

“Problem of the Crucifixion Date”: Proof Saturday is not the Sabbath

By eLaine Vornholt
Laura Lee Vornholt-Jones

The date of Christ’s crucifixion provides the single most overwhelming confirmation that the modern week cycles differently than the Biblical week. This, in turn, proves that Saturday is not the Bible Sabbath or Sunday the true day of the resurrection. When this subject is fully understood, the truth of the Biblical calendar is unassailably established.

Daniel 9 contains the information needed to pinpoint the exact year of Christ’s crucifixion. It is so precise and accurate that rabbinical tradition actually pronounces a curse on anyone who would use it to calculate Messiah’s coming, because it reveals that He has indeed come already!

“A Sage said: ‘May the curse of heaven fall upon those who calculate the date of the advent of the Messiah, and thus create political and social unrest among the people.’”¹

Daniel 9 declares:

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks.²

“Seventy weeks” (70×7 days in each week) equals 490 days. Using the Biblical principle that one day equals one year³ in prophecy, this passage predicts that from the command to restore and build Jerusalem, 490 years were “determined” for the Israelite people. This prophecy was given to Daniel “in the first year of Darius.”⁴ Finding the year of Christ’s death, then, is simply a matter of locating the date of the decree.

There are four events which can be taken as answering to the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem. These are:

¹ *The Talmudic Anthology*, ed. Louis I. Newman with Samuel Spitz, (Behrman House, Inc., 1945), p. 277.

² Daniel 9:24-25

³ See Ezekial 4:9.

⁴ Daniel 9:1

1. The decree of Cyrus for the rebuilding of the house of God, 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4.)
2. The decree of Darius for the prosecution of that work which had been hindered, 519 B.C. (Ezra 6:1-12.)
3. The decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra, 457 B.C.⁵ (Ezra 7.)
4. The commission to Nehemiah from the same king in his twentieth year, 444 B.C. (Nehemiah 2.)

Dating from the first two of these decrees, the seventy prophetic weeks, or 490 literal years, would fall many years short of reaching even to the Christian Era. Besides this, these decrees had reference principally to the restoration of the temple and the temple worship of the Jews, not to the restoration of their civil state and polity, all of which must be included in the expression, “To *restore* and to build Jerusalem.”⁶

The date for the beginning of the 70 weeks of prophetic time (or 490 years, literal time) must be one of the last two decrees. The decree of 457 B.C. allowed more than any previous decree. It provided the Israelites with the means to restore their nation.

In 457 B.C., a decree was granted to Ezra by the Persian emperor Artaxerxes Longimanus to go up to Jerusalem with as many of his people as were minded to go with him. The commission granted him an unlimited amount of treasure, to beautify the house of God, to procure offerings for its service, and to do whatever else might seem good to him. It empowered him to ordain laws, set magistrates and judges, and execute punishment even unto death; in other words, *to restore the Jewish state, civil and ecclesiastical, according to the law of God and the ancient customs of that people.* Inspiration has seen fit to preserve this decree; and a full and accurate copy of it is given in Ezra 7. This decree is recorded not in Hebrew, like the rest of the book of Ezra, but in the official Chaldaic, or Eastern Aramaic. Thus we are referred to the original document by virtue of which Ezra was authorized to restore and build Jerusalem.⁷

⁵ “The years of Artaxerxes’ reign are among the most easily established dates of history. The Canon of Ptolemy, with its list of kings and astronomical observations, the Greek Olympiads, and allusions in Greek history to Persian affairs all combine to place the seventh year of Artaxerxes at 457 B.C. beyond successful controversy. See Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel*, pp. 154-157.” Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publ. Assoc., n.d.), editors’ comments, footnote, p. 208.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209, emphasis original.

⁷ *Ibid.*, emphasis supplied.

Thirteen years later (444 B.C.), Nehemiah received permission from the same king to go to Jerusalem. Permission was granted to him personally, but there is no record of any additional directive. Therefore, of the four decrees, the only one which fits the parameters of Daniel 9:24 is the third decree in 457 B.C. It now becomes a simple math equation: $(490 - 457) + 1 = 34$. Four fifty-seven is subtracted from 490 because it is B.C.; one year must also be added because there was no zero year. The last year of this 490-year time period that was especially “determined” for the Israelites was A.D. 34. In A.D. 34, intense persecution drove the early Christians from Jerusalem and the gospel was taken to the world.

Verse 26 of Daniel 9 refers to Messiah being “cut off,” or in other words, making a covenant.⁸ This is the end of Christ’s three and a half years of public ministry, which began in the Fall of A.D. 27. Three and a half years later, in Spring of A.D. 31, Christ was crucified on Passover.

The reason these facts are important is because they hold the key to the single largest piece of evidence that the modern week has *not* cycled continuously and without interruption ever since Creation. When the facts of luni-solar calendation are brought to A.D. 31, it is found that Passover, the sixth day of the Biblical week corresponds to Wednesday of the Julian week!

Because the moon is so predictable, it is possible to precisely calculate lunations thousands of years ago as well as years into the future. Scholars are agreed that the Hebrew month was lunar:

The month was a unit of time closely tied to the moon. The Hebrew word for “month” also meant “moon.” . . . The reason for the connection between the month and the moon is that the beginning of a month was marked by a new moon. The moon was carefully observed by the people of Bible times. When it appeared as a thin crescent, it marked the beginning of a new month.⁹

The Hebrew month was lunar, beginning with the evening on which the crescent moon appeared. The 1st day of the month was called the new moon.¹⁰

The first day of the lunar month was observed as a holy day . . . The religious observance of the day of the new moon may plainly be regarded as the consecration of a natural division of time.¹¹

⁸ #1285, b^erîyth, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990.

⁹ *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, “Calendar Units (in the Hebrew economy),” (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986.)

¹⁰ *SDA Bible Dictionary*, revised edition, (Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1979), Commentary Series, Vol. 8, see pp. 757-758.

¹¹ *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, PC Study Bible formatted.

The week of seven days was connected with the lunar month, of which it is, approximately, a fourth.¹²

Since Biblical times the months and years of the Jewish calendar have been established by the cycles of the moon and the sun. The traditional law prescribes that the months shall follow closely the course of the moon . . . In the early times of our history the solution was found by the following practical procedure: *The beginnings of the months were determined by direct observation of the new moon.*¹³

The United States Naval Observatory (USNO) provides the date and time for the conjunction closest to the spring equinox as well as the conjunction immediately following.¹⁴ The principles of luni-solar calendation applied to A.D. 31, establish Thursday, April 12, as New Moon day, Abib 1. Leviticus 23:5 provides the date for Passover: Abib 14. When 13 days are added to Thursday, April 12, Passover falls on Wednesday, April 25!

The following charts were compiled with information from the USNO for A.D. 31.

March, A.D. 31						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11 ●	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27 ○	28	29	30	31
Phases of the Moon: 5:● 12:● 20:● 27:○						

The conjunction (or black moon) occurred on March 11. This made Passover too early for the barley harvest to be ready for the wave sheaf offering on Abib 16. Consequently, the 13th month, Veadar, was intercalated to bring the lunar year back into alignment with the solar year. Nisan 1 in A.D. 31 corresponds to the Julian date of April 12, the conjunction being on April 10 at noon.

¹² "The Week," www.jewishencyclopedia.com.

¹³ Arthur Spier, *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, third revised edition, (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1987), p. 1.

¹⁴ See <http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/SpringPhenom.php>. The astronomical "new moon" is conjunction.

The 14th of Nisan thus fell on April 25, a Julian Wednesday. In the key at the bottom of the chart, the USNO confirms that the full moon appeared on April 25.

April, A.D. 31						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10 ●	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25 ○	26	27	28
29	30	Phases of the Moon: 3:● 10:● 18:○ 25:○				

Theologians, scholars and astronomers have long wrestled with this contradiction. The World Wide Church of God solves it by pointing to the “sign of Jonah,” claiming that Christ was crucified on the fourth day of the week and resurrected a complete 72 hours later. Roman Catholics and most other Protestants have simply placed the crucifixion in another year, such as A.D. 33, some in A.D. 34.

Sir Isaac Newton, dismissing Julian years that did not align Friday with Abib 14, stated: “The years 31 and 35 are excluded, because in them the Passion cannot fall on Friday, without making it three days after the full moon, or four days before it: errors so enormous, that they would be very conspicuous in the heavens to every vulgar eye.”¹⁵ Newton had earlier admitted his assumption: “I take it for granted that the passion was on friday the 14th day of Nisan, the great feast of the Passover on Saturday the 15th day of Nisan, and the resurrection on the day following.”¹⁶

For the same reason, Oswald Gerhardt rejected A.D. 31 as the year of the crucifixion: “In 31 the 14 Nisan came either on Wednesday, April 25, or on Thursday, April 26, *but not on a Friday.*”¹⁷ Astronomer Karl Schoch concurred:

¹⁵ Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse*, 1733, pp. 164-165.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160. Newton did not understand the barley harvest of law of Moses which ensured that no Passover would ever fall so early as March. However, his calculations of the lunations are accurate.

¹⁷ Oswald Gerhardt, “Das Datum der Kreuzigung Jesu Christi,” (Berlin: Verlag Wiegandy & Grieben, 1914), see pp. 74-80, as quoted in “Translations of Various Scientific Documents: On Lunar Calendar and the Crucifixion date,” Box 2, Folder 5, Grace Amadon Collection, (Collection 154), Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

I now come to the year 31 A.D. when the new moon [astronomical conjunction] for the Nisan new light came on April 10 . . . After 28 hours, on the eve of April 11, at this time of the year, every new light is quite easily seen in Jerusalem . . . 1 Nisan = April 12; 14 Nisan = April 25, Wednesday; 15 Nisan = April 26, Thursday.¹⁸

The astronomers made a mistake, but it was not in their calculations. Rather it was in their *assumption* that the sixth day of the Biblical week was identical to Friday of the modern week. Sometimes, in an attempt to disprove this fact, the USNO will be quoted saying that it is not possible to know for sure when Passover occurred so many years ago. This must be understood in the context that the USNO is a government entity. As such, it legally cannot involve itself in religious squabbles over the interpretation of its data. The data is what it is, and the USNO maintains that it is extremely accurate. The USNO's refusal to involve itself in sectarian battles should not be interpreted as an admission that its calculations are wrong. Rather, the USNO is merely refusing to apply a *religious* interpretation to its computations.

John 19:31 states that Christ was crucified on “the preparation.” The 14th of every lunar month is always the sixth day of the week, the preparation day just before the seventh-day Sabbath. The prophecies of Daniel pinpoint A.D. 31 as the only possible year of the crucifixion; the predictability of lunar movement allows calculations which reveal an astonishing truth: Christ was crucified on the sixth day of the Biblical week, a Julian Wednesday! When it is remembered that the Julian week at the time of Christ’s death was an *eight*-day week, the evidence is overwhelming: the Biblical week and the modern week do not align. Sunday is therefore not the true day of Christ’s resurrection and Saturday is not the genuine seventh-day Sabbath.

¹⁸ Karl Schoch, “The Crucifixion of Christ on 14 of Nisan,” (Berlin-Steglitz, August 20, 1927), as quoted in “Translations of Various Scientific Documents: On Lunar Calendar and the Crucifixion date,” Box 2, Folder 5, Grace Amadon Collection, *op. cit.*