

# Jot & Tittle

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## **A Chronology of the Passion Week**

by Dana L. Goodnough

Some of the challenges to understanding the last days of Jesus' earthly ministry relate to the day of His death and the timing of the Passover. Assuming that Jesus died on a Friday and that His death occurred on Passover, it's possible to reconstruct from the four Gospels the daily events in Jesus' life during the Passion Week, the time between Jesus' arrival at Bethany through His crucifixion and resurrection.

### ***Challenges to the Traditional Chronology***

Traditional chronologies of the Passion Week include Jesus' Triumphal Entry on the Sunday prior to the crucifixion (Palm Sunday) and an inactive Wednesday, a "quiet day."<sup>1</sup> However, there are chronological indicators in the four Gospels that point toward a more compact week that places the Triumphal Entry on Monday and eliminates a quiet day in the Passion Week.

Citing John 12:1, Clarke identifies Monday as the day of the Triumphal Entry: "*Six days before the passover*] Reckoning the day of the passover to be the last of the six. Our Lord came on our Sabbath, the first day of the Jewish week, to Bethany, where he

supped; and on the next day he made his public entry into Jerusalem."<sup>2</sup>

Hoehner likewise identifies Monday as the day of Jesus' Triumphal Entry, stating, "The next day (John 12:12), Monday, was Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19)."<sup>3</sup> Based on this understanding Hoehner then goes on to lay out a chronology of the Passion Week that does not include a quiet day. These conclusions fit the biblical data more precisely than the traditional chronology based on specific chronological links in the Gospels.

### ***Chronological Links in the Gospels***

The following biblical markers provide a framework for a reconstruction of events in the Passion Week of Christ.

In most cases each day of Christ's Passion Week is linked to the next day by use of a chronological reference. John 12:1 states that Jesus arrived at Bethany six days before the Passover. (This reference provides a significant key to reconstructing the Passion Week.) This could be called the "Bethany Banquet Day."

John 12:12 then says that "the next day" Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey—His "Triumphal Entry." Mark 11:11 indicates that it was late in the day when Jesus entered Jerusalem, so He merely looked around and then returned to Bethany without engaging in any further activities.

Mark 11:12 then says that "the next day" Jesus cursed a fig tree as He returned to Jerusalem. That day Jesus also drove the money changers from the temple, prompting the Jewish leaders to plot His death (Mark 11:18). This was Jesus' "Temple Cleansing" day. That evening Jesus again left the city (Mark 11:19).

"In the morning," according to Mark 11:20, as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem, His disciples took note of the withered fig tree. That day, sometimes referred to as the "Busy Day," Jesus

confronted the Jewish leaders in open debate and taught in parables about their impending judgment. He also delivered His Olivet Discourse to His disciples as they returned from Jerusalem to Bethany.

At this point in the Passion Week none of the Gospels provides any further chronological links between Jesus' "Busy Day" and the day on which He shared the Last Supper with His disciples. It's possible, as the traditional view claims, that Jesus had a quiet day between His "Busy Day" and the day of the Last Supper. However, Luke 19:47 says that Jesus taught in the temple "every day." Either the Gospels give no information about Jesus' activities on the day after His "Busy Day" or the "Busy Day" was in fact the day immediately preceding the day on which He celebrated the Last Supper.

The Last Supper took place on the evening prior to Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. John 19:14 indicates that Jesus was crucified on the day of preparation, that is, preparation for the Sabbath. Since the Sabbath was on Saturday, the day of preparation would have been on Friday. Therefore, the Last Supper would have taken place on Thursday night.

Following the Friday crucifixion, on "the next day" according to Matthew 27:62, the religious leaders insisted that Pilate secure Jesus' tomb. Then, as Matthew 28:1 says, "after the Sabbath" and "on the first day of the week" Jesus rose from the dead.

### ***A Chronological Summary of the Passion Week***

By following the chronological links in the Gospels and disallowing a hypothetical quiet day in the Passion Week, the following chronology of that week unfolds:

Sunday—The Bethany Banquet  
Monday—The Triumphal Entry

Tuesday—The Temple Cleansing

Wednesday—The Busy Day

Thursday—The Last Supper

Friday—The Crucifixion

Saturday—The Securing of the Tomb

Sunday—The Resurrection

But can John 12:1 support this chronological structure? According to this verse, the first day of the Passion Week (the day of the Bethany Banquet) was six days before Passover, or Friday of the Passion Week. Six days prior to Passover (Friday) might, therefore, point toward the previous Sabbath (Sunday) as the day on which Jesus arrived at Bethany. But Jews rarely traveled any significant distances on the Sabbath. Furthermore, if the six days are counted inclusively, that is, including Sunday as the first of those six days, then Sunday is exactly six days before Friday. John 12:1, therefore, can support a chronological structure that places Jesus' arrival in Bethany on Sunday and His Triumphal Entry on Monday of the Passion Week.

Of course, the climax of the Passion Week was Jesus' sacrificial death and His powerful resurrection, the basis of both the Christian faith and our hope of eternal salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. One-Volume Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971 (originally published in 1883), Part Two, pp. 363, 468.

<sup>2</sup> Clarke, Adam. *Clarke's Commentary*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d., vol. 5, p. 607.

<sup>3</sup> Hoehner, Harold W. *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977, p. 91.