark. I can resolve this confusion by assuming that the Last Supper was a meal which followed the Pesach tradition but was held one day early. I have compared the events of the Supper with the modern Pesach Seder to reach this conclusion. See article 10.4 below. My dates are:

Nissan 13 Thursday. (Day 5) The disciples prepare for the Last Supper.

Nissan 14 Friday. (Day 6 Preparation Day) The Passion. After sunset Jesus and the disciples celebrate the last supper, Jesus is arrested, executed and placed in a temporary grave.

Nissan 15 Saturday. (Day 7 Sabbath.) Pesach is celebrated. Jesus body remains in the tomb.

Nissan 16 Sunday. (Day 1) Sometime between sunset and early morning Jesus body is removed from the tomb. The tomb is found empty in the morning.

#### The synoptic chronology

*MARK: 14:12 On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, \* his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" 14:13 He sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him. 14:14 Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" 14:15 Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there." 14:16 The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover.*

*\* NAB NOTE: The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread . . . the Passover lamb: a less precise designation of the day for sacrificing the Passover lamb as evidenced by some rabbinical literature. .... It was actually Nisan 14.*

The Passover lambs were slaughtered in the Temple on the day before Passover, which was Nisan 14. Nisan 15, the date of the first day of the Passover period (Pesach) would then commence after sunset. However there is a problem with this chronology.

*MARK 15:42 When it was already evening, since it was the day of preparation, the day before the sabbath, 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea, a distinguished member of the council, who was himself awaiting the kingdom of God, came and courageously went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*

The difficulty is that Mark is saying that the celebration of Pesach also occurs on preparation day. But you cannot prepare on a day that is even more holy than the Sabbath. The other objection is that the events of the Passion could not occur on a feast day. The only conclusion is that Peter made an error when thinking back to the past. If the Supper followed the Pesach Seder but was held one day early Peter could be excused for equating it with a Passover supper held in the normal course of events and for drawing in the image of the Paschal lambs being sacrificed which usually happened on the day before Pesach.

Why would Jesus celebrate one day early? Perhaps he was following an Essene tradition which had a different calendar. Perhaps he knew he would never see the Jewish Passover. No doubt the owner of the house with the upper room would reserve its use on the holy day for his own family.

#### The date of the Last Supper according to John.

John states quite clearly that the last supper was taken before Passover but does not describe the meal as following the Seder.

*JOHN 13:1 \* Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. (Following is a description of the Last Supper.)*

*NAB NOTE \* Before the feast of Passover: this would be Thursday evening, before the day of preparation; in the synoptics, the Last Supper is a Passover meal taking place, in John's chronology, on Friday evening.*

The New American Bible note is very confusing to a gentile because it assumes the gentile custom of starting the day at midnight. 'Thursday evening' is in fact now Friday as the sun has gone down. 'Friday evening' was in fact the start of the day. All gospels state that the Passion took place on Preparation Day, which was Friday. The Jewish Friday commenced after sunset on the Gentile Thursday evening and ended at sunset on the Friday afternoon. What John is implying

above is that the Friday was not Passover but that it was the Saturday that was. This is a scenario which resolves the objections to the synoptic version.

There is clear indication in John that the passion was on Friday and that Passover and Sabbath coincided in the year of the passion:

*JOHN 9:31 Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the sabbath, for the sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and they be taken down. 19:32 So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. 19:33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, 19:34 but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out.*

The reason for the Sabbath being especially solemn would be because it coincided with Pesach.

## 10.4 Was the Last Supper a Passover meal?

I wish to investigate whether the Last Supper followed the tradition of a Passover meal by comparing the modern Passover ritual with descriptions of the Supper from the gospels. The 'Seder' (ritual, the word means 'order') has changed over the years, and is flexible enough to allow local variations, however the ritual derived from a time before Christ and many of the elements must have been in place. There are fifteen items in the Passover Seder which I will consider one at a time.

My sources for this are a cookbook "In the Jewish Tradition" by Judith B. Fellner. Married to a rabbi, who assisted with the book, Mrs. Fellner provides a description of all the festivals plus suitable recipes for their celebration. Also a website which contains a description of the Passover Seder:

[http://judaism.about.com/library/holidays/passover/bl\\_passover\\_Seder.htm](http://judaism.about.com/library/holidays/passover/bl_passover_Seder.htm)

### 1. Kiddush.

A blessing of the wine, the festival and a praise of God. The first toast is drunk. There is no indication of kiddush in the gospels however I wish to note here the importance of wine in the Seder. There are four toasts and the possibility of a fifth which is in rabbinical dispute. Wine was drunk at the Last Supper:

*MARK 14:23 Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 14:24 He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. 14:25 Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

This is not a decisive indication as wine may be drunk at normal meals.

### 2. Urchatz

A ritual washing of hands.

There is no indication of washing of hands in the gospels however there was water and a basin available for this purpose. Jesus used it in a different way.

*JOHN 13:5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist.*

Not a decisive indication as washing of hands may be common with other meals.

### 3. Karpas

A salad green, symbolic of spring, is dipped in a bowl of salt water, symbolic of the tears shed by the Jews when in bondage in Egypt.

There was a dipping procedure described in Mark, Matthew and John:

*MARK 14:20 He said to them, "One of the Twelve, the one who dips with me into the dish.*

This is a decisive indication as dipping is not part of a normal meal. (See item 5.) I would add that the bowl of brine is a communal bowl although there may be more than one bowl if the company is large. Refer also to item 9.

### 4. Yachatz

There are three loaves of unleavened bread on the Seder table. Here the middle one is split and the larger part hidden for later.

I won't go into the details of this ritual here. Bread did play a part in the Supper however there is a more decisive indication which I discuss below.

### 5. Maggid.

The doctrinal part of the Seder revolving around the story of the Exodus.

I find no reference in the gospels although John devoted four chapters to a lecture by Jesus which may have been delivered at this point.

One part of this ritual is that the youngest person present asks four questions, one of which is: "*On all other nights we don't dip even once. Why on this night do we dip twice?*" This tells me that dipping (see 3 and 9) is unique to Passover (although any devout Jew would tell you that.)

### 6. Rachatzah - Washing the Hands

Everyone washes their hands in preparation for the festive meal.

Refer 2.

## 7&amp;8. Motzi and Matzah

Here the leader (most senior person present) blesses the bread, breaks it (the top and bottom loaves) and gives pieces to other participants to eat.

This is replicated in the gospels:

*MARK 14:22 While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body."*

This is an exact copy of the ritual and a very strong indication for a Passover meal.

## 9. Maror.

Bitter herbs (often a horseradish root) are dipped in a sweet mixture of nuts and fruit (charoset) and eaten. The herbs are a reminder of the pain suffered by the Jews while slaves in Egypt.

The second dipping process in the Seder. This may be the dipping referred to in 3. In either case the symbolism of the dipping is very pertinent to the situation at the Last Supper.

Again this is a process unique to Passover.

## 10. Korekh.

Eating bitter herbs between bread.

This originated with Hillel, a contemporary of Jesus, and was probably not in place until a later date.

## 11. Schulchan Orech.

A sumptuous banquet for which Mrs. Fellner has provided several kosher recipes. In ancient times it was the sacred roast lamb that was eaten at this point.

There is no indication of food, other than bread and wine, in the gospels.

## 12. Tzafoon – afikomen

Here the piece of bread hidden in 4. is found and eaten as a symbol of the sacred lamb eaten by the forebears. This may be a late addition.

No indication in the gospels.

## 13. Barech.

The blessing after meals. Another wine toast and the door is opened for Elijah. This is a matter in doctrinal dispute.

Apart from wine no indication in the gospels.

## 14. Hallel.

Another wine toast and the singing of lively songs designed to interest the children.

## 15. Nirtzah.

The final event of the Seder is the singing of a hymn advocating the continued welfare of the Jews. ("Next Year in Jerusalem".)

This is replicated in the gospels.

*MARK 14:26 Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

I take this to be a very strong indication that the Last Supper was a Passover meal.

## Conclusion.

There are very strong reasons to believe that the Last Supper followed a Seder tradition not too far distant from the modern Seder. (There is some indication that Jesus made changes to the standard ritual – which I see as being in character.)