

Jesus' Last Days Before His Ascension

On Which Day of the Week Was Jesus Crucified?

The traditional understanding of this subject is that Jesus was executed on a Friday and resurrected on the third day i.e., a Sunday. However, Sabbath-keepers often promote the idea that Jesus was resurrected on a Sabbath—a Saturday. So, in their attempt to make this fit the biblical data they propose that Jesus was executed on a Wednesday and so fitting in with a Saturday resurrection for him. Further to that, some even think that Jesus was executed on a Thursday and then resurrected on a Saturday. So, although the study of biblical chronology has a number of problems with certain events, it seems that scholarly opinion on this issue is consistent in demonstrating a Friday death and Sunday resurrection of Jesus, as leading Bible chronologist Jack Finegan shows, saying:

All four Gospels indicate that the day of the crucifixion of Jesus was a Friday (in our terminology), because they describe the following day as the Sabbath (Mark 15:42; Matt.28:1; Luke 23:56; John 19:31), our Saturday, and because they state that the visit of the women to the tomb on the next day was on the first day of the week (Mark 16:2; Matt.28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), our Sunday.

Handbook of Biblical Chronology p.354

Indeed, all four Gospels state that Jesus was crucified on the Day of Preparation (Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42). Accordingly, we need to identify which day was the Day of Preparation. Was it for the purpose of preparing for the Passover or for preparing for the weekly Sabbath? Indeed, there is no Bible record of the evening before the Passover day being called the Day of Preparation. However, the day before the weekly Sabbath was called the Day of Preparation and so was always the Friday of every week when the necessary food had to be prepared ahead of time for the weekly Sabbath (Saturday). In fact, in Mark's Gospel it is clearly stated that, "*It was almost the evening, and it was the **Preparation Day** (that is, **the day** before the Sabbath)*" (Mark 15:42). Also, the *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* says that:

The uniform impression conveyed by the Gospels is that the Crucifixion took place on Friday of Holy Week. If it were not for John 19:14, the point would never have come up for debate. p. 375

John's Gospel Harmonizes with the Synoptic Gospels

The argument presented by Sabbath-keepers for a 72-hour internment in the tomb for Jesus comes from John 19: 13, 14 which says:

"Pilate...brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat It was the Preparation (Gk paraskeue) Day of the Passover, about midday"

Certainly, John's statement here concerning the call to crucify Jesus does not contradict the statements of the other Gospel writers in showing that Jesus died on Preparation Day of the weekly Sabbath i.e., the Friday. Indeed, John's words simply meant that this particular Friday fell during Passover week. However, Sabbath-keepers explain this to mean the day of preparation for the Passover meal i.e., the day before the Passover festival and so leading to the thought that Jesus was crucified on Nisan 14th in contradiction of the Synoptic Gospels. In contrast to this, the text says: "**Preparation of the Passover**" rather than "for" it. So "Preparation" in John 19:14 means "Preparation Day" of that particular week i.e. Friday, the day before the Sabbath, as in all other occurrences of the word "Preparation" and as explained above. Furthermore, in John's Gospel all eight occurrences of the term "Passover" refer to **the entire week** of celebration not just to the first day because Jesus spoke specifically of "the first great day of Passover." Luke also shows this when he reports that: "*the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover*" (Luke 22:1). So "Preparation Day" in John 19:14 is **the "Friday" of that Passover week**, as most scholars acknowledge. So, John does not contradict the Synoptists in their showing that Jesus died on a Friday. Regarding John 19:14 the *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* says:

The NIV suggests a less difficult handling of the apparent discrepancy: “It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour.” This latter translation takes note of two very important matters of usage. First the word *paraskeue* had already by the first century A.D. become a technical term for “Friday,” since every Friday was the day of preparation for Saturday, that is, the Sabbath. In Modern Greek the word for “Friday” is *paraskeue*.

Second, the Greek term *tou pasch* (lit., “of the Passover”) is taken to be equivalent to the Passover Week. This refers to the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Heb. *massot*) that immediately followed the initial slaughtering and eating of the Passover lamb on the evening of the fourteenth day of Abib, which by Hebrew reckoning would mean the commencement of the fifteenth day right after sunset...Therefore, that which might be translated literally as: “the Preparation of Passover Week” must in context be rendered “Friday of Passover Week.” p.375.

Jesus Did Not Die When the Lambs for Private Homes Were Slaughtered

However, some Sabbath-keepers propose that, in the first century, there was a dispute over when Passover should be celebrated; and so there was a body of Jews who did not celebrate the Passover at the regularly accepted time; and therefore, rather than Jesus celebrating the Passover at the regular time, he celebrated it earlier. This then allows these Sabbath-keepers to speculate that Jesus died when the lambs were slaughtered in private homes. However, as a keeper of the Mosaic Law Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples on Nisan 14 during the twilight period as commanded in Numbers 9:2-3. Clearly the lambs for the families in private homes had already been slaughtered also “in the evening” of the 14th (Exod. 12:1-8). However, Jesus died when the lambs on the temple altar were later slaughtered on behalf of the whole nation of Israel. Again, from *The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* we learn that:

The hour of double sacrifice is drawing near. It is midday. The Passover lambs are being prepared for sacrifice, and the Lamb of God is likewise sentenced to death. It simply needs to be pointed out that the lambs referred to here are not those that were slaughtered and eaten in private homes—a rite Jesus had already observed with his disciples the night before—but the lambs to be offered on the altar of the Lord on behalf of the whole nation of Israel. p.376.

Furthermore, the *Handbook of Bible Chronology* by Jack Finegan states that:

In order to discuss this meal, it is necessary to recall the sequence of events in the observance of the Jewish feast of Passover. On the tenth day of the first month (Nisan = Mar/Apr), a lamb was selected for a household, then on the fourteenth day of the month the lamb was killed “in the evening” (Exod. 12:1-8). As explained above, the Hebrew is literally “between the two evenings,” and Josephus says that the sacrifices were made from the ninth to the eleventh hour, i.e., **from three to five o’clock in the afternoon**. Then “that night” (Exod 12:8; Lev 23:5) the Passover meal was eaten... if the day was reckoned according to the later practice from sunset to sunset, then the lamb was indeed slain on the fourteenth day of Nisan but the Passover meal held “that night” was actually eaten on the 15th day of Nisan which had begun at sunset. Jub.49:1 explicitly describes the observance in terms of the latter manner of reckoning:

Remember the commandment which the Lord commanded thee concerning the Passover, that thou shouldst celebrate it in it’s season on the **fourteenth** of the first month, that thou shouldst kill it before it’s evening, and they should eat it by night on the evening of the fifteenth from the time of the setting of the sun. p.354.

So, the order of events was: the lambs selected on the 10th Nisan by private households were taken by the family representative to the priests at the temple to be slaughtered. The carcass was then taken home by this family representative for it to be prepared—all on the Thursday, Nisan 14. The evening then became the 15th when the meal was eaten; whereas the time for the slaughter of lambs as a sacrifice **for the whole nation** was when Jesus died i.e., later on Friday Nisan 15.

Therefore, Jesus died at 3 p.m. on Friday 15th Nisan (the day of Preparation for the weekly Sabbath). Indeed, A. T. Robertson writes that:

Nearly all agree that the crucifixion occurred on Friday and the meal was eaten the evening before, our Thursday, but the beginning of the Jewish day, counting from sunset to sunset.

A Harmony of the Gospels p.279.

The Last Passover Celebrated by Jesus

Although, because of misunderstanding of John 19:14, there has been some issue over whether or not the Last Supper was actually a Passover meal, it is abundantly clear from the synoptic accounts that Jesus and his disciples did celebrate the actual Passover meal in his last year, after which he instituted the Lord's Supper by associating it with the third cup of wine. In particular Matthew's gospel makes it abundantly clear that the actual Passover meal was what was celebrated by Jesus:

*"When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he told his disciples, "You know that after two days **the Passover is coming**, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." ... ¹⁷Now on the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Where do you want us to **prepare for you to eat the Passover?**" ... ¹⁸"Go into the city," he said, "to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near. **I will celebrate the Passover** with my disciples at your house.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had instructed them, and they made preparations for the Passover. When it was evening, **he was reclining at the table** with the twelve disciples" (Matt. 26:1, 2, 17, 18-20).*

Additionally, the gospel accounts in Mark and Luke confirm what was recorded of this event described in Matthew:

*"...the scribes were seeking how to...kill him; for they were saying, 'Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot'.....On the first day of Unleavened Bread, **when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed**, His disciples said to him, 'Where do you want to go and **prepare** for you to eat the Passover'"(Mark 14:2, 12).*

*"Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. ... Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, **on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed** ... And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer'" (Luke 22: 1-7, 15).*

Furthermore, these texts show that the Passover lamb was sacrificed on the first day of Unleavened Bread and yet the disciples have not yet made preparations for celebrating the Passover. Evidently the lambs here were sacrificed before Jesus died and so were the ones sacrificed in the individual private households.

What about John 18:28?

This passage says:

*"Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Roman governor's residence—it was early in the morning. However, they didn't go into the governor's residence; otherwise they would become ritually contaminated, and **not able eat the Passover [meals].**"*

Does this passage really throw out the chronology proposed above from the synoptic Gospels? Indeed, it does not! The reason is that this is not referring to the one meal of the Passover which coincided with the first day of the week-long Festival of Unleavened Bread with its many meals. So, because of the close relation between Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the whole week was sometimes referred to as "Passover." So, these Jewish leaders had already eaten the meal of the actual Passover, but were anticipating the eating of meals for the rest of the week of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. They were therefore concerned about becoming ritually contaminated in a Gentile location.

So, because Jesus evidently died on Friday, Nisan 15 we must now study how long he was in the tomb so that we may know when he was resurrected.

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Why Jesus Did Not Die on a Thursday

The “Two Sabbaths” Idea Is Incorrect

It has been proposed that because there was a “high Sabbath” (John 19:31) that either the Thursday or the Friday was a Passover Sabbath in addition to the regular weekly Sabbath. However, there are no biblical or extra-biblical examples in support of this assumption; and John’s statement clearly shows that it was the Saturday that was a “high day” and no other day added on:

*“Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross **on the Sabbath** (for that Sabbath was a **high day** (Gk *megale hemera*)), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away” (John 19:31).*

Firstly, the Gospel accounts never suggest that two Sabbaths intervened between the day of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection Day. Nevertheless, some refer to the fact that the Greek word *sabbaton* for Sabbath in Matthew 28:1 is plural and rendered “Sabbaths” in interlinear translations and so implying that two Sabbaths were involved i.e., a Thursday or a Friday for the first and a Saturday for the second. This is a serious misunderstanding of the usage of Greek words because it is well known in commentaries that ***Sabbaton* is often plural in form but singular in meaning**. Furthermore, this plural form occurs in many texts where the context clearly shows it to refer to a single Sabbath as does John 19:31. This is as leading Bible teacher Harold W. Hoehner notes that:

The term Sabbath is frequently (one-third of all its New Testament occurrences) in the plural form in the New Testament when only one day is in view. For example, in Matthew 12:1-12 both the singular and plural forms are used (cf. esp. v. 5).

So, with John 19:31, the “**high day**” was the **only Sabbath** mentioned in the passage and so refers to the Saturday. It was a “high day” because it coincided with the Passover in that particular year. This is also shown in the later Rabbinic literature, according to Strack and Billerbeck, where the weekly Sabbath was a ‘high day’ if it fell on Nisan 15, because that was the first day of the Passover festival. This counters the argument by some Sabbath-keepers that the weekly Sabbath was never called “a high day.” Furthermore, it is incorrect to assume that all the references to the Sabbath found in the crucifixion narratives are referring to the annual ceremonial Passover Sabbath simply because certain annual feasts such as the Day of Atonement are designated as ‘Sabbath’ (Lev. 23:24, 32, 39). Such days are never designated simply as ‘Sabbath’ (Gk *sabbaton*), but by the compound expression *shabbath shabbathon* (Gk *sabbata sabbaton*), meaning “a sabbath of complete rest” (Lev 23:32; 16:31). This makes any interpretation of *sabbaton* to mean any annual feast day quite linguistically impossible. Additionally, the women who had seen Jesus buried and had left that area went home late Friday afternoon to rest for the Sabbath and then returned after the Sabbath was over. They, “...prepared anointing spices and perfumes. **On the Sabbath** they rested according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56). Also, Mark’s account states that: “**When the Sabbath was over**, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb” (Mark 16:1, 2).

Astronomic Tables Used for the Wrong Year

It has been proposed that astronomical tables prove that Jesus was crucified on the Thursday of April 6 in the year 30. Indeed, the accuracy of those tables is not disputed. However, it is not totally certain which years were those of Jesus’ birth, or the start of his ministry and his death. In fact, there is somewhat greater evidence that Jesus died in 33 A.D., rather than in 30 A.D., as the information in Appendix A shows concerning when Jesus was born and when he died.

Jesus Was Entombed Late on “The Day of Preparation”– a Friday

Mark makes it absolutely clear that Friday was the day Jesus was entombed because he uses the two

technical terms—*paraskeue* and *pro-sabbaton*, both of which unmistakably designate the day that we call ‘Friday’:

“When evening had already come, because it was the day of Preparation (Gk paraskeue), that is, the day before the Sabbath (Gk pro-sabbaton), Joseph of Arimathia came...” (Mark 15:42).

Luke also makes it absolutely clear that Friday was the day Jesus was entombed because of the sequence of the days involved:

*“Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. ... This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was **the day of Preparation**, and the Sabbath was beginning” (Luke 23:50-51, 54).*

Because the bodies were not to be left unburied overnight Joseph’s action was during the late afternoon on “the day of preparation” with the **Sabbath beginning i.e., late on Friday**. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* Vol. 9 gives the chronology of these events:

Mark (15:42) agrees with John that Jesus died on the day preceding the Sabbath, hence, Friday, “the day of Preparation.” The day began at sunset on Thursday and ended at sunset on Friday. The meal that Jesus and his disciples ate must have been on Thursday night, which would actually fall on the Passover since the day began in the evening, not the morning, as in the Western calendar. p. 184.

Furthermore, renowned Greek scholar A.T. Robertson states:

This phrase “Preparation” was really **the name of the day of the week**, the day before Sabbath, our **Friday**. We are not left to conjecture about this question. The Evangelists all use it in this sense alone. Matthew uses it for Friday (27:62), Mark expressly says that Preparation was the day before Sabbath (15:42). Luke says it was the day of Preparation and the Sabbath drew on (23:54)...Besides, the term “Preparation” has long been the regular name for Friday in the Greek language, caused by the New Testament usage. *A Harmony of the Gospels*, p.28

Indeed, Charles C. Torrey explains that in Aramaic, “the middle days of the week were designated by numbers, ‘third, fourth, fifth,’ but Friday was always *arubta*; ... its Greek equivalent, *paraskeue*—Friday, was likewise adopted, from the first, by the Greek Church.” So, it is a significant mistake to interpret all the references to the “Preparation day” of Christ’s Crucifixion (Matt 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31, 42) as being **the Preparation day for the annual ceremonial Passover Sabbath** as taught by some Sabbath-keepers, rather than the Friday Preparation day for the regular weekly Sabbath. Preparation in all these accounts refers to Friday. In fact, Matthew also makes it clear that after Friday Jesus was still in the tomb, that is, all day Saturday i.e. the Sabbath. He informs us that:

*“The next day, that is, **after the day of Preparation**, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise’” (Matt. 27:62-63).*

All of this shows that Jesus was not resurrected on a Saturday. However, how are we to understand the claim that Jesus was in the tomb for 72 hours?

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Why Jesus Was Not Resurrected on a Sabbath

The Understanding of Sabbath-Keepers

For the purpose of proposing that Jesus was in the tomb for 72 hours because he was supposedly executed on a Wednesday and therefore was resurrected on a Saturday, Sabbath-keepers look to the following phrases used in the Gospel accounts:

- “Three days and three nights”
- “After three days”

Furthermore, others who are not Sabbath-keepers propose that Jesus died on a Thursday and rose very late on Saturday and so requiring three full nights. Clearly, we must examine all the relevant biblical phrases, statements, and contexts to get a correct understanding of the answers to these points.

The first point we shall examine concerns Jesus’ reference to Jonah’s time in the belly of the large fish from which he was vomited out. Here Jesus was showing that this “sign” was that of his resurrection. He was not saying that the sign was of any exact period of time that he would spend in the tomb.

“Three days and Three Nights” Is Defined by the Inclusive Reckoning of the “Third Day”

JONAH’S EXPERIENCE CONCERNS RESURRECTION

*“For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three **days** and three **nights** in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40).*

Matthew here gives the only occurrence in the New Testament of the phrase, “three days and three nights.” Yet when we examine the other two passages mentioning the sign of Jonah (Matt 16:4; Luke 11:29-32) there is a complete absence of any time reference and so indicating that the “sign” of Jesus’ Messiahship concerned his resurrection and not any exact period of time that he was in the tomb. Furthermore, the account of Jonah indicates that Jonah was a “sign” to the Ninevites because of the miracle of his being vomited **alive** onto the shore. Jesus applied this as a parallel to his coming resurrection. Further proof that resurrection is the theme of Matthew 12:40 comes from Jesus’ answer to the Jews’ request for a sign, when he said, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*” (John 2:19). So, indeed it was resurrection that would be the “sign” of his Messiahship rather than the specific time spent in the tomb. Even Rabbinic literature indicates that the phrase stating that Jonah “*was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights*” (Jonah 1:17) should be combined with passages mentioning events that took place “*on the third day.*”

A HEBREW IDIOM USING INCLUSIVE RECKONING

However, does this text really mean three absolutely full days and nights and so making 72 hours for Jonah’s being in the belly of the great fish? If so, this would make Jesus’ time of being in the tomb also for 72 hours, as this Scripture seems to suggest to our Western thinking? In fact, it does not mean this because the phrase “three days and three nights” is a Hebrew idiom and was not understood in biblical times in crass literalness. The idiomatic use of this phrase as referring to a calendrical day, whether complete or incomplete is well attested in Biblical and Rabbinical literature. Please note the following Biblical examples:

1. Samuel records the event of an abandoned Egyptian servant who “*had not eaten bread or had a drink of water for **three days and three nights***” (1 Sam. 30:12). Yet the idiomatic usage of this expression is shown by the next verse, when this servant relates that his master had left him behind “**three days ago**” (v. 13). So, the phrase “three days and three nights” cannot be taken literally. Otherwise he would have said that he’d been left behind **four days ago**.
2. According to Matthew, Jesus “fasted forty days and forty nights” (Matt. 4:2). However, the same period is given in Mark 1:13 and Luke 4:2 as simply “forty days,” and so not necessarily requiring forty complete 24-hour days.
3. There are similar features concerning a period of fasting for “three days and three nights” in Esther 4:16 which turns out as completed “*on the third day*” (Esther 5:1).

In Rabbinic literature: Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, who lived about A.D. 100, stated: “A day and a night are an Onah [‘a portion of time’] and the portion of an Onah is as the whole of it.” So Strack and

Billerbeck's *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash* states with reference to Matthew 12:40:

In regard to the reckoning of the three days, we must note that...part of a day was considered as the whole day. R Yishmael (ca 135 A.D.) treated part of an 'onah' (in this case 12 hours) as a whole 'onah' (i.e. as a full 12 hours)...Pesahin 4a: 'A part of a day counts as a whole day...'

Even among the Jews today *The Jewish Encyclopedia* informs us that:

In Jewish communal life part of a day is at times reckoned as one day; e.g., the day of the funeral, even when the latter takes place late in the afternoon, is counted as the first of the seven days of mourning; 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 on the first day only a few minutes remained after the birth of the child, these being counted as one day."

"The Third Day"

This "three days and three nights" idiom must have the following meaning according to both God's and Jesus' statements concerning "the third day": So "*today, tomorrow and the third day*" defines the "three days and three nights"

*"And Yahweh said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them **today and tomorrow**. They must wash their clothes, and they must be prepared for **the third day**, because on the third day, Yahweh will go down on Mount Sinai before the eyes of all the people"* (Ex. 19: 10, 11).

*"Go and tell that fox," [Jesus] responded, 'to take note that **today and tomorrow** I'm expelling demons and performing healings and **on the third day** my mission will be completed"* (Luke 13:32).

Throughout his Gospel Luke uses **inclusive counting** as shown by his statement that the Transfiguration happened "after eight days" (Luke 9:28). So, for Jesus' time of entombment, the only full day in these events that was a full 24 hours is "tomorrow" i.e., the Saturday. The day before "tomorrow" and the day after "tomorrow" are only parts of days and so less than full days. So, the weight of evidence that Jesus was entombed for less than 72 hours comes from the **eleven times** that the New Testament states that Jesus was to be resurrected "*on the third day*" (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4); and therefore, the phrase "three days and three nights" means: parts of two days and one complete 24-hour day and so cannot literally incorporate a third night.

THE MEANING IS NOT DEDUCIBLE FROM THE INDIVIDUAL WORDS

As shown above this is the language of idiom, which means that it is "**a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those individual words**" (*Oxford English Dictionary*), **and so is not required to literally incorporate** a third night. So, if as an example, we apply the biblical statements in Exodus 19: 10, 11 and Luke 13:32 above to show their usage we get: "**today** (part of Friday including a complete Friday night), **tomorrow** (24 hours of Saturday including a complete night) and **the third day** (part of Sunday and so not including any part of Sunday night i.e. a third night. This is because it is an idiomatic statement)." So, the concept of a 72-hour entombment makes the Bible contradict itself because the phrase "*on the third day*" cannot amount to 72 hours. Furthermore, the idea that Jesus was resurrected on a Thursday, because there were supposedly two Sabbaths (see below), would also make the Bible contradict itself.

The Phrase, "After Three Days" Is Therefore Limited by the Phrase, "the Third day"

The phrase "after three days" is used four times in the Gospels (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Matt 27:63) saying, "*[Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests...and be killed, and **after three days** rise again*" (Mark 8:31). This phrase "and after three days rise again" said by Jesus in Mark 8:31 was later quoted by the religious leaders in Matthew 27.

*“The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, ‘Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, “After three days I will rise.” Therefore order the tomb to be made secure **until the third day**” (Matt. 27:62-64).*

But does this phrase refer to three full days? Indeed not! This is because those same leaders showed that they understood this phrase as meaning that it would not be a 72-hour period when they said in the very next verse, *“Therefore order the tomb to be made secure **until the third day**” (Matt. 27:64).* Furthermore, in Luke’s account that parallels Mark 8:31 Jesus states that he would be *“raised up on the third day” (Luke 9:22).* So, in all these accounts it is “the third day” which limits Jesus’ time in the tomb to less than 72 two hours. Factually, if the resurrection of Jesus had occurred after the third day it **would have actually occurred on the fourth day.** Therefore, we must conclude that the phrase “and rise after three days” must have the same meaning as the phrase, “on the third day” as well as the phrase, “three days and three nights” which as we saw earlier was the Hebrew idiom referring to one full day and parts of two days. So, the phrase “after three days” does not mean after three full days.

Other Reasons the Resurrection Was Not on a Saturday

1. MATTHEW 28

DOESN'T SPEAK OF A SATURDAY WHEN THE WOMEN RETURNED

The KJV of Matthew 28:1, 5-6 reads: *“In **the end of** the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre . . . And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”*

The issue here is one of translation of the Greek word *opse*. The KJV and versions up to the end of the 19th century mistranslated verse one as *“In **the end of** the Sabbath.”* This was corrected with the appearance, in 1901, of *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*, fourth ed. On the Greek phrase in Matthew 18:1 this lexicon, on p.472, states that: “the sabbath having just passed, after the Sabbath, i.e. at the early dawn of the first day of the week—(an interpretation absolutely demanded by the added specification “when it was growing light” etc.), Mt. xxviii. 1.” Also, the *Bauer-Danker Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 746, shows Matt. 18:1 to be rendered correctly as *“**After the Sabbath.**”* Furthermore, renowned Greek scholar, Edgar J. Goodspeed explained that:

...the adverb *opseis* sometimes used in the sense of ‘late,’ with a genitive of time . . . which would mean ‘late on the Sabbath.’ . . . But *opse* has another sense; it is also used by late Greek writers like Philostratus (second to third century) as a preposition meaning ‘after,’ followed by the genitive, *opse touton*, ‘after these things’ (Life of Apollonius vi. 10; cf. 4:18: *opse musterion* ‘after the mysteries’). This is the sense of the word in Matthew 28:1 and at once clears up any difficulty . . . The plain sense of the passage is: ‘After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning.’”

In fact, since the beginning of the 20th century all modern translations render this Greek phrase, “After the Sabbath” or similar. Even the NKJV has corrected this KJV mistranslation.

2. THE WOMEN

WERE RESTRICTED IN TRAVEL DISTANCE ON THE SABBATH

The travel restriction of two thirds of a mile on a Sabbath would mean that the women living at home in Bethany, where they would spend the Sabbath (Luke 23:56), would not be allowed to make the two-mile journey from home to the tomb (Matt 21:1), even at the close of the Sabbath in the dark. Furthermore, the Gospel accounts show that these women travelled from Bethany to the tomb early Sunday morning (Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).

3. THE WOMEN’S

REPORTING OF THE RESURRECTION WAS NOT LATE IN THE DAY

When Jesus said to the women, *“Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee” (Matt. 28:10),* it is most unlikely that this would be for sending them on a journey late on a Sabbath afternoon contrary to the customs of the time.

4. THE GUARDS’ FABRICATED STORY WOULD NOT BE LATE IN THE DAY

The chief priests instructed the soldiers: “You are to say, ‘His disciples came **by night** and stole him away while we were asleep” (Matt. 28:13). However, the soldiers had been guarding the tomb during the daylight hours of the Sabbath (Matt. 27:62-66). This makes it impossible for them to have told this lie to anyone on Saturday evening, when night had not yet happened.

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Jesus Was Certainly Resurrected on a Sunday

Jesus Was Resurrected on “the First Day of the Week” – a Sunday

Because the Sabbath ended the previous evening at sunset, the first day of the week i.e., the Sunday, had already begun when the following event occurred at dawn:

*“**After the Sabbath, at dawn** on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb” (Matt. 28:1).*

*“Very early **on the first day of the week, just after sunrise,** they were on their way to the tomb” (Mark 16:2).*

*“Now **on the first day of the week** Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “**They have taken the Lord out of the tomb...**” (John 20:1-2).*

*“The women who had come with him [Jesus] from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. But **on the first day of the week, at early dawn,** they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did **not find the body** of the Lord Jesus” (Luke 23:55-24:3).*

These women evidently prepared the spices during the very late Friday afternoon before the Sabbath actually began and then returned, “on the first day of the week (Sunday), at early dawn” only to find that Jesus was no longer in the tomb. So, Jesus was only in the tomb for the late afternoon of Friday, all of Friday night, all day and all night on Saturday (24 hours), and Sunday morning. This amounts to parts of two days, one full day (the Sabbath), and two full nights in line with the above information concerning the phrase “on the third day.”

Jesus Stated That He Was to Be “Raised on the Third Day

The important detail that, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be **raised on the third day**” (Matt 17:23) is stated a total of eleven times in the New Testament (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4).

“THE THIRD DAY” WAS SUNDAY

*“But **on the first day of the week,** ... ¹³That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus ... ¹⁵Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, ‘What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?’... And they said to him, ‘Concerning Jesus of Nazareth ... ²⁰and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and **crucified him.** ²¹...Yes, and besides all this, **it is now***

the third day since these things happened...“it is getting toward evening, and the day is nearly over”
(Luke 24:1, 13, 15-17, 20-2, 29).

“**The first day of the week**” is Sunday. So, these two disciples were travelling on the Sunday i.e., “**that very day**” and they said that “**it is now the third day** since these things happened” i.e., **the crucifixion**. Soon after this event, these two disciples returned to Jerusalem and met with the apostles and the rest of the disciples. Then Jesus appeared to them and:

*“...he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and **on the third day rise from the dead**...You are witnesses of these things’”*
(Luke 24:45, 46, 48).

So, calculating back from Sunday, the amount of time of Jesus’ internment in the tomb included “early dawn” on Sunday, all day and all of the night on Saturday (the Sabbath), and the late afternoon and the night of Friday. Again, this amounts to parts of two days, one full day, and two full nights so that Jesus rose “on the third day” and not after it. This corresponds with the events concerning the women’s actions in Luke 23:50-24:1 on the day before the Sabbath and the day after the Sabbath. These are the only days involved i.e., Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

THE DISCIPLES’ ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS WAS ON SUNDAY EVENING

Additional to the fact that Sunday was “*the third day*,” since Christ’s Crucifixion (Luke 24:21) verse 29 tells us that it was “getting toward evening” when the disciples on the road to Emmaus were talking to Jesus. So, if a Wednesday had been the afternoon of Christ’s crucifixion then, according to the **Jewish inclusive day-reckoning**, they would have called Sunday “the fifth day.” If on the other hand a Thursday had been the afternoon of Christ’s crucifixion then according to the Jewish inclusive day-reckoning, they would have called Sunday “the fourth day,” rather than “the third.”

The Fact That It Was Still Dark Meant That Sunday Had Not Begun

The description of the time on “the first day of the week” in the four Gospel accounts is that it was: “at dawn” (Matt. 28:1), “just after sunrise” (Mark 16:2), “early dawn” (Luke 23:55-24:3), and “while it was still dark” (John 20:1-2). From this we can see that it is only John’s account that says it was still dark. However, just as in Western ways (the “day” begins immediately after midnight) the Jewish “day” also does not begin with daylight, but on the previous evening. Furthermore, Matthew’s account shows these events to be “**After the Sabbath**” and so not on a Saturday, but on Sunday. Also, as shown earlier, Luke’s account to the disciples on the road to Emmaus shows that it was on “the **first day of the week**” which was “*the third day since these things (Jesus’ condemnation and crucifixion) happened*” (Luke 24:1, 13, 15-17, 20-21). So, Sunday (“the first day of the week”) was the third day since Jesus had been crucified.

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The Clear Sequence from Crucifixion to Resurrection

Mark explains very clearly for his Gentile readership that Christ was crucified late on “*the day of Preparation (Gk paraskeue), that is, the day before the Sabbath (Gk pro-sabbaton)*” (Mark 15:42). This was on Friday immediately before the Sabbath (Saturday). Mark then proceeds to show that the “first day of the week” (Sunday) followed immediately after the “Sabbath” (Mark 16:1, 2). Similarly, we find the same clear sequence in Luke: the day of Christ’s crucifixion was followed by a weekly Sabbath: “*It was the day of Preparation (Gk paraskeue), and the Sabbath was beginning*” (Luke 23:54). Here Luke connects the beginning of the Sabbath to the end of the day of Preparation, and the beginning of the “first day of the week” (Luke 24:1) to the end of the Sabbath (Luke 23:56). So, in both Mark’s and Luke’s statements there

is absolutely no room for two full days to intervene between the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Not a Teaching Introduced by the Roman Catholic Church

Often those who teach a Saturday resurrection of Jesus (generally Sabbath-keepers) claim that the teaching of the idea of a Sunday resurrection of Jesus was purposefully introduced by the Roman Catholic Church. This is not true to history as well as being in contradiction of the biblical account of Luke 24. The fact that the early Christians observed Sunday as the day of Jesus' resurrection confirms the fact that the resurrection was on a Sunday. For instance, Barnabas in the second century wrote: "We keep the eighth day for rejoicing, in the which Jesus also rose from the dead..." Also, Ignatius and Justin Martyr, of the second century, refer to Sunday as "the Lord's day" thereby implying that Sunday was the day Jesus was resurrected.

The Order and Times of Events in Jesus' Last Days

1. During the daytime of Nisan 14 (a Thursday) the disciples go to the upper room to prepare for the Passover meal. This is when all the lambs for the individual households are being slaughtered and cooked, and so Passover, as the overall term for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, began. Jesus arrives at some time later.
2. After sunset of Nisan 15 (our Thursday) Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover meal.
3. Late in the night of Nisan 15 Jesus leaves the upper room, goes to the Garden of Gethsemane and is arrested some time before midnight (Mark 14:4-52); Matt. 26:47-56) and then taken for the illegal trial by the Jewish leaders which lasts until dawn.
4. The daytime of Nisan 15 (our Friday) was the "Preparation day" i.e. Preparing for the Sabbath which was a "high Sabbath" or "special Sabbath" because it coincided with "Passover" the term used for the entire "Feast of Unleavened Bread" and not because there were two Sabbath days (Sabbath simply means Saturday from sunset to sunset).
5. Jesus' trial before Pilate at daybreak and later his questioning by Herod occurs on Nisan 15 (our Friday)
6. Jesus' crucifixion was on Friday Nisan 15. It occurred at the third hour (9 a.m.) according to Mark 15:25 where the hours are numbered from sunrise (also in Matthew and Luke) in the Palestinian system. However, John states that it was at the sixth hour because he is using the official numbering system of the Roman civil day which began at midnight (John 19:14) and so meaning 6 a.m. which may encompass the scourging, mocking, and preparation for crucifixion of Jesus—all taking an extra 3 hours before 9 a.m.
7. Darkness over the land from the sixth hour (midday) until the ninth hour (3 p.m.).
8. Jesus' death at the ninth hour (3 p.m.). (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44).
9. Still on Friday Nisan 15, Joseph of Arimathea removes Jesus' body before the Sabbath begins at sunset.
10. Jesus' full day in the tomb on Saturday (the Sabbath) Nisan 16 up to sunset after which it is the next day— the 17th.
11. Jesus' resurrection is early on Sunday Nisan 17.

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Summary

There is a clear sequence of the days of Jesus' crucifixion, entombment, and resurrection in the Gospels. These are, Preparation day, Sabbath, and First day.

Preparation Day = Friday.....This was when Jesus was delivered up, condemned and crucified (Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54).

Sabbath = Saturday.....This was Jesus' only 24 hour day in the tomb.

First day of the week = Sunday. This was when Jesus was resurrected (Matt. 28:1, Mark 16:2).

PROOF OF FRIDAY/SUNDAY ENTOMBMENT

Eleven times in the New Testament it is stated that Jesus would be raised “**on the third day.**” For example:

Matthew 17:23

*“The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will **be raised on the third day.**”*

Luke 24:1, 20-21

*“But on the first day of the week (Sunday)” Then the disciples explain “how the chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ...Yes, and besides all this, it is now **the third day since these things happened (on Friday)**”*

So, because Jesus earlier stated in **Luke 13:32**, “Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures **today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course,**” we are provided with the pattern that “the third day” from Jesus' crucifixion involved the following periods:

- **late afternoon of Friday till sunset – Preparation Day, Nisan 15**
- **Friday night and all-day Saturday till sunset – Sabbath, Nisan 16**
- **Saturday night till “early dawn” on Sunday – First day of the week, Nisan 17.**

Furthermore, there were not two Sabbaths (a Friday and a Saturday) because the Greek word *Sabbaton* is **plural in form but singular in meaning** in many texts where the context clearly shows it to refer to a single Sabbath as does John 19:31. Also the “**high day**” was the only Sabbath mentioned in the passage and so refers to the Saturday. It was a “high day” because it coincided with the Passover in that particular year.

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