

THE DAY OF THE CRUCIFIXION

--A. Ralph Johnson

Three different days have been proposed for the crucifixion of Jesus

1. **Friday**, the date given by most commentators
2. **Thursday**, with a “*high Sabbath*” followed by the weekly Sabbath
3. **Wednesday**, with Thursday as a “*high Sabbath*,” followed by a day of preparation between it and the weekly Sabbath.

Mark 16:9 says he was risen on the first day of the week.

Fifteen times it says He arose “on the third day” after he was killed. Counting back from Sunday three days puts his crucifixion on Friday, the day before the Sabbath.

The primary problem is the difficulty of reconciling Matthew 12:40 with the other scriptures concerning the resurrection.

Matthew 12:40 *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

I. CALCULATING THE DAYS

All three of the synoptic gospels indicate that Jesus died about the ninth hour. (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46)

Matthew 27 says,

*45 Now from the sixth **hour** there was darkness over all the land unto the **ninth hour**. 46 And about the **ninth hour** Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* that is to say, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* 47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, *This man calleth for Elias.* 48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. 49 The rest said, *Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.* 50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.*

This would put his death about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. He had to be buried before sundown, around 6: PM when the Sabbath began. That would be the first day of our count towards the resurrection.

The day following is said to have been “the Sabbath.” Because it was the Passover Sabbath that began the countdown to Pentecost (Lev. 23:15). John calls it a “*high day*” (John 19:31). This included a night and a day, the second day.

If the crucifixion was on Friday afternoon and the resurrection was before sunrise on Sunday, then, some would view the resurrection as “on the third day” (Friday, Saturday and Sunday). However, our technical view would consider it, as only two days and two nights (one part day and one whole night, plus one whole day and one part of a night).

		Fri. day afternoon Preparation Crucified Buried 1 st day	Sat. night High Sabbath 1 st night	Sat. day High Sabbath 2 nd day	Sun. night 2 nd night	
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If the crucifixion took place on Friday afternoon and the resurrection was after sunrise on Sunday, then the resurrection would be “on the third day.” However, technically, there would have been three days and two nights (two parts of days, two whole nights, and one whole day).

		Fri. day afternoon Preparation Crucified Buried 1 st day	Sat. night High Sabbath 1 st night	Sat. day High Sabbath 2 nd day	Sun. night 2 nd night	Sun. day morning Raised 3 rd day
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WHEN WAS HE RAISED?

Mark 16:9 “Now when he was risen early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene...”

Some Saturday keepers place his resurrection late on Saturday. They raise two objections.

OBJECTION: By moving the comma after “week” to follow “risen” it can be made to say that it was on the first day of the week that he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, not that it was the first day of the week that he was raised.

ANSWER: This poses several problems.

1. There is no grammatical basis for such a claim, and the translators do not generally reflect that view.
2. It does not solve the problems in the text involving the counting of the days.

There are clear indications that the first day of the week was the day upon which the church met to eat the Lord’s supper (Acts 20:7, cf. Acts 2:42; 1Cor. 11:17-34), and that was the day they took their offerings (1Cor. 16:1, 2).

From the most ancient times (long before the edict of Constantine), Christians met on the first day of the week, which they called “The Lord’s Day.” They unanimously recognized that Sunday was the day He arose. (See quotations farther below)

OBJECTION: Mark 16:9 is in doubt as being in the original. Some of the most ancient manuscripts have it either missing or have a shorter ending.

ANSWER: In those manuscripts where it is missing it seems clear that there originally was an ending that had been lost. Many reliable authorities accept this as the proper ending.

EVIDENCE CITED IN FAVOR OF A SABBATH RESURRECTION

Those who opt for a Sabbath resurrection cite Matthew 28:1 which some translations render as "*late on the Sabbath came Mary Magdalene...*"

ANSWER:

Many other translations render Matt. 28:1, "*After the Sabbath...*" (Revised Standard Version; New Revised Standard; New King James etc.)

Matthew continues to say, "*...as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week*" (28:1). This sounds like early morning, which is exactly what the other gospels indicate (Mark 16:1, 2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).

Mark says that Mary Magdalene and other women came to the tomb with spices, "*when the Sabbath was past*" (Mark 16)

Luke says that "*on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they* (the women --23:55, including Mary Magdalene --24:10) *came unto the tomb, bringing spices*" (Luke 24:1).

John says "*on the first day of the week*" Mary Magdalene came early, "*while it was yet dark.*" By Jewish time, "dark" would be the first day of the week (Gen. 1:5; Lev. 23:32).

OBJECTION: None of these scriptures tell the day upon which Jesus was raised. They only tell when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb.

ANSWER: It is clear that the women came to the tomb at sunrise on the first day of the week. Did Jesus arise on Saturday and then play dead for 12 hours until the women came and the stone was rolled away?

If the resurrection scriptures are rejected then we must turn to calculating from the day when Jesus died.

As we have seen above, the scriptures clearly teach that this was the day before the Sabbath. However, some claim there was more than one Sabbath in that week. They maintain that when it speaks of a "high Sabbath" that would be a different one than the weekly Sabbath. The answer to that, of course, is that if that Sabbath was the Passover, it would be a high Sabbath. However, let's see if the Scriptures support the possibility of two Sabbaths.

THE CLAIM FOR A WEDNESDAY CRUCIFIXION

A Wednesday crucifixion simply will not fit. Even if we accept the claim that Jesus arose on the Sabbath, it makes him rise on the fourth day, failing to square the fifteen scriptures that

say he was raised “on the third day.”

Wed. day afternoon Preparation	Thur. night High Sabbath	Thur. day High Sabbath	Fri. night	Fri. day	Sat. night Sabbath	Sat. day afternoon Sabbath
Crucified 1 st day	In grave 1 st night	2 nd day	2 nd night	3 rd day	3 rd night	Raised 4 th day

Wednesday advocates claim that Mark 16:1 is speaking of them coming to the tomb on a day between the “*high Sabbath*” and the weekly Sabbath. They contend that verse 2 is speaking of coming a second time on the first day of the week when the sun was risen.

ANSWER:

The tomb was sealed and the Roman guard would not have permitted access between the Sabbaths.

If there had been a day between Sabbaths, and the Disciples had access, surely would have completed the embalming on that day.

No day between Sabbaths is anywhere indicated.

Mark 16:1-2 is cited as indicating two different occasions, the first when they purchased the spices after the high Sabbath, and verse 2, coming to the tomb following the resurrection. Actually, verse 2 is just the result of verse 1. Nothing is said of different days.

OBJECTION: It is argued that Sunday night following the Sabbath, the women could not have purchased the spices (Mark 16:1). Therefore, this must have taken place on a day between the two Sabbaths.

ANSWER:

There is no reason to question their purchase of spices immediately after the Sabbath. Throughout history, business has often continued after dark. The disciples thought that Jesus sent Judas to buy things for the feast at night (John 13:29-30). Jesus was taken in the evening after the Passover supper and the Jews were up all night trying Him (Matt. 26:75; 27:1). The story of the five foolish virgins speaks of them going at midnight to buy oil. They had oil lights for night activities even in those days. Paul preached until midnight (Acts 20:7). It is clear that it was possible to buy things after dark.

The claim that mention of it being a “high Sabbath” (John 19:31) distinguishes it from the weekly Sabbath, does not hold up. If the weekly Sabbath was a Passover Sabbath, it would be a “high” day.

OBJECTION: Daniel 9:27 says the Messiah was to be cut off *in the midst of the week*. That would place the crucifixion on Wednesday.

ANSWER:

Daniel 9:24-27 is speaking of a prophetic period of 70 weeks of years, like in Ezekiel 4:4-

6. Verse 24 of Daniel 9 says the count begins with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. There was to be 69 weeks of years and in the midst of the 70th week he was to be “cut off,” bringing about the end of the sacrificial system.

CLAIM FOR A THURSDAY CRUCIFIXION

A Thursday crucifixion, with Christ being raised Sunday night, most closely fits the days and nights, but it presents other problems.

First, a Thursday crucifixion with a Sunday resurrection has him raised on the fourth rather than “*on the third day.*” Thursday would be the first. Friday, the second. Saturday, the third. Sunday would be a FOURTH day.

	Thur. day afternoon Preparation Crucified Buried 1 st day	Fri. night High Sabbath 1 st night	Fri. day High Sabbath 2 nd day	Sat. night Sabbath 2 nd night	Sat. day Sabbath 3 rd day	Sun. night Raised 3 rd night
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If we try to make “day” mean, daylight hours, we have the problem that, since he died and was buried during the day before the Sabbath began, the third day would fall on Saturday but that only gives two nights (Friday and Saturday).

	Thur. day afternoon Preparation Crucified Buried 1 st day	Fri. night High Sabbath 1 st night	Fri. day High Sabbath 2 nd day	Sat. night Sabbath 2 nd night	Sat. day Sabbath Raised? 3 rd day	
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If we extend the resurrection to after sun-up, we end up with both four days and four daylight periods.

Here again, we have problems with the problem that no place do we find two Sabbaths, back-to-back with each other.

IMPORTANCE OF THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD

The most important factor in deciding the day of crucifixion is that it took place on the “*Day of Preparation*” followed by the Sabbath. The third day is the first day of the week.

All attempts to represent Jesus as crucified on any other day than Friday require two Sabbaths. However, there was never any mention of more than one Sabbath between the day of crucifixion and the day of resurrection.

Matthew specifies that the day the Jews set up their guard at the tomb was on the “*morrow*” after

the crucifixion. He identifies this as “the day after the preparation” (Matt. 27:62). This had to be the Sabbath because all of the accounts indicate the day after the preparation was the Sabbath.

The next thing said is “*after the Sabbath was passed, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel from the Lord descended...*”(Matt. 28:1-2).

Mark places the crucifixion on the day of preparation, which he identifies as “the day before the Sabbath” (Mark 15:42). He then says, “*And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James...bought spices...and very early on the first day of the week they came to the tomb*” (Mark 16:1-2).

Luke is very explicit. He says the day they put Him into the tomb “*was the day of preparation, and the Sabbath drew on*” (23:54). He then says they rested on the Sabbath, and follows this immediately with coming to the tomb very early on the first day of the week.

John says the crucifixion was on “*the day of Preparation*” (John 19:31). He recounts the soldiers piercing Jesus, and Joseph putting His body into his own tomb. He then says, “*Now on the first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet dark, unto the tomb, and seeth the stone taken away from the tomb*” (John 20:1)

In none of these accounts is there any mention of a second Sabbath, nor is any room for one provided.

So, how do we get Jesus “*three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*”? Everything else can be harmonized with little difficulty, but this is a tough one.

Since any part of a day is a “day,” if He died on Friday and was raised after dawn on Sunday, the problem is not there. The problem is, how to get “*three nights*”? The four gospel writers indicate only two.

Most authorities suggest that the answer is in the Hebrew way of expressing a “day.”

Wesley says,

40. Three days and three nights — It was customary with the eastern nations to reckon any part of a natural day of twenty-four hours, for the whole day. Accordingly they used to say a thing was done after three or seven days, if it was done on the third or seventh day, from that which was last mentioned. Instances of this may be seen, 1 Kings 20:29; and in many other places. And as the Hebrews had no word to express a natural day, they used night and day, or day and night for it. So that to say a thing happened after three days and three nights, was with them the very same, as to say, it happened after three days, or on the third day. See Esther 4:16; 5:1; Genesis 7:4, 12; Exodus 24:18; 34:28. Jonah 2:1.

Thus, from the Hebrew perspective, any part of a day was “night and day.” Three days would be expressed as “three days and nights,” even though the third day was only a part of a day. The Greeks expressed this with the word, “nuchtheameron” (#3574 **nucqh,meron**).

“ON” THE THIRD DAY OR “AFTER” THE THIRD DAY?

Mark 8:31 says, “**After** three days” he was to rise again. This need not be made to conflict with the many statements that say he was to rise “**on** the third day.” It means, “after the third day had come.”

SCRIPTURES THAT SPECIFY HIS RESURRECTION WAS **ON** THE THIRD DAY

1. Matthew 16:21. *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the **third day**.*
2. Matthew 17:23. *And they shall kill him, and the **third day** he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.*
3. Matthew 20:19. *And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the **third day** he shall rise again.*
4. Matthew 27:64 *Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the **third day**, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.*
5. Mark 9:31 *For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the **third day**.*
6. Mark 10:34 *And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the **third day** he shall rise again.*
7. Luke 9:22 *Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the **third day**.*
9. Luke 13:32 *And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to **day** and to morrow, and the **third day** I shall be perfected.*
10. Luke 18:33 *And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the **third day** he shall rise again.*
11. Luke 24:7 *Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the **third day** rise again.*
12. Luke 24:21 *But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to **day** is the **third day** since these things were done.*

13. Luke 24:46 *And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the **third day**:*

14. Acts 10:40 *Him God raised up the **third day**, and shewed him openly;*

15. 1 Corinthians 15:4 *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the **third day** according to the scriptures:*