

The Date of Easter

Graham Thomason, 14 April, 2011
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I was recently asked about the date of Easter. Here is the reply I gave.

There is a church version of Easter, and a scriptural version of the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection. I'll deal mainly with the latter, because that is what I am particularly interested in. So my definition of Easter is *the first full resurrection day*, and it needs defining in terms of the Hebrew calendar, then converting to our calendar.

Strictly speaking, resurrection day is the day on which Christ was raised. As we will see, this is a Saturday, right at the very end of the day. But it seems more appropriate to regard the Sunday as the main Easter day, as that is the day when the raised Christ was first announced, seen and talked about. It is the first full day of the resurrection. We will call anniversaries of it "Easter Day". They do not necessarily fall on a Sunday.

If the reader would prefer to consider the previous day as the day of Easter, allowance for that can easily be made by subtracting one day from our conclusions on the date of our Sunday-based Easter Day below.

Now there are two big clocks in the sky - the sun and the moon.

Our calendar, the Gregorian calendar, is solar. To a good approximation, the sun is in the same place relative to the "fixed stars" on the same date each year. So the Earth is in the same place in its orbit each year.

The Islamic calendar is lunar, with a year consisting of 12 months starting at new moon, so is 354 or 355 days long. When festival dates are converted to our calendar, they drift quite fast through the year, over the years. But that is by the way.

The Hebrew calendar is lunar and solar. Months start at new moon. Festivals are on the *N*th day in a particular month. But to keep the solar part, so that e.g. a spring festival is always in the spring, every now and then there is a 13th month, a leap-month. We are interested in the Hebrew month of Nisan. Because of the relatively coarse adjustments by a leap-month, Nisan (or any other month) doesn't always start on the same Gregorian date, but it will vary by at most a month.

The scriptural events at Easter are as follows.

The 14th of Nisan is the Passover Preparation day, the day before the main Passover feast, with the unleavened bread. It will be seen that it was three full days before the weekly Sabbath (the Saturday), so it was a Wednesday (not the "Good Friday" of the churches). It is

day the “Lamb without blemish”¹ was offered every year, as prescribed by Moses, and, guess what, Christ the “Lamb of God”², was crucified on this very day.

The crucifixion being on the Wednesday, Christ was dead for the Thursday, Friday and Saturday, fulfilling 3 full days of being dead, and so fulfilling the depiction in Jonah³. The churches typically only give Christ one full day of death. They do not realize that festival days are also called Sabbaths (as can be seen in Leviticus 23:24 and 23:27 where two Sabbaths are 9 days apart) so they think Christ was crucified the day before the Saturday (the weekly Sabbath, so Saturday), rather than the day before the Passover (a high Sabbath, which was a Thursday). Christ rose again three days after his death, so on 17 Nisan, a Saturday. This was at the very end of the day, but before the start of the 18 Nisan, which many people take as the resurrection day, and which we take as the main Easter day. In this way Christ “rose on the third day”⁴ (not the fourth) but was still “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”⁵. The resurrection was first seen on 18 Nisan, the Sunday, the first day of the Hebrew week, which was the first full day of the resurrected Christ.

OK, so when is Easter Sunday? You can do various things:

1. Convert 18 Nisan, 3970 (i.e. Hebrew year 3970, which is in 30 AD – I'll explain why 30 AD later) to the Gregorian Calendar and use that date. Then you have the date that is "fixed" in terms of where the sun is relative to the stars. The conversion of 18 Nisan, 3970 gives **7 April, 30 AD**. So under this option, **Easter is on 7 April every year (even if it is not a Sunday)**.
2. Take Easter as 18 Nisan each year, according to the Hebrew calendar. It will be a different Gregorian⁶ date from year to year, and will not necessarily fall on a Sunday. You need to know the current Hebrew year. In 2015 (the year of revising this article), it is 5775. The conversion of 18 Nisan 5775 gives Tuesday **7 April, 2015**. In 2016, 18 Nisan 5776 converts to Tuesday **26 April, 2016**.
3. If you wish to follow what the church does, Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. In 2015, that is Sunday **5 April, 2015**. In 2016, it is Sunday **27 March 2016**. It always falls between March 22 and April 25.

Now why have we taken AD 30 as the crucifixion year? We do not have an explicit statement of what the year was. According to Wikipedia (which is churchy and so wrong on Easter), Pilate ruled from AD 26-36. So the crucifixion was in that range.

If the crucifixion was in AD 27 or 30, then 18 Nisan is a Sunday. Those are the only possibilities in Pilate's period of office.

¹ Leviticus 23:12

² John 1:29

³ Jonah 1:17, referred to in Matthew 12:40

⁴ Matthew 16:21, Acts 10:40 etc.

⁵ Matthew 12:40

⁶ We do not convert dates prior to 1752 to Julian dates; we retain Gregorian dates throughout.

The details are

Hebrew Date	Gregorian Date	Day of the Week
18 Nisan, 3786	24 March, 26 AD	Tuesday
18 Nisan, 3787	11 April, 27 AD	Sunday
18 Nisan, 3788	31 March, 28 AD	Friday
18 Nisan, 3789	18 April, 29 AD	Wednesday
18 Nisan, 3790	7 April, 30 AD	Sunday
18 Nisan, 3791	28 March, 31 AD	Friday
18 Nisan, 3792	16 April, 32 AD	Friday
18 Nisan, 3793	5 April, 33 AD	Tuesday
18 Nisan, 3794	24 March, 34 AD	Friday
18 Nisan, 3795	13 April, 35 AD	Tuesday
18 Nisan, 3796	1 April, 36 AD	Tuesday

If Christ was born in autumn 3756, a year spanning 5 and 4 BC (not 1 A.D., which may sound strange, but it's to do with the introduction of Western calendars much later and misaligning them with the Roman "Ab Urbe Condita" calendar), then AD 30 would give Christ 33½ years on earth, just under half a nominal lifetime of "threescore and ten", for which there might be some justification⁷. Moreover, 33½ years ties in with Christ being 30 years old when "beginning his ministry"⁸, giving him a reasonable period of ministry. *Three and a half* has significance elsewhere in Scripture⁹, but we do not relate those occurrences directly to the three and a half here.

Hebrew to Gregorian date (and vice-versa) conversion site here:

<http://www.hebcal.com/converter/?gd=28&gm=3&gy=31&g2h=Convert+Gregorian+to+Hebrew+date>

Day of week calculator here, based on the Gregorian calendar:

<http://www.searchforancestors.com/utility/dayofweek.html>

I haven't verified these conversion sites, so if the dates are particularly important to you, please verify the conversions yourself.

For a time chart of Christ's last day, see Appendix 165 to *The Companion Bible*,

<http://www.therain.org/appendixes/app165.html>.

Western dates are in the Gregorian calendar, which wasn't invented until the 16th century, but we can extrapolate back.

The big uncertainty in this is whether the alignment of Gregorian calendar, via the Julian one, with the Roman one, is valid.

⁷ Psalm 55:23, Psalm 90:10 (Christ bearing our sins as if a sinner)

⁸ Luke 3:23

⁹ Daniel 7:25, 9:27; Revelation 11:3, 11:11, 13:5. (Week=7; 42 months = 1260 days = 3½ nominal years.)