

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Timeline of the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus

Submitted to Dr. Wooddell, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the completion of the course,

APOL 679

Apologetics Capstone

by

Dirk Anderson

May 3, 2020

## Contents

Introduction .....	1
<b>Background Information</b> .....	1
<b>Arguments in Favor of a Wednesday-Saturday Timeline</b> .....	4
Sign of Jonah .....	5
Not Enough Time .....	5
The Spices and Two Sabbaths .....	7
Saturday Resurrection .....	9
The Midst of the Week .....	13
<b>Arguments in Favor of the Traditional Timeline</b> .....	14
Mark’s Weekly Timeline .....	14
Inclusive Reckoning of Time .....	19
“After Three Days” Versus “On the Third Day” .....	22
On the Road to Emmaus .....	24
The “High” Sabbath Day .....	25
The First Fruits .....	26
<b>Extra-Biblical Evidence</b> .....	27
Historical Evidence .....	28
Calendrical Evidence .....	29
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	32
Bibliography .....	33

## **Introduction**

Without a doubt, the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the most important event in human history. With it being so important, one would expect to find a variety of opinions on this event within the body of Christ. While there is near universal agreement that the resurrection occurred, there is a small, but significant disagreement over the timing of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Some insist that in order for the “Sign of Jonah” prophecy of Matthew 12:40 to be fulfilled, Christ must have died on Wednesday afternoon, remained in the grave for three full days and nights, and then arisen on Saturday afternoon. Advocates of this timeline insist this is the only interpretation that provides the proper amount of time needed to fulfill this prophecy. If Jesus died on Friday afternoon, and arose on Sunday morning, then it would play into the hands of the atheists as yet another embarrassing failed prophecy. However, does one need to adopt a Wednesday crucifixion in order to solve this dilemma? Indeed, the traditional position of Jesus’ death on Friday afternoon, and his resurrection on Sunday morning, not only fulfills the “Sign of Jonah” but also is much more consistent with the biblical record.

## **Background of the Issue**

There are two presuppositions that must be established before delving into the arguments for each timeline. First, and of utmost importance, is the historicity of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The whole subject of the duration of the entombment relies upon a fulfillment of prophecy regarding the miraculous resurrection of Jesus. Over the years, many theories have been proposed offering non-miraculous explanations of the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this research to prove the factuality of the resurrection, if Jesus

---

<sup>1</sup> Josh McDowell *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 257-283. McDowell lists 1) swoon theory, 2) theft theory, 3) hallucination theory, and 4) vision theory.

was not miraculously raised from the dead, then the subject of the duration of his entombment, and even the entire Christian faith, has no relevance.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the historicity of the resurrection must be presupposed in order for the discussion of the resurrection timeline to be apropos.

A second presupposition of this research is the inerrancy of the biblical text.<sup>3</sup> The crux of the argument revolves around a single prophecy attributed to Jesus, which will be referred to henceforth as the “sign of Jonah” text: “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” (Matthew 12:40).<sup>4</sup> If the biblical texts were not inerrant, then the tension between the “three days and three nights” timeline of this text, and the traditional timeline of two nights, and one-and-a-half-days could readily be dismissed as some sort of an error by the gospel authors in either calculating or recording the dates and times accurately. There are several possible ways to solve it with errancy. One could argue Jonah was not actually in the fish for three full days and three full nights, but that whatever duration he was in the fish, was the same duration as the entombment of Jesus. Alternatively, one could argue Jesus did not actually say “three days and three nights,” but rather, Matthew *thought* he remembered Jesus said that. Even more insidious, perhaps Matthew wanted to make it appear Jesus was fulfilling a prophecy, and so added those words to what Jesus actually said. One could even argue Jesus was actually in the tomb “three days and three nights,” but the authors of the gospels, writing long after the fact, either got confused about the timeline, or chose to align their dates with the Passover for theological reasons. Therefore, if inerrancy is not important other viable options are available.

---

<sup>2</sup> C. Stephan Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 70. Stephan Evans notes the atonement has no relevance without a resurrection. Paul said, “if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain” (1 Corinthians 15:17 KJV).

<sup>3</sup> Inerrancy here is the truthfulness and inspiration of the Bible as written in its original languages.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Bible passages are referenced from the King James Version (Blue Letter Bible).

Since this research presupposes the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the tension between the “sign of Jonah” and the other gospel narrative timelines must be resolved with a biblically supportable explanation. If not, it opens up an opportunity for critics of the faith to question the inerrancy of Matthew, or the entombment timeline of the other gospels. As an example, atheist author Lawrence Flowers opines: “For Jesus’ prophecy to have been accurately fulfilled, therefore, his ‘resurrection’ would have to have occurred at dawn on Monday... That, according to the gospels, did not happen. Hence, Jesus’ prophecy was a ‘false’ one.”<sup>5</sup>

In Jesus’ own words, the singular sign “given to” his generation was the “sign of the prophet Jonas” (Matthew 12:39). Since Jesus reportedly said this was the only sign to be given, one would expect it to be fulfilled as stated. However, it appears the duration prophesied by Jesus did not match the duration recorded by the eyewitnesses. The integrity of the resurrection story would be weakened if the actual event differs in substance from what Jesus prophesied. Thus, to maintain the inerrancy of the New Testament gospels, one must posit a rational explanation for the difference between the “sign of Jonah” and the gospel timelines.

Having established the presuppositions of the historicity of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and the inerrancy of the biblical text, it is important to narrow the scope to the only realistically viable alternatives. Only the Friday-Sunday and Wednesday-Sunday timelines will be considered. There is a third theory which says Jesus died on Thursday afternoon, with Friday being the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and then Jesus was resurrected on Sunday morning. However, according to Harold Hoehner, “the Thursday view has

---

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Flowers, “The Problem of Matthew 12:40 – Revisited,” *The Atheist Observer*, October 12, 2018, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://theatheistobserver.com/2018/10/12/the-problem-of-matthew-1240-revisited/>.

too many problems to make it a real valid solution.”<sup>6</sup> For example, a Thursday crucifixion would place Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Sabbath. This would be impossible given Jewish Sabbath restrictions. Dwight Pentecost explains it would be a Sabbath violation for an animal to work on the Sabbath by carrying Jesus, and cutting and carrying palm branches “would have also violated the law” (Deuteronomy 5:14, Matthew 21:8, Mark 11:8).<sup>7</sup> In addition, the Thursday crucifixion has the same “sign of Jonah” challenge as the Friday crucifixion because under each approach, Christ was not entombed for a full three days and three nights. In the Thursday model, Jesus is entombed for three nights, but since he is resurrected on Sunday morning, he is only interned in the tomb for two-and-a-half days. Thus, for those requiring an interment of three full days and three full nights, this timeline is unsatisfactory. For those who do not insist upon a full 72-hour internment, the Thursday crucifixion solves little, but adds the dilemma of a Sabbath triumphal entry, while retaining nearly all the problems of the Wednesday crucifixion. Thus, this view has not been widely accepted, and most of the criticisms of the Wednesday crucifixion model presented below can be applied to this view as well.

### **Arguments in Favor of a Wednesday-Saturday Timeline**

Various arguments have been proposed in support of a Wednesday-Saturday timeline. There are five plausible arguments that are commonly used to support this timeline. While additional arguments exist, these five are the ones most broadly repeated and the most credible.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 71.

<sup>7</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1981), 574.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Herman L. Hoah, *The Crucifixion was not on Friday* (Pasadena, CA: Ambassador College Press, 1968), 14-15. Hoah argues the Gospel of Peter has the disciples fasting “night and day until the Sabbath,” proving the crucifixion was not on Friday. However, if the disciples fasted Thursday evening after the last supper and Friday, that would suffice. Besides, the Gospel of Peter is a spurious work and teaches a Sunday resurrection which Hoah rejects (verse 36). If the Sunday Resurrection is incorrect, then how do we know the fasting statement is correct?

## Sign of Jonah

The first, and by far the strongest argument, is the “sign of Jonah” prophecy of Matthew 12:40. If Jesus prophesied that he was going to remain in the tomb for three days and three nights, and did not stay that entire time, then one could charge him with being a false prophet. Advocates of a Wednesday crucifixion extricate Jesus from this accusation by proposing Christ died on Wednesday afternoon, and then spent Wednesday night, all day and night on Thursday and Friday, and most of the day of Saturday in the tomb. After a full 72-hours elapsed, he was resurrected on Saturday afternoon. Thus, he completed exactly three days and three nights in the tomb, just as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for that duration. The traditional position is criticized as being a complete failure to fulfill the “sign of Jonah” because if Jesus was entombed late Friday afternoon, and then resurrected on Sunday morning, he would only be in the tomb around 36 hours. That would be two nights and less than one-and-a-half days.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is argued the traditional timeline cannot satisfy a literal fulfillment of the “sign of Jonah” prophecy. The Gospel of Mark lends some support to this position, because Mark states three times that Jesus said he would rise to life “after three days” (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34). If Wednesday was the first day, Thursday the second, and Friday the third, then Saturday would be the fourth day from the crucifixion. This would corroborate Mark’s statements that Jesus would rise “after three days.”

## Not Enough Time

A second argument in favor of a Wednesday crucifixion is that a Friday afternoon crucifixion does not allow enough time for all of the activities that took place after Jesus’ death. William Scroggie argues there simply was not enough time between the time when Jesus died

---

<sup>9</sup> Friday and Saturday evening would count as two nights. As for the days, there would be less than a day-and-a-half: A few hours on Friday, all day Saturday, and very little, if any, of the daylight period on Sunday.

(after 3pm) and sundown (around 6pm) for all of the events recorded in the Gospels. Scroggie provides a list of nineteen events that transpired during this period:<sup>10</sup>

- 1) A deputation of Jews goes before Pilate (John 19:31).
- 2) Pilate sent someone from Jerusalem to Golgotha (John 19:31).
- 3) Soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves and pierced Jesus (John 19:32,34).
- 4) Joseph asked Pilate for Jesus' body (John 19:39; Mark 15:43).
- 5) Pilate summoned a centurion to ask him if Jesus was dead (Mark 15:44).
- 6) The centurion confirmed Jesus was dead (Mark 15:45).
- 7) Joseph went to the market and purchased linen burial garments (Mark 15:46).
- 8) Joseph went to Golgotha to get Jesus' body (Mark 15:46).
- 9) Joseph took Jesus' body to his tomb (Matthew 27:59,60; Mark 15:46).
- 10) Women from Galilee followed (Luke 23:55).
- 11) Joseph prepared the body (Matthew 27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53).<sup>11</sup>
- 12) Jesus' body was placed in the tomb (Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46).
- 13) The women watched (Matthew 27:61).
- 14) A stone was placed over the tomb entrance (Matthew 27:60; Mark 16:4).
- 15) The women returned to the city (Luke 23:56).
- 16) Nicodemus brought a great quantity of spices (John 19:39).
- 17) The women who had returned from the tomb prepared (cooked) spices (Luke 23:56).
- 18) The men returned to the tomb and wrapped the body with spices (John 19:40).
- 19) The stone was put back on the tomb, and the men went home (John 20:7).

---

<sup>10</sup> William Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995), 572.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 576. Scroggie postulates two different wrapping events. The Greek *sindon* ("once piece of linen") is used here; whereas John 19:40, 20:5-7, and Luke 24:12 use the Greek *othonion* ("strips").



Admittedly, much activity occurred, including transits between Jerusalem, Golgotha, and Joseph's tomb, wherever that was located. While it is true that Jerusalem was much smaller in that era than it is today, walking through crowded streets carrying items took time. For example, the distance between the location of Pilate in Herod's palace and Golgotha is roughly two kilometers. At a brisk pace, this could be a twenty- to thirty-minute walk. Scroggie solves this time dilemma by proposing Jesus died on Wednesday afternoon and many of the activities mentioned in these verses could have taken place "on the whole of Friday."<sup>12</sup>

The weakness in Scroggie's logic is that the traditional timeline only seems improbable if most of these events transpired sequentially. In reality, some of the activities most likely happened in parallel or overlapped. Pentecost writes, "several things could have been done simultaneously by various people."<sup>13</sup> For example, Joseph may have learned of Jesus' death and come to Pilate while Pilate was sending centurions to confirm his death. The women may have been buying and preparing spices while the men were preparing the body. When acknowledging many of the activities could have unfolded simultaneously, it is difficult to argue convincingly these activities could not have taken place within a three-hour time span.

### The Spices and Two Sabbaths

A third argument for the Wednesday crucifixion involves the buying and preparation of the spices. It is assumed the spices were purchased in a raw state and required some cooking in order to properly prepare them. Luke writes the women "prepared spices" on Friday before the Sabbath started at around 6pm (Luke 23:56). However, Mark writes that some women "bought sweet spices" after "the sabbath was past" (Mark 16:1). Assuming the buying and preparing of

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 576.

<sup>13</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus*, 573.

spices by the women was a single process by a single group of women, then the buying would have to happen *prior to* the preparing.

Mark 16:1 says “when the sabbath was past” they “bought sweet spices.” According to the Wednesday timeline, this activity took place after the sun set on Thursday, the Passover “Sabbath.” Then, Luke 23:56 says they “prepared spices and ointments” and then “rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.” Thus, on Friday the women prepared the spices that had been purchased either Thursday evening after sunset or on Friday morning. The argument maintains that it would not be possible for the women to have bought spices *after* the Sabbath, and also prepared spices and rested *before* the same Sabbath unless there were two sabbaths involved, with a day in between them.

Support for two sabbaths is derived from Matthew 28:1, where the women came to the tomb at the “end of the Sabbath.” The Greek word for “Sabbath” is *sabbaton*, which is a plural form of the word Sabbath. Some Wednesday crucifixion advocates claim this plural word indicates the presence of two sabbaths during the week, the annual sabbath on Thursday followed by the weekly Sabbath. While it is true that the Greek word is plural, in New Testament usage it often refers to a single sabbath.<sup>14</sup> Further, there are multiple Old Testament references to the singular Sabbath which are translated in the plural *sabbaton* in the Greek Septuagint.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Luke 4:16, Acts 13:14, 16:13, Colossians 2:16.

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 20:8, 35:3, Deuteronomy 5:12, Jeremiah 17:21. Advocates of a Wednesday crucifixion counter that in Luke 6:1 there is found a case where an annual sabbath is called *sabbaton*. It is preceded and succeeded by *deuteroprōtos* which could be rendered in Greek as “second-first Sabbath.” They have theorized this to be the sabbath following the Passover annual sabbath. However, there are perhaps a dozen or more other possible explanations. *Strong’s* favors it as the second of seven sabbaths between Passover and Pentecost. (G1207) Ellicott maintains that all explanations of this phrase are merely “conjecture.” (John Ellicott, *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*) Meyers says “all explanations are destitute of proof.” (Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer’s *New Testament Commentary*) The Pulpit Commentary maintains that recent research has “proved that this word is not found in the majority of the more ancient authorities.” (eds. Joseph Exell and Henry Donald Maurice Spence-Jones) Thayer admits, “the genuineness of the word is questionable.” (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*)

Thayer notes that the plural form of the word can be used in the New Testament to denote “a single sabbath.”<sup>16</sup> One could even argue that Matthew used the plural because the Sabbath and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread fell upon Saturday. Therefore, there is no compelling reason to believe Matthew is hinting to the existence of a sabbath on Thursday.

One solution to the spice dilemma is that the women already had some spices on hand Friday afternoon, possibly purchased by themselves or Nicodemus. Since it was Friday afternoon, the women likely knew the Jews would not permit Jesus to “remain upon the cross on the sabbath day,” so they easily could have reasoned he would be killed within the next few hours (John 19:31). Therefore, it is possible they went to purchase spices in the early afternoon, even *before* the death of Christ. Also, Jesus had predicted his death on multiple occasions, so it is possible spices were procured ahead of time for this expected event.<sup>17</sup> Mark 16:1 says the women “bought sweet spices” after the Sabbath. Since these spices are specifically called out as “sweet spices,” this could refer to spices that were different from the ones on-hand earlier. Thus, one could surmise the women prepared what spices they had on-hand before the Sabbath, and since there was insufficient time to go to the market and purchase more spices before the Sabbath commenced, they waited until Sabbath was over before purchasing the other spices.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the spice problem is not an insurmountable obstacle for the traditional timeline.

#### Saturday Resurrection

A fourth point argues for a Saturday afternoon resurrection because Jesus was already resurrected when Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb while “it was yet dark” (John 20:1). Since

---

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), 565.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23; Mark 8:31; Luke 13:13, 18:31-33.

<sup>18</sup> The sweet spices, if they required preparation, could have been prepared afterwards on Saturday night.

Matthew 28:1 starts off with the words, “in the end of the Sabbath,” it is proposed that the women came on Saturday evening after dark and after the Sabbath day had ended at sundown. If they arrived around sundown Saturday evening, then Jesus must have been resurrected earlier that day. An immediate challenge to this view is the synoptic Gospels place the women’s arrival on Sunday morning. Luke writes they arrived “upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning” (Luke 24:1). Mark writes the women came “very early in the morning the first day of the week” (Mark 16:2). Even Matthew writes they came “as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” (Matthew 28:1). Mark explicitly states that Jesus “was risen early the first day of the week” (Mark 16:9). Robert Odom correctly adduces, “not one Bible text says that Jesus rose on the Sabbath day!”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the majority of evidence firmly places the women’s arrival around dawn on Sunday morning. If the women arrived around dawn, this would allow for Jesus to be resurrected as late as around dawn on Sunday.

Another challenge of the Saturday evening arrival of the women at the tomb is the logistical problem of getting to the tomb after Sabbath because of Jewish restrictions on Sabbath travel (Acts 1:12). On the Sabbath during the first century, Jews were not expected to walk more than a sabbath day’s journey, which was somewhere between half a mile and three fourths of a mile.<sup>20</sup> Mary Magdalene lived in Bethany, which was two miles from Jerusalem (Matt. 21:1). This was significantly longer than a Sabbath day’s journey. Since she presumably rested on the Sabbath at home in accordance with the commandment (Luke 23:56), she could not have commenced walking to the tomb before the end of the Sabbath. Therefore, the women would

---

<sup>19</sup> Robert L. Odom, *Was Christ Crucified on Wednesday* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 2012), 20.

<sup>20</sup> Chad Brand, Charles W. Draper, and Archie W England, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), entry “Sabbath Day’s Journey.”

have waited until after the end of the Sabbath before starting out. The Sabbath day does not technically end until three astronomical objects are observable in the sky. Therefore, they could not have started their journey until well after darkness. While not impossible, a Saturday night trek to and from the sepulcher seems less viable than a Sunday morning trip.

Matthew 28:1 states the women came “in the end (Greek *opse*) of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week.” The verse clearly indicates the women came to the sepulcher at “as it began to dawn.” “Began to dawn” is an accurate translation of the Greek word *epiphōskō*, which Joseph Thayer’s lexicon defines as “to grow light, to dawn.”<sup>21</sup> However, the word can also be used at the end of the day (Luke 23:54). Therefore, the question is, what does “in the end of the Sabbath” mean? Does it mean *as* the Sabbath day was ending? Or does it mean *after* the Sabbath day had ended? The answer lies in the Greek word *opse*. Samuele Bacchiocchi explains that older translations, such as the KJV and RSV used the classical Greek rendering of the word *opse* which is “late” or “late on.”<sup>22</sup> Hence, the RSV says, “now late on the Sabbath day.” However, this is not the usage of the koine Greek that the New Testament was written in. In the koine Greek the word means “after.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, nearly all modern translations translate this passage as “after the Sabbath.”<sup>24</sup>

Since there is some ambiguity in this verse, the only safe way to discern whether the women came to the tomb on Saturday evening or Sunday morning is to look at the parallel accounts in the synoptic gospels. As noted above, both Mark and Luke state the women came

---

<sup>21</sup> Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 246.

<sup>22</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1985), 55.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>24</sup> The NKJV, NIV, ESV, NASB, CSB, ISV, and RSV use “after.”

“very early in the morning.” Therefore, to be consistent with the other synoptics, the phrase “as it began to dawn” should be understood as very early on Sunday morning.

Mark’s account proves that the women visited upon Sunday morning “at the rising of the sun” (Mark 16:2). The very same women are named in both Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts. In Mark’s account, as the women neared the tomb, they asked: “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?” (Mark 16:3). If they had already been there Saturday around sundown and found the tomb empty, then they would have already known that the stone was rolled away from the door. This is proof they had not been to an empty tomb Saturday evening.

A further objection to a Saturday resurrection is raised by Bacchiocchi:

More decisive still is the instruction given to the soldiers by the chief priests: “Tell people, His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep” (v. 13). In view of the fact that the soldiers had been stationed at the sepulcher during the light hours of the Sabbath day (Matt 27:62-66), they could hardly have told the people on Saturday evening that the disciples stole Christ’s body by night, when no night had yet intervened between the beginning of their vigil and the Resurrection.<sup>25</sup>

One possible solution to the somewhat awkward start of Matthew 28:1 is that the phrase “in the end of the Sabbath” actually belongs with the last verse of Matthew 27, which is speaking of securing the tomb and setting a watch. Since the original Greek contains no chapters, verses or other punctuation, there is no reason this phrase could not be removed from Matthew 28:1 and placed with Matthew 27:66. When the verses are organized this way, Roman guards were put in place at the end of the Sabbath because the Jews made the Romans aware of Jesus’ statements about rising on the third day. They suspected the disciples would steal the body of Jesus under cover of darkness on Saturday night, which was the third since the Friday crucifixion. With this arrangement, the verses would read: “27:66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

the stone, and setting a watch in the end of the sabbath. 28:1 As it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.” With this arrangement of the verses, Matthew’s account now agrees precisely with Mark’s and Luke’s accounts that the women came to the tomb at dawn on Sunday morning.

### The Midst of the Week

A fifth argument is derived from Daniel 9:24-27, which is considered by some scholars to be a messianic prophecy. It was prophesied that “the sacrifice” would “cease” in “the midst of the week” (Daniel 9:27). Since Wednesday is in “the midst” or middle of the literal week, and Friday is not, on the surface this would seem to lend credence to a Wednesday crucifixion.

There are a couple of problems with this interpretation of this prophetic passage. First, it is not entirely clear that this passage is even talking about the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah. John Walton et al. note the passage reads as “*a* messiah and not *the* Messiah” and may not refer to the “future Davidic king.”<sup>26</sup> Hoehner argues that Daniel 9:27 “cannot refer to Christ” because Christ never confirmed “an already-existing covenant.”<sup>27</sup> Further, Daniel 9:27 says the sacrifice would “cease” in “the midst of the week,” and yet the sacrifices continued for decades after Jesus’s crucifixion. Since Daniel 9:26 is focused on the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, it is probable the reference in Daniel 9:27 to the cessation of sacrifices in the midst of the week is not referring to Jesus’ death but to the termination of sacrifices that occurred when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 70 A.D.

---

<sup>26</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 745. Emphasis in original.

<sup>27</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 69.

A second challenge to this method of interpretation is that many scholars interpret this passage as referring to prophetic time, and not literal time. Hoehner concludes that the Hebrew of Daniel 9 indicates “Daniel was referring to years and not days.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the “midst of the week” would refer to the middle of a week of years, or three-and-a-half years into a seven-year period. One reason for counting this period as years instead of days is because Daniel 9:24 says a probationary period of “seventy weeks” would be allotted to the Jewish people. According to Hoehner, this time period is “490 years.”<sup>29</sup> It started with Artaxerxes’ “commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem” (Ezra 7:7-8; Daniel 9:25). Seventy literal weeks would be far too short of a time to accomplish all of the events described in Daniel 9:24-27. It would be inconsistent to interpret one part of Daniel 9:24-27 as prophetic days and another part as literal days. Therefore, there is no support in this prophetic passage for a Wednesday crucifixion.

### **Arguments in Favor of the Traditional Timeline**

There are a number of strong arguments supporting the traditional timeline of Jesus being crucified on Friday afternoon and resurrected on Sunday morning.

#### **Mark’s Weekly Timeline**

The traditional timeline can be established from the Gospel of Mark. Marcus Borg and John Crossan write that “Mark alone went out of his way to chronicle Jesus’s last week on a day-by-day basis.”<sup>30</sup> According to Borg and Crossan, the chronology is as follows:<sup>31</sup>

Nisan 9: Palm Sunday, as “they were approaching Jerusalem” (Mark 11:1).

---

<sup>28</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 61.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: The Day by Day Account of Jesus’ Final Week in Jerusalem* (Nashville, TN: HarperCollins, 2006), vi.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, vi-vii.



Nisan 10: Monday, on “the following day” (Mark 11:12).

Nisan 11: Tuesday, in “the morning” of the day after Monday (Mark 11:20).

Nisan 12: Wednesday, “two days before the Passover” (Mark 14:1).

Nisan 13: Thursday, on “the first day of Unleavened Bread” (Mark 14:12).<sup>32</sup>

Nisan 14: Friday, as “soon as it was morning” on Passover (Mark 15:1).

Nisan 15: Saturday, the “Sabbath” (Mark 15:42; 16:1).

Nisan 16: Sunday, “very early on the first day of the week” (Mark 16:2).

In order to establish the integrity of this traditional timeline, the beginning and ending days must be anchored to specific days of the week. This is important because those advocating a Wednesday crucifixion argue that Jesus entered Jerusalem on the Friday *before* Palm Sunday. One problem with that argument is that this would leave a gap of silence for the days of Thursday and Friday in Mark’s chronology. The traditional way to anchor the date is to use the preparation day (Friday) and Sabbath as the fixed points in the week.<sup>33</sup> These days can be established because Mark specifically mentions those days. Mark writes that Jesus died on “the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath” (Mark 15:42).<sup>34</sup> The Greek word for Sabbath is “sábbaton” which *Strong’s* defines as “the seventh day of each week.”<sup>35</sup> This is the weekly Sabbath, and not an annual sabbath day. The “preparation” (Greek *paraskeuē*) is only used in the

---

<sup>32</sup> T.A. Burkill, “The Last Supper,” *Numen* 3, no. 3 (1956): 162, doi:10.2307/3269479. According to T.A. Burkill, Mark’s use of “first day of Unleavened Bread” here refers to the “whole festal period” and not necessarily to the literal first day of Unleavened Bread, which is “the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.”

<sup>33</sup> Moises Silva, *The Essential Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), entry “Preparation Day.” In this entry Silva writes that the preparation day “refers to the sixth day of the week (Friday).”

<sup>34</sup> The English words in the KJV “the day before the sabbath” come from a single word Mark uses—*prosabbaton* (Strong’s G4315), which is a combination of the Greek *pro* meaning “before” (Strong’s G4253), and *sabbaton* (Strong’s G4521), meaning “sabbath.” The word *prosabbaton* was used by inter-testament authors to refer to the day before the *weekly* Sabbath, as can be seen in Judith 8:6 and 2 Maccabees 8:26.

<sup>35</sup> James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance: New American Standard Bible*, updated ed. (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995), G4521.

Bible to refer to crucifixion day. However, this day can be confirmed as Friday because, as Bacchiocchi explains, the Greek *paraskeuē* was the Semitic Greek “equivalent of the Aramaic word ‘*arubta-eve*’ both of which were commonly used to designate ‘Friday.’”<sup>36</sup> Bacchiocchi goes on to provide two additional evidences, namely, 1) *paraskeuē* was used for Friday in the *Didache* 8:1 which advocates fasting on that day (Friday) of every week, and 2) Mark added the phrase “that is, the day before the sabbath” after *paraskeuē* in order to clarify what was meant by *paraskeuē*” for a Gentile audience.<sup>37</sup> The writings of Josephus support this interpretation as well. He writes that Jews were not required “to go before any judge on the Sabbath-day, nor on the day of the preparation to it, after the ninth hour.”<sup>38</sup>

Additional support for the preparation day being Friday can be found in Luke. Luke writes that Jesus died on the “preparation day” as the “sabbath drew on” (Luke 23:54). Luke then adds the women returned home to prepare spices and then “rested the sabbath day according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56). Those proposing a Wednesday crucifixion contend that the women rested upon an annual sabbath (Unleavened Bread) and not the weekly Sabbath. According to this theory, the “commandment” refers to instructions where the Israelites were commanded to do “no customary work” on the first day of the feast of unleavened bread (Leviticus 23:7 NKJV). The Greek word in Luke 23:56 for commandment is *entole*, which is a generic word used many times in the New Testament for any type of commandment.<sup>39</sup> However, *entole* is never used in the New Testament in regards to a feast day regulation. This does not mean it could not be used in that manner, but the burden would be upon Wednesday crucifixion

---

<sup>36</sup> Bacchiocchi, *The Time of the Crucifixion*, 40.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>38</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVI 6:2. Hence, Jesus’ trial was completed before the 9<sup>th</sup> hour (Mark 15:25).

<sup>39</sup> Thayer, *Greek Lexicon*, 218.

advocates to prove Luke was using this word in regards to a festal ordinance. On the other hand, *entole* is routinely used by New Testament authors in reference to the Ten Commandments. Luke used *entole* when Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler about the Ten Commandments, telling him, “Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother” (Luke 18:20). Other New Testament authors also used *entole* to refer to the Ten Commandments.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, while it is not possible to exclude the theory that Luke was referring to a feast day regulation in Luke 23:56, the preponderance of biblical evidence points to the fact that Luke was referring to the Fourth Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11). That being the case, the Sabbath after the preparation day in Luke 23:56 is the weekly Sabbath upon which the Lord commanded Israel to rest.

Another point in favor of Luke 23:56 being the weekly Sabbath is that the command to keep the Passover was an “ordinance” and not a “commandment.” Exodus 12:14 states this clearly: “Ye shall keep it a feast by an **ordinance** for ever” (Exodus 12:14, emphasis supplied). In his writings, Luke used a different Greek word to refer to ordinances. In Luke 1:6, Luke writes of the righteousness of John the Baptist’s parents, saying they kept both the “commandments” (*entolē*) and “ordinances” (*dikaiōma*). The fact that Luke uses *entole* instead of *dikaiōma* in Luke 23:56 provides further evidence Luke was referring to the weekly Sabbath.

Advocates of a Wednesday crucifixion are aware of this evidence and some have conceded that the Sabbath mentioned by Luke was indeed the weekly Sabbath. However, they attempt to get around this dilemma by saying that after viewing where the body of the Lord was laid, the women rested upon Thursday, and then, according to Luke 23:56, they prepared spices and ointments all day on Friday, and finally rested upon the seventh day Sabbath. There are

---

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 15:3-6, Mark 7:9-11, 10:19, Ephesians 6:2.

several problems with that scenario. First, Luke 23:54 says that Jesus died on the preparation (*paraskeue*), which could only mean Friday. Second, Luke 23:54 says the Sabbath (*sabbaton*) was approaching. *Sabbaton* is only used in the New Testament to refer to the weekly Sabbath. Third, Luke 23:56 says the women “returned” from viewing the body. This connects it to verses 54 and 55 in which Luke tells us that on the day Jesus died, the women went to the sepulcher. Thus, we find the women returning from the sepulcher on crucifixion evening and then resting upon Sabbath according to the commandment. If the crucifixion was on Wednesday, then the women would be returning from the sepulcher late Wednesday afternoon, and then the next event we find recorded is that the women must stop preparing the spices because Friday sundown has arrived. Luke never mentions an annual feast day, nor that the women spent a whole day (Friday) preparing spices. The natural flow of the passage has the women returning late Friday afternoon after the crucifixion, starting the preparation of the spices before sundown, and then resting on the weekly Sabbath.

Having established the crucifixion week ended upon the seventh day Sabbath which followed Friday (the preparation day), the best way to anchor the beginning date of Mark’s crucifixion week is to determine when Jesus entered Bethany. Jesus came to Bethany one day prior to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. According to John, Jesus arrived in Bethany “six days before the Passover” (John 12:1). John adds that “on the next day” the people cut “branches of palm trees” as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, “sitting on an ass’s colt” (John 12:12-14). If Passover (Nisan 14) was on a Friday, as already established, then Jesus arrived at Bethany six days prior to Nisan 14, which was likely around the start of the Sabbath on Friday evening. According to Andreas Kostenberger and Justin Taylor, after resting on Sabbath, “Jesus arose

Sunday morning to enter the city of Jerusalem” on Palm Sunday.<sup>41</sup> If Nisan 14 was on a Wednesday, then Jesus arrived at Bethany on Thursday. While this has the advantage of alleviating the problem of Jesus dealing with Sabbath travel restrictions when travelling into Bethany upon the Sabbath, it creates a similar problem for Jesus on Mark’s second day, which would be Sabbath if Jesus died on Wednesday. On that day, Jesus traverses to and from Bethany. Bethany is two miles from Jerusalem, which is more than double a Sabbath day’s journey. The bottom line is that John’s statement that Jesus died on “the Jews’ preparation day” establishes Friday, Nisan 14, as the day of Christ’s death. Helen Bond notes this view is held “by a significant modern consensus” of scholars.<sup>42</sup> Six days prior to that would place Jesus’ arrival in Bethany on Saturday, thus providing too little time for a Wednesday crucifixion. Thus, the chronology of John correlates with Mark’s chronology and supports the traditional timeline.

#### Inclusive Reckoning of Time

Having established that crucifixion week began on Palm Sunday, the dilemma remains that the traditional chronology keeps Jesus in the tomb for a little over a day-and-a-half. This is far less than the time required by the “Sign of Jonah” prophecy of Jesus: “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40). In order to reconcile this substantial difference, it is important to understand how the Hebrews reckoned time. In Jewish reckoning a part of a day could be counted as a whole day, or even as a whole day and night. This is called inclusive

---

<sup>41</sup> Andreas Kostenberger and Justin Taylor, *Final Days of Jesus: The Most Important Week of the Most Important Person Who Ever Lived* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 22. Note: On page 38 the authors surmise that crucifixion Friday was on Nisan 15, which would place the triumphal entry on Sunday, Nisan 10. Regardless of the dates, they concur that Jesus died on a Friday (p. 69) and was raised on Sunday (p. 126).

<sup>42</sup> Helen Bond, “Dating the Death of Jesus: Memory and the Religious Imagination,” *New Testament Studies* 59, no. 4 (10, 2013): 465, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/S0028688513000131>.

reckoning. If this method of reckoning can be established as biblical, then it could explain the time duration dilemma.

One example of inclusive reckoning is found in Esther. Esther told the Jews to not eat for “three days, night or day” (Esther 4:16). She said that she would do the same, and afterwards she would “go in unto the king” (Esther 4:16). The modern reader would logically conclude that if the Jews were planning to fast day and night for three days, then one would expect Esther to wait to go into the king until after this 72-hour period of fasting had completed, which would be upon the fourth day. However, the Bible clearly states she went into the king “on the third day” (Esther 5:1). While this may seem odd to the modern reader, it correlates with how the Jews reckoned days. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* explains inclusive reckoning:

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 of the first day only a few minutes remained after the birth of the child, these being counted as one day. Again, a man who hears of a vow made by his wife or his daughter, and desires to cancel the vow, must do so on the same day on which he hears of it, as otherwise the protest has no effect; even if the hearing takes place a little time before night, the annulment must be done within that little time.<sup>43</sup>

From this definition it is obvious that “day” does not always equate to a 24-hour period of time. Based on this, when reckoning events such as days of mourning for a funeral, even a few minutes of a 24-hour period would count as one day. Thus, two facts can be established:

- 1) Any part of a day constitutes a “day” in Jewish reckoning.

---

<sup>43</sup> Emil G. Hirsch and Michael Friedländer, “DAY (Hebrew, ‘yom’),” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, accessed March 29, 2020, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5007-day>.

- 2) The term “day and night” is synonymous with a day. For example, Matthew says Jesus fasted “forty days and forty nights” whereas Mark and Luke write that Jesus fasted “forty days” (Matthew 4:2, Mark 1:13, Luke 4:2).

Given that #1 and #2 above are true, it must also be true that “day and night” could refer to any part of a 24-hour period, including only a small part of the day. Colin Humphreys appeals to the Jewish Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah for support of this. Humphreys confirms, “a portion of a twenty-four-hour period of a day and a night counts as a whole day and a night.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, if Jesus died on Friday afternoon, that would count as “one day and one night.” Saturday would count as the second “day and night.” Sunday would count as the third “day and night.”

Based on the above analysis, a strict 72-hour period is not required in order to fulfill the “sign of Jonah” prophecy. Hank Hanegraaf explains: “in Jewish idiom any part of a day counted as a day—night unit. Thus, there is no need to literalistically [*sic*] demand that seventy-two hours be accounted for.”<sup>45</sup> Hoehner concurs, writing, “the three days and three nights in Matthew 12:40 is an idiomatic expression...rather than a literal seventy-two hour period.”<sup>46</sup> Craig Keener agrees, writing, “‘three days and three nights’ need not imply complete days; parts of a twenty-four-hour day counted as representing the whole day.”<sup>47</sup> Many other eminent scholars could be cited in support of this, but suffice it to say the overwhelming scholarly consensus concludes there is no discrepancy between the “sign of Jonah” prophecy and the traditional time frame of Jesus’ entombment.

---

<sup>44</sup> Colin J. Humphreys, *The Mystery of the Last Supper: Reconstructing the Final Days of Jesus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 23.

<sup>45</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, *The Bible Answer Book* vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 33.

<sup>46</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 66.

<sup>47</sup> Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 81.

## “After Three Days” Versus “On the Third Day”

Critics of the traditional timeline will point out that there are two verses in the Gospels which say that Jesus would rise “after three days” (Matthew 27:63, Mark 8:31). This would seem to support the theory of a three-day entombment, followed by the resurrection. If Jesus died on Friday, “after three days” would require a Monday afternoon resurrection, presenting a problem for the traditional time line. Once again, this line of reasoning does not consider Jewish inclusive reckoning of days. If any part of a day equals a whole day, then the problem disappears.

There is considerably more evidence that Jesus rose “on the third day” rather than after the completion of a 72-hour period. Jesus prophesied if the temple was destroyed, he would raise it up “in three days” (John 2:19).<sup>48</sup> Of course, Jesus was speaking “of the temple of his body” (John 2:21). To build a temple “in three days” would mean in 72-hours *or less*. When Pilate sent a guard to the tomb of Jesus, he ordered it secured “until the third day” (Matthew 27:64). Again, this indicates the Jews understood Jesus to mean that he would arise *within* a three-day time period not *after* a three-day period. There are numerous verses indicating Jesus would rise sometime on the “third day” after his death:

Matthew 16:21 – “...and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”

Matthew 17:23 – “...they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again.”

Matthew 20:19 – “...and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.”

Mark 9:31 – “...and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.”

Mark 10:34 – “...and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.”

Luke 9:22 – “...and be slain, and be raised the third day.”

Luke 18:33 – “...and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.”

---

<sup>48</sup> See also Matthew 26:61, 27:40; Mark 14:58, 15:49.



Luke 24:7 – “...and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”

Luke 24:21 – “...to day is the third day since these things were done.”

Luke 24:46 – “...to rise from the dead the third day.”

Acts 10:40 – “Him God raised up the third day...”

1 Corinthians 15:4 – “...he was buried, and that he rose again the third day...”

If Jesus was raised up “on the third day” he could not possibly have died on Wednesday and arisen on Saturday because Saturday would be the fourth day since Wednesday.<sup>49</sup> The biblical evidence is heavily weighted in favor of Jesus rising “in three days” or “on the third day.” In fact, in Jewish reckoning, all these phrases are synonymous with “after three days.” This can be verified by examining other biblical passages. For example, King Rehoboam told the people: “Depart for three days, then return to me” (1 Kings 12:5).<sup>50</sup> Afterwards, the people returned “on the third day” (1 Kings 12:12).<sup>51</sup> Similar interchangeability can be seen in the parallel passages of the synoptic gospels. In two instances, Matthew and Luke both use the words “on the third day” while the parallel passage in Mark uses “after three days.”<sup>52</sup> This shows the biblical authors considered “on the third day” and “after three days” to be interchangeable.

If Jesus had died on Wednesday, the Gospel authors should have written that Jesus was raised “on the fourth day,” not the third. Luke’s rendition of Peter’s vision and subsequent visit to Cornelius provides a good example demonstrating how time was calculated. On day one Cornelius of Caesarea saw a vision around the “ninth hour of the day” (Acts 10:3). Cornelius sent men to find Peter, which they did at around the sixth hour “on the morrow,” which was day

---

<sup>49</sup> Wednesday would be the first day, Thursday the second, Friday the third, and Saturday the fourth.

<sup>50</sup> Also 2 Chronicles 10:5: “Return to me again in three days.”

<sup>51</sup> Also 2 Chronicles 10:12.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 16:21 and 20:19, Luke 9:22 and 18:33 versus Mark 8:31 and 10:34. See also Matthew 17:23 (“on the third day”) compared to Mark 9:31 (“after three days”).

two (Acts 10:9). Peter then started out with the men to Cornelius' house "on the morrow," which was day three (Acts 10:23). The men arrived in Caesarea "the morrow after," which was the fourth day (Acts 10:24). These events span a period of four days, which matches the length of time a Wednesday crucifixion would require. Cornelius tells Peter that he received a vision, "four days ago..." (Acts 10:30). This demonstrates that if Jesus had died on Wednesday and been raised on Saturday, the biblical authors would have recognized it as being four days. However, they never once mentioned that Jesus was raised on the fourth day.

### On the Road to Emmaus

Wednesday crucifixion advocates argue that their interpretation removes a large discrepancy between the "sign of Jonah" prophecy and the traditional duration of Jesus' entombment. However, it actually opens more discrepancies than it solves. Luke's account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is irreconcilable with a Wednesday crucifixion. Luke writes that two disciples were traveling to Emmaus on the day Jesus was resurrected, which was the "first day of the week" (Luke 24:1,13). Jesus appears and begins walking with them. Cleopas describes the crucifixion to Jesus and then declares, "to day is the third day since these things were done" (Luke 24:21). "These things" refers to the events described in the previous verse: The rulers "condemned" Jesus to death, and they "crucified him" (Luke 24:20). If Sunday was the third day, then Saturday was the second day, and Friday was the first day or the day upon with the said events happened. If Jesus had been crucified on Wednesday, then Cleopas would have had to have said, "to day is the *fifth* day since these things were done." Realizing this dilemma, Wednesday crucifixion advocates have proposed that the events the disciples were referring to happened on Thursday. However, their timeline shows the trial and crucifixion happened on

Wednesday, not Thursday.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the Wednesday crucifixion timeline cannot possibly fit the Emmaus timeline. Thus, it creates an additional discrepancy that Wednesday crucifixion advocates have never adequately solved.

### The “High” Sabbath Day

Kostenberger and Taylor write that Jesus was crucified on Friday, “the day of Preparation for the Sabbath of Passover week.”<sup>54</sup> Humphreys agrees, noting that all “four gospels agree that Jesus died the day before...the Sabbath, hence Jesus died on a Friday.”<sup>55</sup> He adds that when Nisan 15 fell “on the normal weekly Sabbath, it was called a special Sabbath.”<sup>56</sup> John describes that Sabbath as: “an high day” (John 19:31). During every Passover week there was always both a weekly Sabbath and an annual sabbath day on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Wednesday crucifixion advocates propose the annual sabbath day was on Thursday and the weekly Sabbath was on Saturday. The traditional timeline claims the annual feast day sabbath fell upon a weekly Sabbath, so that both events coincided on the same day. Which is the correct interpretation of “high” Sabbath? The translators of the NASB Bible render the phrase: “for that Sabbath was a high day,” which indicates the feast occurred on the weekly Sabbath (John 19:31 NASB). John Owen comments on the phrase “high Sabbath” saying: “Literally: for the day of that Sabbath was great.”<sup>57</sup> Albert Barnes adds, “It was called a high day because that year the

---

<sup>53</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *The Resurrection was not on Sunday!* (Radio Church of God, 1952), 10-11. Armstrong postulated that “all these things” of Luke 24:21 referred not just to the events explicitly stated by Luke, namely Jesus’ condemnation and crucifixion, but to events not mentioned by Luke, such as “the setting of the seal and the watch over the tomb” on Thursday. If this expansive thinking was somehow true, then Saturday would be the third day since those events happened, not Sunday.

<sup>54</sup> Kostenberger and Taylor, *Final Days*, 114.

<sup>55</sup> Humphreys, *The Mystery*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>57</sup> John J. Owen, *A Commentary, Critical, Expository, and Practical, of the Gospel of John* (New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1860), 466.

feast of the Passover commenced on the Sabbath.”<sup>58</sup> Bacchiocchi notes that Rabbinical sources indicate “the weekly Sabbath was called a ‘high day’ when it coincided with Passover.”<sup>59</sup>

There is substantial evidence to support the idea that the annual sabbath coincided with the weekly Sabbath. First, the annual sabbaths are never referred to as “Sabbath” outside of the Pentateuch. Pentecost confirms the Feast of Unleavened Bread is never called “sabbath” in any known ancient writing, concluding “there is no evidence for this anywhere.”<sup>60</sup> They are referred to as feasts and assemblies but not as Sabbath. Secondly, it is unlikely John would have written “that Sabbath was a high day” if it was merely the Passover. In every other instance in his writings, John refers to the Passover as “Passover.”<sup>61</sup> Finally, it would be odd for John to call the Passover a “high day” if it was on Thursday. It would just be the Passover. The most sensible reading of John 19:31 is exactly the way the translators have written it: That Sabbath was a high day. Since an annual sabbath day is never referred to as “Sabbath” outside of the Pentateuch, it is highly unlikely John used that terminology here. The proper understanding of this verse is that the day following the crucifixion was the weekly Sabbath, and that weekly Sabbath also happened to be a “high day,” indicating it was also the first day of the Passover.

### The First Fruits

During the Passover week, on the “morrow after the sabbath” the priest would wave the first fruits of the harvest in thanksgiving to God (Leviticus 23:11). According to Thomas McCall, this event occurred “on the day after the Sabbath (verse 11), which was always the Sunday of

---

<sup>58</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1962), 354.

<sup>59</sup> Bacchiocchi, *The Time of the Crucifixion*, 44.

<sup>60</sup> Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus*, 575.

<sup>61</sup> John 2:13; 2:23; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28; 18:39; 19:14.

Passover week.”<sup>62</sup> Humphreys notes that both Philo and Josephus acknowledge the “first sheaf of barley was presented...on the second day of the feast, that is on Nisan 16.”<sup>63</sup> The resurrection of Jesus on Sunday morning provided a stunning fulfillment of this event. As the first fruit sheave was waved, Paul writes Jesus Christ was raised “from the dead” to become “the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20). It is evident from this passage that Paul understands the resurrection to be the antitype for the first fruits type. McCall writes: “As for the New Testament record, it is clear that Jesus arose from the dead on Sunday, the First Day of the Week, the day after the Sabbath, as the fulfillment of the feast of First Fruits.”<sup>64</sup> Humphreys writes the “resurrection on the following Sunday was...precisely the day the priests waved the first-fruits of the barley in the temple.”<sup>65</sup> He adds it would be “improbable” for Paul to use the “symbolism of Christ as the Passover lamb and as the first-fruits of those who rise from the dead if both events” were one day off.<sup>66</sup> A Saturday afternoon resurrection fails to accurately fulfill the timing of the type. The fulfillment of the first fruits by the resurrection of Jesus on Sunday lends support for the traditional understanding of the crucifixion week timeline.

### **Extra-Biblical Evidence**

There is additional evidence outside of the Bible which supports a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection. The main sources of this information are testimonies from early Christian authors and more recent discoveries regarding calendrical evidence.

---

<sup>62</sup> Thomas S. McCall, “The Mystery of the Date of Pentecost,” Levitt Letter, July 1995, accessed March 29, 2020, <https://old.levitt.com/newsletters/1995-07>.

<sup>63</sup> Humphreys, *The Mystery*, 69.

<sup>64</sup> McCall, “The Mystery of the Date of Pentecost.”

<sup>65</sup> Humphreys, *The Mystery*, 69.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

## Historical Evidence

A number of early Christian sects, particularly those of Jewish origin, originally met for worship on Sabbath.<sup>67</sup> Over time, these groups abandoned meeting upon the Sabbath and started meeting for church services on Sunday. One argument offered for the change was because Christ arose on Sunday. If Jesus had arisen on Saturday afternoon, this argument could not have been used as justification for meeting on Sunday. Furthermore, there is no record of any early Sabbath-keeping sects ever challenging the fact that the resurrection was on Sunday. If Jesus had arisen on Saturday afternoon, this would have been a strong argument for these sects to continue to meet on Sabbath. The silence in the historical record suggests a Saturday afternoon resurrection was not considered viable. One of the earliest and plainest statements on this subject comes from around the year 155 A.D., when church father Justin Martyr wrote of the crucifixion: “But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because...Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday).”<sup>68</sup> The day before *Saturn* is Friday.<sup>69</sup> Thus, Martyr affirms Jesus died on Friday and was resurrected on Sunday.

In early Christian writings, the day of Christ’s resurrection is universally reported to be on Sunday. In the first three hundred years of Christian history, there is no evidence that any person, whether on the inside or the outside of the church, ever questioned the timeline of a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection. Bacchiocchi argues that the lack of any discussion in

---

<sup>67</sup> Eric M. Meyers, “Early Judaism and Christianity in the Light of Archaeology,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 51, no. 2 (1988): 71, Accessed April 27, 2020, doi:10.2307/3210028.

<sup>68</sup> Justin Martyr, “First Apology,” *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Vol. 2, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Marcus Dods, George Reith, and B. P. Pratten (Edinburg, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1867), 66.

<sup>69</sup> Saturn is the Roman seventh day of the week, *Sāturni diēs*.

the historical record of alternative timelines is convincing evidence for the traditional timeline of the crucifixion. He writes, “no early Christian writer ever disputed or doubted its occurrence on Friday” and this provides “overwhelming proof of the trustworthiness of the traditional chronology of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.”<sup>70</sup> It is impossible to believe the entire body of Christian believers had the timeline wrong until it was “discovered” in modern times!

### Calendrical Evidence

There has always been great interest in fixing the exact date upon which Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Can that date be known? Certain facts of history can help to narrow down the possibilities. The Roman emperor Tiberius, the Jewish high priest Caiaphas, and the Roman governor Pilate were all ruling at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. Based on historical records, Humphreys concludes the “crucifixion must therefore have been in the period AD 26–36.”<sup>71</sup> During the time of Christ the Passover lamb was slaughtered between “three to five p.m.” on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of the seventh Jewish month, which is named Nisan.<sup>72</sup> John’s Gospel indicates Jesus, the “Lamb of God,” died on Passover eve, 14 Nisan, at about the time of the traditional slaughter of the Passover lamb (John 1:36; 19:31). Matthew and Mark’s Gospels indicate the disciples prepared the Last Supper on Nisan 14, and Jesus was crucified on Nisan 15 (Matthew 26:17, Mark 14:12). Bart Ehrman points out correctly, “this is a difference” that is difficult to reconcile.<sup>73</sup> Because there is diversity among the eyewitnesses on the date Jesus died, both dates must be entertained as possibilities. Given that, Humphreys concluded that

---

<sup>70</sup> Bacchiocchi, *The Time of the Crucifixion*, 47.

<sup>71</sup> Humphreys, *The Mystery*, 20.

<sup>72</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 50. Note: Jewish months begin with the appearance of the crescent moon after the new moon.

<sup>73</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 27.

“virtually all biblical scholars agree” that Jesus died on either Nisan 14 or 15 during the years of 26 to 36 A.D.<sup>74</sup>

During the years of 26 to 36 A.D., Oxford astronomer Graeme Waddington calculated that Nisan 14 only fell upon a Wednesday in 34 A.D.<sup>75</sup> Humphreys rules out the 34 A.D. date, “since it would conflict with the date of Paul’s conversion.”<sup>76</sup> Nisan 15 falls upon a Wednesday in 28, 31, and 35 A.D. According to J.K Fotheringham, 28 A.D. can be ruled out because “the crucifixion can hardly be earlier than the Passover of 29.”<sup>77</sup> As for 35 A.D., once again it is too late. Thus, if Jesus had been crucified on a Wednesday, it would have to have been on Nisan 15 in the year 31 AD. However, while there is some variance between John and the synoptic authors on the day of the month, they all agreed Jesus died on Friday, the preparation for the weekly Sabbath. That being the case, the 31 A.D. date can be dismissed.

Nisan 14 fell on a Friday in the years 27, 30, 33, and 36 A.D. The year 27 A.D. can be eliminated because John the Baptist’s ministry began in 28/29 A.D. thus making it “impossible biblically.”<sup>78</sup> Hoehner concludes 36 A.D. is unacceptably late, leaving “only two plausible dates for the crucifixion, namely, A.D. 30 and 33.”<sup>79</sup> Humphreys agrees, asserting the “only two possible crucifixion dates” are “Friday, April 7, AD 30 and Friday, April 3, AD 33.”<sup>80</sup> If

---

<sup>74</sup> Humphreys, *The Mystery*, 61.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>77</sup> J. K. Fotheringham, “The Evidence of Astronomy and Technical Chronology for the Date of the Crucifixion.” *The Journal of Theological Studies* os-XXXV, no. 138 (1934): 155. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1093/jts/os-XXXV.138.146>.

<sup>78</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 51.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 52. Hoehner concludes on page 55, “the A.D. 33 date for the death of Christ best explains the evidence of both sacred and secular history.”

<sup>80</sup> Humphreys, *The Mystery*, 66.



Humphreys' calculations are correct, the calendrical evidence is weighted against a Wednesday crucifixion, especially considering John's timeline, which places the crucifixion on Nisan 14.

There is further evidence supporting the year 33 A.D. which helps substantiate a Friday crucifixion. In Peter's sermon in Acts chapter two, he quotes from Joel and says: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood" (Acts 2:20). The assumption is that Peter is referring to a lunar eclipse event where the moon appears red in color. This event would have to be visible in Jerusalem on the day Jesus was crucified. Waddington used computer algorithms to calculate that there was only a single lunar eclipse visible in Jerusalem between 26 A.D. and 36 A.D., and that eclipse occurred "on Friday, April 3, AD 33."<sup>81</sup> Some scholars, such as Helen Bond, doubt that astronomy can be used "to date Jesus' death."<sup>82</sup> However, many others find the research of Humphreys and Waddington to be compelling. Fotheringham regards the April 3, 33 A.D., date as having "fewer difficulties than any of the other" dates.<sup>83</sup> If these scientists are correct about the date, then Friday is the most likely day of the week for the crucifixion to have occurred.

A final consideration in support of a 33 A.D. date is the crucifixion-day earthquake mentioned by Matthew (Matthew 27:51). Several studies of sediment deposits have concluded there was an earthquake in the region of Jerusalem on or about the year 33 A.D.<sup>84</sup> While not definitive, this lends yet further support to the traditional timeline.

---

<sup>81</sup> Humphreys, *The Mystery*, 90. NASA lists April 3, 33, as a confirmed lunar eclipse on "Lunar Eclipses of Historical Interest," accessed April 19, 2020, <https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/LEhistory/LEplot/LE0033Apr03P.pdf>.

<sup>82</sup> Helen Bond, "Dating the Death of Jesus: Memory and the Religious Imagination," *New Testament Studies* 59, no. 4 (10, 2013): 475, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/S0028688513000131>.

<sup>83</sup> Fotheringham, "The Evidence of Astronomy," 161.

<sup>84</sup> S.J. Thomas, "On Earthquakes, Bloody Moons, and Dating the Crucifixion," April 13, 2017, <https://christian-apologist.com/2017/04/13/on-earthquakes-bloody-moons-and-dating-the-crucifixion/>. Thomas cites the 2011 research of Kagan et al. in the Dead Sea basin (33 AD +/- 2), the 2004 research on sediment cores by

## Conclusion

The theory of a Wednesday crucifixion and Saturday afternoon resurrection has been shown to be entirely lacking in biblical evidence. It creates far more biblical challenges than it purports to solve. The whole argument for this timeline hinges on the day prior to Passover being called a “preparation day,” and Passover being called a “sabbath.” However, no grammatical evidence has ever been produced to show that “preparation day” was used to describe the day prior to Passover in any ancient writing. Likewise, no evidence has been produced to prove the Passover was ever called a sabbath after the Pentateuch. Thus, this theory is based nearly entirely upon conjecture. The theory forces Jesus to rise on the *fourth* day, and yet no Bible passage says Jesus rose on the fourth day. Matthew, Mark, Luke, Peter and Paul provide a total of thirteen statements confirming Jesus rose “on the third day.”<sup>85</sup> An invention of modern times, the theory lacks any credible support in Christian history. The single valid argument in favor of this theory is the “sign of Jonah” prophecy. However, other biblical passages demonstrate conclusively that the Jews used inclusive reckoning to calculate time, which would dismiss the theory that Jesus must remain entombed for exactly 72-hours in order to fulfill this prophecy. In conclusion, it must be pointed out that it is far more important for one to believe in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus than to know the exact day of week he died! However, it is important to present a united front to the world and coalesce around the only timeline that holds the entire weight of biblical evidence, the traditional timeline.

---

Migowski, Agnon, Bookman, Negendank, and Stein which “confirmed an earthquake in 33 AD with a magnitude of 5.5,” and the 2014 findings of Ben-Menahem who concluded an earthquake occurred at “Jerusalem in 33 AD.”

<sup>85</sup> Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7; 24:21; 24:46; Acts 10:40; 1 Corinthians 15:4.

## Bibliography

- Bacchiocchi, Samuele. *The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection*. Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1985.
- Bond, Helen K. "Dating the Death of Jesus: Memory and the Religious Imagination." *New Testament Studies* 59, no. 4 (10, 2013): 461-75.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/S0028688513000131>.
- Borg, Marcus J. and John Dominic Crossan. *The Last Week: The Day by Day Account of Jesus' Final Week in Jerusalem*. Nashville, TN: HarperCollins, 2006.
- Burkill, T. A. "The Last Supper." *Numen* 3, no. 3 (1956): 161-77. doi:10.2307/3269479.
- Fotheringham, J. K. "The Evidence of Astronomy and Technical Chronology for the Date of the Crucifixion." *The Journal of Theological Studies* os-XXXV, no. 138 (1934): 146–162.  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1093/jts/os-XXXV.138.146>.
- Hanegraaff, Hank. *The Bible Answer Book* vol. 2. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Hoenher, Harold. *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010.
- Humphreys, Colin J. *The Mystery of the Last Supper: Reconstructing the Final Days of Jesus*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Kostenberger, Andreas J., Justin Taylor, and Alexander Stewart. *Final Days of Jesus: The Most Important Week of the Most Important Person Who Ever Lived*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.
- McDowell, Josh. *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.
- Pentecost, J. Dwight. *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1981.
- Scroggie, William Graham. *A Guide to the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995.
- Silva, Moises. *The Essential Bible Dictionary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017.
- Walton, John H., Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.