

ON WHICH DAY OF THE WEEK WAS CHRIST CRUCIFIED AND ON WHICH DAY WAS HE RESURRECTED?

The Bible has much to say about the death, burial, and resurrection of our Messiah, Jesus Christ.

On at least **seventeen** separate occasions, Jesus, or His associates, spoke of the timetable involving His death and resurrection:

- Ten times it was specified that the resurrection would take place on the "third day" (Mat.16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 9:31; 10:34, Luke 9:22; 13:32; 18:33; 24:7,46).
- On five occasions they said, "in three days" (Matthew 26:61; 27:40, Mark 15:29, John 2:19-20).
- Twice they used the phrase, "after three days" (Matthew 27:63, Mark 8:31)
- And one time only Jesus spoke of His death as "three days and three nights" (Matthew 12:40).
- It is clear that all of these different expressions are used to describe the **very same event**. There seems to be no controversy regarding this point. "The third day," "in three days," "after three days," and "three days and three nights" are **equivalent terms** used in the Bible in reference to the resurrection of Jesus.
- (Note: In addition, Luke 10:40 states: "God raised him up the third day." As we shall see under "Inclusive Reckoning," below, the third day was Sunday.

Expressions Cannot Be Literal

- Now we ask the question: Can all of these expressions be taken in a strictly literal sense and still harmonize with each other? No! For example, "after three days" would certainly have to be interpreted as longer than seventy-two hours. "In three days" could mean anytime less than seventy-two hours, and "three days and three nights" could only mean exactly seventy-two hours to the second...
- All languages have "idioms." For example, in English we often say we can't accept an appointment with another person because "we are all tied up." We are not literally tied up, but the idiom in English means that we are busy with other things that prohibit us from accepting a given time for an appointment.

This may seem confusing? If so, it is because **man has placed his own interpretation upon the meaning of God's Word.** **We must let the scripture explain itself**, and, especially, we must **let Christ provide definitions** for the words which He spoke. See Isaiah 28:10. (“...line upon line; precept upon precept; here a little and there a little....” In other words, we need to **compare scripture with scripture** and then draw a conclusion based on the information in all of the relevant Biblical passages.

It would be a mistake in logic and principles of Biblical research and Biblical interpretation, to focus upon **any one** of the seventeen expressions used and neglect of the other sixteen phrases.

Inclusive Reckoning

The only way we can harmonize all of these apparently contradictory statements of Jesus is to understand them in the light of **inclusive reckoning** of time. This was the method used throughout the scripture in computing time, and we must apply the same method now, unless we want mass confusion. The unreasonable insistence upon the use of twentieth century English idioms of speech to interpret first century Greek or Hebrew has led to some extreme views by certain Christian groups. Jesus and His friends spoke and wrote in harmony with the common usage of the day, and that usage recognized inclusive reckoning of time. In simple language, this means that **any part of a day was counted as a whole day.**

Here is the authoritative statement of the *Jewish Encyclopedia* on this issue:

"A short time in the morning of the seventh day is counted as the seventh day; circumcision takes place on the eighth day, even though, of the first day only a few minutes after the birth of the child, these being counted as one day." *Jewish Encyclopedia, Volume 4, page 475.*

Therefore, **any small part of a day was reckoned as the entire twenty-four hour period.** It is the Hebrew method of counting time in days. Scores of contradictions would appear in both Old and New Testament if this principle were ignored. **We must compare Scripture with Scripture** and use the idiom of the language in which the scripture was written. Inclusive reckoning was taken for granted by all writers of the Scripture.

Examples from Scripture

Let us now notice a few examples of this usage in the scripture that will clarify the problem before us.

Noah: In Genesis 7:4, God said to Noah, "For **yet seven days**, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth." But in verse 10 we read, "And it came to pass **after seven days**, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth." The marginal reading expresses it as "**on** the seventh day." Historians would have a difficult time trying to figure that one out unless inclusive reckoning is used. When did the flood come? **In** seven days? **On** the seventh day? Or **after** seven days? The answer is simple when inclusive reckoning is applied. The day on which God spoke to Noah counted as the first day, and the day on which it started raining was the seventh day. Even if God spoke just ten minutes before the end of that first day, it was still counted as one of the seven. And if it started raining at noon on the last day, it was also counted one of the seven.

Taxes: Consider also the tax issue between King Rehoboam and the people. 2 Chronicles 10:5,12 says, "Come again unto me **after three days**. ... So ... all the people came to Rehoboam **on the third day**."

Christ clarifies how days were counted. He gave such a plain, conclusive explanation of how to locate the third day that no one would ever need to doubt again. "**Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following**" (Luke 13:32, 33).

The Resurrection on Sunday

Now, we must pinpoint the actual days of the week when these events took place. Again, we are amazed at the perfect harmony of the Scriptures on the subject. There can be no question but that He arose on Sunday, the first day of the week. Mark emphatically states, "**Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene**" (Mark 16:9). Sunday is the first day of the week, and that is when He was resurrected. Words could be no plainer. Even the original Greek construction of the text will allow no other meaning. He did not rise from the grave on Saturday, as some contend. Neither was He crucified on Wednesday. There is not a hint of scriptural evidence that He died on the fourth day of the week.

According to the inspired record, Christ was put to death on the "**preparation day**," and the preparation day was not Wednesday. In all the pages of biblical history, the preparation day has been Friday. Please read Mark 15:42, 43, "And now when the even was come, because it was the **preparation**, that is, **the day before the Sabbath**, Joseph of Arimathaea ... went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus."

The day following the crucifixion was not only the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, "**that Sabbath day was an high day**" (John 19:31). This means that a yearly Sabbath in that particular year happened to fall on the weekly Sabbath. In this case it was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matthew 26:17, Mark 14:1), which was also called the Passover Feast, the day following the slaying of the Passover lamb. (Luke 22:1). Luke clearly identified that preparation day as the one immediately preceding the weekly Sabbath (Luke 23:54 - 24:1).

Here is what Moses wrote in Leviticus: "In the first month, on the **fourteenth day** of the month between the two evenings is the LORD's Passover (sacrifice). And on the **fifteenth day of the same month** is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD; seven days ye shall eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have a holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work. And ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days; in the seventh day is a holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work." ([Leviticus 23:5](#))

Surely there can be no question as to the time elements involved. He died on the preparation day, or the day before the weekly Sabbath. The next day is designated as "the Sabbath day according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56). Since the commandment says, "The seventh day is the Sabbath" (Exodus 20:10), we know that this had to be the day we call Saturday.

Jesus was raised from the tomb anywhere between sunset on the Sabbath day (roughly 6PM Saturday) to sunrise the first day of the week (6AM Sunday), which encompassed the first 12 hour period of the third day.

Spices and Ointments

Furthermore, after describing the events of the preparation day in Luke 23:54-55, the next verse says:

Luke 23:56, "And they returned, and **prepared spices and ointments**; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment."

They prepared spices on the preparation day, then rested on the Sabbath day. Now notice what the very next verse says:

Luke 24:1, "Now upon the **first day** of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, **bringing the spices which they had prepared**"

Please take note that after preparing the spices on the afternoon of the crucifixion (Friday), and resting over the Sabbath (Saturday), they came to the tomb with the spices on the **first day** of the week (Sunday) to do the work of anointing. This was their first opportunity after the Sabbath to carry out the preparations made on Friday afternoon. This is when they discovered that Christ was risen.

If the crucifixion took place on Wednesday, how can we explain why the women waited until Sunday to come to the sepulchre? Why didn't they come Thursday or Friday to anoint His body? Did they not understand that after four days His body would be decomposing and their work of love would be in vain? **These many evidences constitute conclusive proof against a Wednesday crucifixion.**

The Four Days of Cornelius

Now let us consider a final clear-cut example of inclusive reckoning that should lay this point to rest with every open-minded reader. It is taken from the New Testament and reveals graphically how days were numbered in the days of Jesus. The following is an account of a 72 hour period, and it calls 72 exact hours "four days," not three days!

Start at Ninth Hour: In Acts 10:3, Cornelius "saw in a vision evidently about **the ninth hour** of the day an angel of God coming in to him." Follow the story carefully now. He was instructed in the vision to send men to Joppa and call for Peter. "And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and ... he sent them to Joppa" (verses 7-8). (Note: a part of this day was considered a full day.)

One day after vision: "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew night unto the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray" (verse 9). While praying he had a vision, and the men knocked at his door when his vision ended (verse 17). Please notice that this is one day after Cornelius received his angel visitor. Peter invited the men to come in and lodged them (verse 23).

Two days after vision: "... And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him" (verse 23). Take note that this is now the second day since the men were dispatched by Cornelius.

Three days after vision: "And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them" (verse 24). This is the third day since Cornelius had his angelic vision. But don't miss this point - a few minutes later, in talking to Peter, Cornelius said, "**Four days ago** I was fasting until this hour; and at **the ninth hour** I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing" (verse 30).

Three Days = Four days? (How?) Now we see the picture clearly. It had been **exactly three days**, to the **very hour** (the ninth hour). Yet Cornelius said, "**Four days ago.**" How could he say it was four days when it was only three days? Because he used inclusive reckoning, which meant that the initial day and last day (partial days) were called full days in inclusive reckoning...

Now, if Jesus were put in the tomb on Wednesday and resurrected on Saturday, scripture would have said it was four days. But it describes Jesus' resurrection as only three days. This is the way scripture describes the length of time Jesus was in the tomb. Even though it was only a part of those three days (part of the 6th day, the entire 7th day, part of the 1st day), it is counted as three full days! Friday (1), Sabbath (2), and Sunday (3) = Three Days!

Sir Isaac Newton Dates the Crucifixion and Passover

Scholars generally accept the premise that Newton is among the greatest physicists, astronomers, and mathematicians that the world has ever known. Some would say that he is the greatest. He discovered laws of motion, the law of gravity, and he validated Kepler's laws of the solar system.

In 1991, John P. Pratt published an article in ***QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY 32, SEPT. 1991***, in which he points out that Newton concluded that Passover and the crucifixion both fell on Friday, April 3, A.D. 33. To the objective mind, this testimony by Newton obviously supports the Biblical account of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

Conclusion

Therefore, we can conclude from ample and persuasive Biblical and scholarly evidence that Christ was crucified on Friday, rested in the tomb over the Sabbath, and arose the first day of the week.

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