

On June 17, 2012, I presented my critique of Bart Ehrman’s alleged contradiction between the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Luke with regard to the day and time of Jesus’ death. After making that presentation at Reformation Fellowship, I concluded that the way I had organized my critique was not particularly successful. I had not presented my critique in a way that made it as clear and as accessible as it needed to be. I offer these written notes as my attempt to rectify my failed effort on June 17. I hope that you will find the organization and clarity of these notes superior to, and more readily accessible than, my talk. My apologies to those of you who suffered through my initial talk. I hope you find these notes more interesting and understandable.
—Jack Crabtree

[Note: The original notes, which follow the recording, are attached at the end of these later notes.]

A Critique of Ehrman’s Allegation that John and Mark are Contradictory with respect to the Day and Time Jesus Died: Some Notes

In what follows, remember that—in the New Testament—the new day begins at sundown and lasts until the following sundown. Hence, the weekly Sabbath does not simply correspond to our Saturday. Rather, it begins at sundown on what is our Friday and ends at sundown on what is our Saturday. Consequently, in the notes that follow, whenever I specify the day of the week on which some event occurs, I will indicate that day by hyphenating the two of our days that overlap with it—for example, Friday–Saturday (or, Fri–Sat) would indicate the weekly Sabbath in N.T. times. In this convention, the first day indicates on which of our days the beginning of the N.T. day falls; the second day indicates on which of our days the end of the N.T. day falls. So, “Monday–Tuesday” means the day that begins at sundown on Monday and ends at sundown on Tuesday.

Furthermore, remember that “Passover” is an annual religious celebration prescribed by the Mosaic Covenant that always occurs on the same day—the fourteenth day of the Jewish month of Nisan: “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD’S Passover” (Leviticus 23:5). Hence, Passover will not always fall on the same day of the week every year. On different years, Passover will fall on different days of the week.

Finally, note that the “Feast of Unleavened Bread” is actually two religious observances that are back-to-back with one another. On the fourteenth day of the first month of the year is the day of Passover. Then, the following seven days are the “Feast of Unleavened Bread.”

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD’S Passover. Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. (Leviticus 23:5–8)

Sometimes the whole period of the two religious observances, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, is simply called the “Feast of Unleavened Bread” (or just “Unleavened Bread” or the “Feast”), and sometimes it is simply called “Passover.”

It is especially noteworthy that the first and the last days of the observance called the “Feast of Unleavened Bread” are both holy Sabbaths. So, depending on which year it is, neither the day of Passover nor either of the two Sabbaths commanded to be kept as part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread need to coincide with the weekly Sabbath. In that event, then, during the eight days of “the Feast” (or “Passover” or “Unleavened Bread”), the Jews would be required to observe three different Sabbaths in an eight-day span of time. Here, for example, is how the Sabbaths would fall if Passover day were to fall on a Sunday–Monday:

1. The next day, Monday–Tuesday, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, would be a Sabbath;
2. The next Friday–Saturday, the weekly Sabbath, would be a Sabbath;
3. The very next day, Saturday–Sunday, the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, would be a Sabbath.

The fact that there are other Sabbaths besides the weekly Sabbath during Passover “week” is an absolutely critical fact that one must take into account when one is seeking to understand the events surrounding Jesus’ death.

Bart Ehrman contends that Mark’s account of the time of Jesus’ death contradicts John’s account of the time of Jesus’ death in three respects:

A. The “LAST SUPPER” (Jesus’ last meal with his disciples, a meal that—according to tradition [and Ehrman]—occurred sometime after sundown on Thursday):

1. Ehrman’s interpretation:
 - a. Mark presents the “Last Supper” as a Passover meal, eaten at the beginning of Passover Day [Thursday–Friday], just after sundown on Thursday.
 - b. John presents it as an ordinary meal (that is, not a prescribed religious meal of any sort), eaten at the beginning of the day of preparation for the Passover (Thursday–Friday) just after sundown on Thursday. (According to Ehrman, the “Day of Preparation” is the day before Passover.)
2. Ehrman’s claim:
 - a. Mark and John contradict one another. Mark presents the Last Supper as a Passover meal; John presents the Last Supper as if it is NOT a Passover meal.
3. Ehrman’s evidence and my response:
 - a. Evidence that Mark takes the last meal to be a Passover meal:
 - i. Mark explicitly indicates that the meal is a Passover meal (Mark 14:12, 14:14, 14:16–18).
 - (A) I agree with Ehrman’s interpretation of this evidence. However, note the following: Ehrman rightly indicates that this “first day of Unleavened bread”

(Mark 14:12) is the day *before* Passover; it is the day when the Passover lamb is offered up and the day the Passover meal is prepared. However, Ehrman assumes that the very fact that it is the day when a Jew must prepare the Passover meal qualifies it to be labeled “the day of preparation for Passover.” This is a mistake. There is no evidence that the day before Passover would be called “the day of preparation (*paraskeue*) for Passover.” See my discussion below, B.3.b.i. and B.3.b.ii.

- ii. Mark portrays Jesus as re-interpreting the elements of a Passover meal (Mark 14:22-25).
 - (A) I agree with Ehrman’s interpretation of this evidence.
- b. Evidence that John does not take the last meal to be a Passover meal:
 - i. John never explicitly calls the meal a Passover meal.
 - (A) This is true. However, it does not have the evidentiary weight that Ehrman suggests it has. John could easily assume that his readers will already know from other background knowledge that the meal he is describing is a Passover meal. If so, he may very well see no need to make that fact explicit in his own account.
 - (1) A careful examination of the gospel of John will reveal two significant things: (i) John seems intent on producing an account that complements—rather than duplicates—the material that has already been recorded in the other Gospel accounts (the Synoptic Gospels); (ii) John is intent on supplementing the accounts already in existence with recollections that come from his own personal knowledge and experience.
 - (2) It follows from the above two points that, in writing his gospel, John is assuming that his readers already possess certain background information. They have such background information either from the other written Gospels or from the tradition that those Gospels are based upon. For this reason, John would not need to explicitly state that the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples was a Passover meal. His intended readers would already be privy to such knowledge. It is reasonable to think that John is assuming this in the way he gives his account.
 - ii. John never makes any explicit reference to the meal having any of the attributes or the elements of a Passover meal.
 - (A) This is true. But, again, it does not have the evidentiary weight that Ehrman suggests it has. Again, John could easily be assuming that his readers already know, from other background knowledge, that Jesus offered a new interpretation (a new “midrash”) of the symbolic elements of the Passover meal when he was with his disciples at that last Passover meal together.

- (1) See note just above, A.3.b.i. Given how important the “Lord’s Supper” became to believers, it is reasonable to assume that this part of the story of Jesus was well known. John does not omit it because it lacks significance to him. Neither does he omit it because he wants to transform the meal into something other than a Passover meal. And neither does he omit it because he is ignorant that it occurred. Rather, he omits it because he does not see the need to repeat it. He knows that it is already a well-established element of the story of Jesus’ last days, both in its oral form and in its written form. Accordingly, he can assume his readers know the story of reinterpretation of the bread and wine as he simply seeks to supplement the story of Jesus’ last supper, supplying lesser known facts of which he has first-hand knowledge.
- iii. John records the members of the Sanhedrin as refusing to enter into Pilate’s residence when they brought Jesus to Pilate to be tried by him. John records that they did not want to “defile” themselves and thereby become ineligible to “eat the Passover” (John 18:28). This implies that these members of the Sanhedrin have not yet eaten the Passover meal. It follows, therefore, that neither would Jesus and his disciples have eaten the Passover meal (unless, of course, Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover meal in accordance with a different calendar and tradition—but that is unlikely).
- (A) This could be the most compelling piece of evidence in support of Ehrman’s contention that John does not present the Last Supper as a Passover meal. Interestingly, Ehrman does not even mention this statement (John 18:28) as evidence. However, the statement is ambiguous, and hence misleading. If one translates it, “...so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover meal,” then it becomes clear and powerful evidence that the Passover meal has not yet occurred. And if that is so, then Jesus and his disciples were not eating the Passover meal on the evening before. But while the term that John uses, *pascha*, can be used to denote the Passover meal, it can also be used to denote the Passover lamb that is at the very center of the Passover meal. Why is that significant? One of the requirements of the Passover celebration is that the Passover lamb (the *pascha*) be completely consumed *before the next morning*. Hence, it is entirely possible that what the members of the Sanhedrin are saying is this: “We have to get back to our homes and finish eating the Passover lamb (the *pascha*) before the night is completely gone.”

[Note two things: (1) The members of the Sanhedrin have had a very busy night away from their homes. This has not been their typical Passover day celebration. It is very possible that they have some unfinished celebrating (eating) to do.(2) This interview with Pilate could be happening as early as 6:00 a.m. I am not aware of anyone who can know with certainty how the Jews in Jesus’ day interpreted the requirement in the Law that the *pascha* be completely consumed before daybreak. In other words, on their interpretation, by when, exactly, did the *pascha* need to be completely

consumed? Furthermore, how willing would they have been to bend the rules a little in regard to this? Their trial of Jesus had already been rather unlawful it would seem.]

If this latter interpretation is right—if their concern is that they need to be “clean” in order to finish consuming the Passover lamb—then, far from being evidence that the Passover meal has not yet occurred, this is evidence that the Passover meal itself *has*, in fact, *already occurred*. It is the completion of the Passover meal that is their concern, not the inception of it.

B. Day of Jesus’ death:

1. Ehrman’s interpretation:
 - a. Mark presents Jesus’ death as occurring on the day of Passover.
 - b. John presents Jesus’ death as occurring on the day of preparation for Passover, the day before Passover, the day when the Passover lamb was offered up in the temple.
2. Ehrman’s claim:
 - a. Mark and John contradict one another. Mark presents Jesus’ death as occurring on the day of Passover; John presents it as occurring the day before Passover.
3. Ehrman’s evidence and my response:
 - a. The following evidence is (or could be) cited in support of Ehrman’s claim that Mark depicts Jesus’ death as occurring on the Passover:
 - i. The meal that Jesus’ ate with his disciples the night before his crucifixion was the Passover meal, placing his crucifixion on the day of Passover.
(A) I have shown above that I agree with this.
 - ii. Mark portrays Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus’ trial before Pilate, and Jesus’ eventual crucifixion, as occurring in the early morning hours of the same day on which (the evening before) they ate the Passover meal (Mark 15:1 and 15:15). Indeed, Mark portrays Jesus as being hung on the cross between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m. (the third hour) on the day of Passover (Mark 15:25).
(A) I agree with Ehrman’s interpretation of this evidence.
 - iii. Mark indicates that Jesus’ death occurred some time between 2:00 and 3:00 p.m. (the ninth hour) on the day of Passover (Mark 15:33–34, 15:37).
(A) I agree with Ehrman’s interpretation of this evidence.
 - iv. Mark indicates that Jesus’ death occurred on the day of preparation for the Sabbath (Mark 15:42). This does not serve as any evidence for Ehrman, but—if he were thinking of the calendar rightly—it could provide significant evidence. Rightly understood, the Passover is *always* a day of preparation for the Sabbath. (The day immediately following the day of Passover is always the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which is required to be a Sabbath day.) Hence, the fact

that Jesus died on a day of preparation is consistent with Jesus’ death being on the day of Passover.

- (A) It is not altogether clear how Ehrman understands and interprets Mark’s account, but I believe he is mistaken in some important respects. It would appear that Ehrman interprets the day of preparation on which Jesus died to be the day before the weekly Sabbath. In other words, in the particular year in which Jesus died, Passover fell on the day before a weekly Sabbath. Hence, by dying on Passover, Jesus died on the day of preparation (Thursday–Friday) for the weekly Sabbath (Friday–Saturday). Ehrman shows no awareness that *every* Passover would be a day of preparation (*paraskeue*) for the Sabbath—no matter what year it is.

According to the Mosaic Law, on the day immediately following the Passover celebration, Israel was to celebrate seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The very first day of this Feast of Unleavened Bread (the next day immediately after the day of Passover) was to be a holy Sabbath. Hence, no matter on which day of the week Passover might occur, the very next day would be a Sabbath. Hence, Passover was always a “day of preparation” (*paraskeue*) for the Sabbath. [Note: since Passover is always on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan each year, it will fall on different days of the week depending on which year it is.]

Ehrman appears to interpret Mark to be suggesting that, as it happened, Passover—in the year of Jesus’ death—fell on the day before the weekly Sabbath (that is, on Thursday–Friday). Hence, in that particular year, Passover was a day of preparation, the day of preparation for the weekly Sabbath. But Ehrman shows no awareness that the Passover is always a day of preparation for the Sabbath on the following day. Ehrman explicitly distinguishes the “day of preparation” of Mark 15:42 from the day of preparation that he *wrongly* believes is reflected in Mark 14:12. I will argue below that the day before Passover is not called a “day of preparation” (*paraskeue*). Only a day that immediately precedes a Sabbath day is called a day of preparation (*paraskeue*). But since Passover always immediately precedes a Sabbath day, it will always be a “day of preparation” (*paraskeue*). The day *before* Passover would only be a day of preparation (*paraskeue*) if Passover itself happened to fall on the weekly Sabbath in any given year. (In that event, both Passover and the day *after* Passover [the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Sunday] would be Sabbath days in that particular year.)

- (1) It is noteworthy that John indicates that the day after the day on which Jesus died was a “*high* Sabbath.” John writes, “Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (indeed the day of that Sabbath was a high [literally, “great”] one), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and

that they might be taken away” (John 19:31).

What is a “high Sabbath”? I would suggest that a “high Sabbath” is a Sabbath other than an ordinary weekly Sabbath. A Sabbath that occurs only once a year (as does the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread) is a “high Sabbath”—I would suggest—and, hence, a particularly holy one, because it is not a more frequent, weekly Sabbath. If this is right, then it is clear that the Sabbath the Jews are concerned about in John’s account is not the weekly Sabbath (and, hence, it need not be the case that the day Jesus died was the day immediately preceding the weekly Sabbath.)

- (B) When all is said and done, however, I agree with Ehrman’s interpretation of Mark in this respect: Mark clearly identifies the day of Jesus’ death as the day of Passover.
- b. The following evidence is (or could be) cited in support of Ehrman’s claim that John depicts Jesus’ death as occurring on the day *before* Passover:
 - i. John explicitly states that Jesus’ crucifixion was on “the day of preparation for the Passover” (John 19:14). This puts Jesus’ death on the day before the Passover.
 - (A) The assertion in John 19:14 is mistranslated. Rightly understood, it offers no support for Ehrman’s interpretation of John. It should not be translated “the day of preparation for the Passover,” as if it were describing the day when preparations were made for the Passover meal. Rather, it should be translated “the Day of Preparation that occurs on Passover.” John’s point is that Passover, by its very nature, is a *paraskeue*, a Day of Preparation. Passover must always, necessarily, be a day of preparation—that is, the day before a Sabbath. Since Passover is always, necessarily, the day before the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and since the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is always, necessarily according to the Mosaic Law, a holy Sabbath—then it follows that Passover must always, necessarily, be a *paraskeue*, a day of preparation for a Sabbath. The phrase John uses is *paraskeue tou pascha* (paraskeuh\ touv paʒsca)—literally, a day of preparation *of* Passover. This does not mean a day of preparation *for* Passover (as some translations render it). Rather, it means a day of preparation *during* Passover. (Literally, a day of preparation that is Passover.) In other words, John was describing the fact that Passover itself was a day of preparation. In the context, John seems to intend to emphasize the urgency with which the Jews were interacting with Pilate. As a day of preparation for a Sabbath, Passover was a very busy day. They wanted to get on with their responsibilities. Hence, they just wanted Pilate to decide to do what they wanted him to do (namely, crucify Jesus) and be done with it. They didn’t have time to negotiate and bargain with him. “It is Passover, a day of preparation. Could you just get on with it, Pilate!”
 - (B) See note below as well, B.3.b.ii.

- ii. Two times, John depicts the day of Jesus’ crucifixion as occurring on the day of preparation: John 19:31 and 19:42. John intends by this to suggest that Jesus was crucified on the day of preparation *for* the Passover. Hence, it was the day *before* the Passover—not the day of Passover—on which he was crucified. (At least, Ehrman could use this argument. It is not exactly clear if this is what he intends.)
- (A) If he were to advance this argument, Ehrman would be wrong in his interpretation of *paraskeue* (a day of preparation) and in his interpretation of John’s intent in describing Jesus’ death as occurring on the *paraskeue*.
- (1) The word that is translated as “the day of preparation” is the Greek word *paraskeue*. There are several important points regarding this word:
- (a) When Mark (14:12) describes Jesus’ disciples as “preparing” the Passover meal, he does not use the verb *paraskeuazo*; he uses a different verb, *hetoimazo*. Nor does he use the noun *paraskeue* to describe that day. So, while the day before the Passover is a day when one must “prepare” the Passover meal, there is no evidence that the technical term *paraskeue* (day of preparation) is ever used to designate the day before the Passover.
- (b) Indeed, nowhere in the New Testament, can one find any clear, incontrovertible evidence that *paraskeue* is ever used to refer to the day before Passover. All the N.T. evidence points to its being a technical term to designate the day before a Sabbath day.
- (c) *Paraskeue* appears to be used as a technical term to describe a day when one needs to prepare his meals—and make other necessary preparations—for the following day, precisely because he will not be able to cook or otherwise work on the following day. The day before Passover is *not* such a day (unless Passover just happens to fall on the same day as the weekly Sabbath). Hence, it would make no sense to call the day before Passover a *paraskeue*. One need not prepare to not do any work on a typical Passover day because work is not (in a typical year) religiously forbidden on the Passover. Indeed, one has to work on the Passover to prepare for the Sabbath that always, necessarily comes on the following day.
- (i) Ehrman acknowledges that *paraskeue* in Mark 15:42 (also, see Luke 23:54) clearly denotes the day before the Sabbath. Hence, he must clearly acknowledge that the term itself is not a technical term for the day before the Passover. Hence, one cannot argue that *paraskeue* clearly needs to denote the day before the Passover in John.
- (ii) Clearly *paraskeue* must mean the day before a Sabbath in John 19:31, for it says, “Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation (*paraskeue*), so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day),

asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.” The same would seem to be true of John 19:42, though John does not make it explicit there.

- (2) In both of these passages (John 19:31 and 19:42), the point is clear: They need to get Jesus’ body off the cross and buried in a tomb quickly, for it is a *paraskeue* (day of preparation) and the Sabbath is about to begin. If it was a day of preparation for the Passover, then the connection John is making makes no sense. Why would they need to get Jesus into the tomb quickly on the day before Passover—for Passover is not (necessarily) a Sabbath? Only if the day before Passover just so happened to fall on the day of preparation (*paraskeue*) for the weekly Sabbath would it provide any reason for them to have to get Jesus in the tomb quickly.
 - (a) The latter appears to be the way Ehrman wants to salvage this interpretation of John (as depicting Jesus’ death on the day before the Passover). He seems to want to reason as follows: according to John’s account of it, in the year of Jesus’ death (as it happened), Passover and the weekly Sabbath fell on the same day. Hence, while Jesus’ was crucified on the day before Passover (and not on Passover itself), it was nonetheless a *paraskeue* (a day to prepare for not working on the next day) because, as it happened, the next day was the weekly Sabbath as well as Passover.
 - (b) This proposal, of course, removes these statements as any *evidence* for Ehrman’s interpretation that John is depicting Jesus’ death as occurring on the day before the Passover. Once he acknowledges that the day of preparation is a day of preparation for the Sabbath (and not for the Passover itself), then the fact that John depicts it as a day of preparation does not require it to be a day of preparation for (and hence the day before) the Passover.
 - (c) Furthermore, there would be a significant problem with this proposal:
 - (i) Suppose that Jesus died on Friday, and suppose that in that year (as it happens) Passover and the weekly Sabbath coincide (on Friday–Saturday). In such an event, not only is Friday–Saturday a Sabbath (the weekly Sabbath), but so also is Saturday–Sunday (the holy Sabbath that is required on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread). In other words, if Passover coincides with the weekly Sabbath in a particular year, there will be two consecutive Sabbath days in that year (Friday–Saturday and then Saturday–Sunday). If that were the case in the year that Jesus died, then the women could not have lawfully gone to the tomb early on Sunday morning to prepare Jesus’ body. Sunday morning would have been the second of two consecutive

Sabbaths in that year. Accordingly, it is not possible for Jesus to have died on a Friday, the day *before* Passover. (Hence, the traditional designation of the day of Jesus death as Friday is not possible.)

- iii. The chief priests will not enter Pilate’s residence because they do not want to defile themselves and not be able to eat the Passover. Hence, this has to be sometime *before* the day of Passover. (See A.3.b.iii. above.)
 - (A) I have already shown above (A.3.b.iii.) that this is a misinterpretation of what concerns the members of the Sanhedrin.
- iv. John does nothing to indicate in any way whatsoever that Jesus’ crucifixion was on the day of Passover.
 - (A) This may be true. But it may not be true. It is quite reasonable to assume that Pilate’s custom to release a prisoner to the Jews at Passover (John 18:39) was something that occurred *on the day of Passover itself* every year. If that is a reasonable assumption, then John is clearly and unmistakably locating Jesus’ death on the day of Passover, for it is on the very day that Pilate offers to release Jesus to the Jews (when they demand the release of Barabbas instead) that Jesus is ultimately crucified.

C. Time of Jesus’ crucifixion:

- 1. Ehrman’s interpretation:
 - a. Mark presents Jesus’ crucifixion as occurring sometime between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m.
 - i. Ehrman, of course, believes that Mark depicts Jesus’ crucifixion as occurring on the day of Passover, which is the day after John suggests it occurred.
 - b. John presents Pilate as sentencing Jesus to be crucified sometime between 11:00 a.m. and noon.
 - i. Ehrman, of course, believes that John depicts Jesus’ crucifixion as occurring on the day before Passover, the day before Mark suggests it occurred.
- 2. Ehrman’s possible claim:
 - a. I have already shown that there is no merit to Ehrman’s suggestion that Mark and John describe Jesus’ crucifixion as occurring on different days (one on the day before Passover, the other on the day of Passover). But, if one concedes that Mark and John are speaking of the same day, one nonetheless confronts a different problem, a different contradiction.
 - b. Namely, one confronts this apparent contradiction between Mark and John: Mark claims that Jesus is on the cross beginning some time between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m.; John claims that Jesus is not even sentenced by Pilate to be crucified until some time between 11:00 a.m. and noon.

3. Ehrman’s evidence; my criticism:

- a. Mark says that Jesus was crucified during the third hour: “It was the third hour when they crucified him” (Mark 15:25). The third hour would be, roughly, the time that occurs during the third hour after sunrise. In our time (assuming a 6:00 a.m. sunrise), that would be some time between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m.
- b. John says that Pilate pronounced sentence and handed Jesus over to be crucified in the sixth hour: “...Now it was the day of preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, ‘Behold, your King!’ So they cried out, ‘Away with him...crucify him!’ ...So he then handed him over to them to be crucified” (John 19:13–16). The sixth hour would be, roughly, during the sixth hour after sunrise. In our time (assuming a 6:00 am sunrise), that would be some time between 11:00 a.m. and noon.
 - i. Ehrman assumes two things: (i) that both John and Mark are employing exactly the same method for indicating time; and (ii) that the method involves dividing the night (from sunset to sunrise) into 12 “hours” and dividing the day (from sunrise to sunset) into 12 “hours.” While these are plausible assumptions, in light of the conflict it creates between Mark and John, it is equally possible that John is using a different method for indicating time.
 - (A) It is important to note that, in the ancient world, an “hour” (*hora*, *węra*) was not a duration of 60 minutes as measured in our time. An “hour” (*hora*, *węra*) was simply a designated segment of the night or day. It was more like our term “watch.” During third “hour” is like saying during the third “watch.” The ninth hour of the day is the ninth “watch” of the day. So, an “hour” (*hora*, *węra*) could be of longer or shorter duration than our modern hour—it simply depended upon how many segments the night and day were divided into.
 - ii. I would propose the following theory:
 - (A) Mark is indicating time according to just that method of time-telling as Ehrman has assumed.
 - (1) In all of my calculations, I assume sunset to be 6:00 p.m. (our time) and sunrise to be 6:00 a.m. (our time). In actual fact, the ancients counted from the actual sunrise and the actual sunset. Hence, the duration of a *hora* would vary from season to season. Daylight *horas* grew shorter in winter and longer in summer. Nighttime *horas* grew longer in winter and shorter in summer.
 - (2) Jesus was crucified in the third “hour” (*hora*, *węra*). Under the system I assume here, that would be roughly between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m.
 - (B) John, however, is indicating time by a system that divides the twenty-four-hour day (from the sunset that began the day to the following sunset) into ten “hours” (*hora*, *węra*), that is, into ten different “watches.” The first five “hours” (*hora*, *węra*) [the first “hour” through the fifth “hour”] would run

from sunset to the following sunrise. The second five “hours” (*hora*, *wçra*) [the sixth “hour” through the tenth “hour”] would run from sunrise to sunset. Under such a system, each “hour” (*hora*, *wçra*) would have a duration of two hours and twenty-four minutes (as measured in our modern time).

- (1) Jesus was handed over to be crucified in the sixth “hour.” Under the system I assume here, that would be roughly between 6:00 a.m. and 8:24 a.m. (The fifth “hour” would end at sunrise. So, the sixth “hour” consists of the next two hours and twenty-four minutes after sunrise.)
- (C) If I am right about the system John is using, there is no conflict (no contradiction) between Mark and John. John says that Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified in the sixth “hour,” that is, sometime during the first “watch” after sunrise. In his method of reckoning, that would be between 6:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Mark says that Jesus was hung on the cross during the third “hour,” that is, during the third “watch” after sunrise. In his method of reckoning, that would be between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. There would, of course, have to have been some time that transpired from the time that Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified until the time when he was actually nailed to the cross. Therefore, if we reckon these two accounts as I have done, these two accounts are completely consistent with one another: Pilate sentenced Jesus to be crucified sometime after 6:00 a.m. (and before 8:30 a.m.), and Jesus’ is actually being nailed to the cross by 9:00 a.m.
- (D) The objection could be raised that there is no historical record of anyone using the method that I have just proposed as the method that John is using.
- (1) It is true, so far as I know, that there is no independent record of any such method of indicating time. However, in view of the following line of reasoning, it is reasonable to expect that John intends to indicate the same time for Jesus’ crucifixion as Mark does: (i) Depicting Jesus’ crucifixion as occurring at midday (or early afternoon) is not a trivial, merely numerical difference from depicting his crucifixion as occurring in the early morning. One would even need to know what time it is to experience the difference between an event occurring in the early morning from an event occurring at midday or later. (ii) *In all other respects*—besides the time of day that Jesus’ crucifixion occurred—Mark’s and John’s accounts are entirely consistent with one another. Therefore, (iii) it is reasonable to expect John and Mark to be consistent in something as apparent and non-trivial as the time of Jesus’ crucifixion (especially, the time considered qualitatively). Therefore, (iv) it is reasonable to expect John and Mark to be indicating roughly the same time of day for Jesus’ crucifixion.
 - (2) Given that crucifixion is intended to be a slow, torturous death—not a quick death—it stands to reason that the early morning (8:00 to 9:00 a.m.) time given for Jesus’ crucifixion would be preferable to an early afternoon time. (Since Jesus must be dead and in the tomb by sunset,

and since one does not typically die quickly by crucifixion, it stands to reason that Jesus was hung on the cross sooner rather than later.) Hence, Mark’s time as Ehrman and I construe it (8:00 to 9:00 a.m.) seems to indicate the correct time for Jesus’ crucifixion.

- (3) In order for John and Mark to be indicating roughly the same time of day for Jesus’ crucifixion (that is, 8:00 to 9:00 a.m.), it follows that John must be employing an entirely different method for indicating the time of day.
- (4) Arguably, therefore, John could be construed to be a reliable historical witness to the existence of an entirely different method for indicating time of day. Indeed, one plausible theory for that alternate method is the sort of method for indicating time that I have just proposed above.
- (5) There were other institutions in first-century Jewish society that could very well have relied on their own distinctive methods for dividing up the day. For example, there could quite plausibly have been “watches” of the day wherein priests carried out their prescribed duties in the temple. John could very well be giving witness to an alternative method for indicating the time of day that was drawn from some other institution of first-century Jewish society (e.g., the temple). At the very least, this is certainly a plausible possibility. And, certainly, no one (including Ehrman) has any basis from which he can claim to know with certainty that such is not the case.

When Jesus Died: Contradictions between *Mark* and *John* Alleged by Ehrman

Mark	John
<p>In the afternoon, Jesus’ disciples prepare the Passover meal to eat that evening, at the beginning of Passover.</p> <p>“On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, ‘Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?’” (Mark 14:12)</p>	
Sundown begins the “Day of PASSOVER ”	Sundown begins the “ DAY OF PREPARATION ”
<p>Jesus eats the Passover meal with his disciples. It is quite clearly presented as a Passover meal with specific elements of the Passover meal explicitly mentioned. Jesus gives a new interpretation of the Passover meal.</p>	<p>Jesus eats a meal with his disciples. It is not clearly presented as a Passover meal. There is no explicit mention of any elements distinctive of a Passover meal. Jesus gives a final teaching to his disciples before his death.</p>
<p>Jesus and his disciples travel to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Jesus’ location is betrayed by Judas, and Jesus is arrested there and taken to be tried by the Sanhedrin.</p>	<p>Jesus and his disciples travel across the Kidron to a garden hideout. Jesus’ location is betrayed by Judas, and Jesus is arrested there and taken to be tried by the Sanhedrin.</p>
<p>Early in the morning (of Passover), Jesus is taken to be tried by Pilate.</p>	<p>Early in the morning (of the Day of Preparation), Jesus is taken to be tried by Pilate.</p> <p>“Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.” (John 18:28)</p>
<p>Pilate offers to the crowd to release Jesus. The crowd refuses Jesus and accepts Barabbas instead. They want Jesus to be crucified.</p>	<p>Pilate offers to the crowd to release Jesus. The crowd refuses Jesus and accepts Barabbas instead. They want Jesus to be crucified.</p>
<p>To appease the crowd, Pilate hands Jesus over to be scourged and then crucified.</p>	<p>Just before noon (11 am –noon) on that same day (The Day of Preparation for the Passover), Pilate pronounces that Jesus is to be taken and crucified.</p> <p>“Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, ‘Behold, your King!’ So they cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!’... So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.” (John 19:13-16)</p>

<p>Jesus is taken to Golgotha and crucified on that same day, beginning about 8–9 am. Many different things transpired over the hours that he hung on the cross. “It was the third hour when they crucified Him.” (Mark 15:25)</p>	<p>Jesus was taken to Golgotha and crucified. Many different things transpired over the hours that he hung on the cross.</p>
<p>Between 11 am and noon, darkness came over the land while Jesus was hanging on the cross. It lasted until somewhere between 2 and 3 pm. “When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.” (Mark 15:33)</p>	
<p>Jesus died somewhere between 2 and 3 pm. “At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ... ‘MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?’ ... And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.” (Mark 15:34–37)</p>	<p>Jesus died. “Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.” (John 19:30)</p>
	<p>Soldiers seek to hasten Jesus’ (and others’) death so that they are not left hanging on the cross on the Sabbath day that is approaching. They must remove them from cross before sundown. “Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.” (John 19:31)</p>
<p>Jesus is quickly buried before Sabbath day arrives at sundown (6 pm). “When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.” (Mark 15:42-43)</p>	<p>Jesus is quickly buried before Sabbath day arrives at sundown (6 pm). “Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” (John 19:42) {How does Ehrman reconcile 19:31 with 19:42 on his interpretation?}</p>
<p>Sundown begins the “FIRST DAY OF FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD” (The Day after Passover)</p>	<p>Sundown begins the “Day of PASSOVER”</p>

“Irreconcilable” Contradictions

(1) Time of Jesus’ crucifixion: noon, on day before Passover (John) versus 9:00 am on day of Passover (Mark)

(2) Last Supper: NOT a Passover meal (John) versus a Passover meal (Mark)

Ehrman’s assumptions:

[1] Jesus died on a Friday, as tradition suggests. And, related to that, when any of the accounts mention the Sabbath, it is the weekly Sabbath that is in view.

[2] The Day of Preparation (*paraskeue*) mentioned in John 19:14 is the same day mentioned in Mark 14:12, the day that Jesus asked his disciples to **prepare** the Passover meal. In other words, Ehrman assumes that the Day of Preparation (*paraskeue*) is the day on which the Passover lamb is offered at the temple and the Passover meal is prepared.

[3] John says nothing to suggest that the “Last Supper” is a Passover meal because he does not intend to suggest that it is a Passover meal. He does not intend to portray it as a Passover meal. (He does not mention Jesus’ disciples preparing for the Passover meal, and he does not mention the re-interpretation of the elements of the Passover meal.)

[4] John intends to portray the trial of Jesus as occurring the day before the Passover when he depicts the Chief Priests as not wanting to go into Pilate’s residence and thereby make themselves unclean before they “eat the Passover.”

[5] John is employing the same time-telling convention as Mark.

[6] The purpose of John’s (and Mark’s) account is to propagate his particular understanding of Jesus and what he did; it is to propagate his “theology.” It is not his purpose to tell his readers exactly what transpired in the events surrounding Jesus’ death.

When Jesus Died: My Interpretation

		Mark	John
Day before Passover (Mo/Tu)	Passover lamb offered		
Noon – 6:00 pm	Disciples prepare Passover meal	Mark 14:12–16	
Day of Passover (Tu/Wed)	Day that Passover lamb is eaten		<i>Paraskeue</i> > Day of Preparation for “High” Sabbath
6:00 pm – midnight	Passover meal	Mark 14:17–25	John 13:1–17:26
	Garden Gethsemane	Mark 14:26–42	John 18:1
midnight–6:00 am	Jesus’ arrest	Mark 14:43–52	John 18:2–12
	Trial before Sanhedrin	Mark 14:53–72	John 18:13–27
6:00 am–noon	Pilate “tries” Jesus and hands over to be crucified	Mark 15:1–15	John 18:28–19:16 Pilate pronounces judgment sometime during the sixth hour (6:00–8:24 am)
	Jesus beaten by soldiers, taken to be crucified	Mark 15:16–21	
	Jesus hung on a cross	Mark 15:22–32 Crucifixion begins sometime during third hour (8–9 am) and lasts for several hours	John 19:17–27
Noon–6:00 pm	Three hours of darkness	Mark 15:33 From sixth hour to ninth hour (from 11 am–noon to 2–3 pm)	
	Jesus dies on the cross in ninth hour (2–3 pm)	Mark 15:34–41	John 19:28–37
	Jesus buried quickly before Sabbath begins	Mark 15:42–47	John 19:38–42
Sabbath: 1st Day Feast Unleavened Bread (Wed/Thur)	<i>Officials conspire to guard Jesus’ tomb (Matthew)</i>		
Day of Preparation for weekly Sabbath (Thur/Fri)	<i>Women prepare spices for burial (Luke)</i>		
Weekly Sabbath (Fri/Sat)	<i>Rest</i>		
First Day of Week (Sat/Sun)	<i>Resurrection</i>		