

# BIBLICAL Theology

## *What Day Did Christ Die?*

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The fact of Christ's death is fundamental to the core belief system of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This belief system includes other core issues such as:

- The inspiration of Scripture.
- The deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The validity of the resurrection of Christ.
- The reliability of Biblical prophecy.
- The authenticity of Christian doctrine.

Each of these core issues are tied to the other; remove one and the others follow. For example, remove the inspiration of Scriptures and the Scripture is no longer infallible, inerrant or trustworthy. If Scripture cannot be trusted, everything it says about the other core issues becomes suspect. In the same way, remove the death of Christ and there is no need for the resurrection, Biblical prophecy becomes suspect, Christian doctrine becomes less authentic and Scripture becomes fallible. The whole system collapses on itself.

One can see how undermining the death of Christ affects the whole system. Therefore, what facts about Christ's death are negotiable? The answer is simple, none! No prophecies regarding its place or manner are negotiable. If these are non-negotiable then neither is the day on which Jesus was crucified. As will be seen, recognition of the proper day is vitally important. If He did not die in fulfillment of Scripture, then the whole system collapses as shown above.

### **Three Schools of Thought**

*Friday Crucifixion:* Christ died on a Friday. He was buried at sunset (6:00 PM). He spent two nights (Friday and Saturday) and one intervening day (Saturday) in the tomb. He arose about sunrise (6:00 AM) Sunday morning. This means Christ was in the tomb 24 hours.

*Thursday Crucifixion:* Christ died on a Thursday. He was buried at sunset (6:00 PM). He spent three nights (Thursday, Friday and Saturday), two days (Friday and Saturday) and part of one day (Sunday) in the tomb. He arose about sunrise (6:00 AM) Sunday morning. This means Christ was in the tomb about 60 hours.

*Wednesday Crucifixion:* Christ died on a Wednesday. He was buried prior to sunset (6:00 PM). He spent three nights (Wednesday, Thursday and Friday) and three days (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) in the tomb. He arose prior to sunset (6:00 PM) Saturday evening. This means Christ was in the tomb 72 hours.

It should be noted that nowhere does the Scripture state that the crucifixion of Christ occurred on a Friday, Thursday or Wednesday. The text simply states that Christ was crucified the day

before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42). In order to determine the proper day, consideration will be given to the history, culture, grammar and theology behind the text.

### **The Jewish Religious Calendar**

The Jewish religious calendar is a 'lunisolar' calendar. The months are determined by the moon and the years by the sun. It consists of 354 days, 8 hours and 38 seconds separated into twelve lunar months of 29 or 30 days with each month determined by the new moon.<sup>1</sup> Seven times every nineteen years an additional month is added to synchronize the lunar calendar with the solar calendar. The Jewish religious year, which follows the lunisolar cycle, begins with the first new moon after the Vernal Equinox. The first month of this year is Nisan (also known as Aviv - Exodus 12:2; 13:4; Leviticus 23:34; 25:9; Numbers 9:11). The fourteenth day of Nisan was established as the celebration of the Passover (Leviticus 23:5; Luke 12:2-6). The names of the months used today in the Jewish calendar were assigned during the Babylonian captivity.<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish week (שבוע - shaw-boo-ah), like the modern week, is comprised of seven twenty-four hour cycles. The week as a cycle of time was instituted at Creation (Genesis 2:2-3). The cycle was set forth with each 'day' being comprised of an evening and morning. The Jewish day (יום - yom) is reckoned from 6:00 PM till 6:00 PM (Leviticus 23:32) rather than 12:00 AM till 12:00 AM. This is based again on the Creation day - 'the evening and morning...' (Genesis 1:5). The Hebrews actually view the evening in 'two phases' (Exodus 16:12; 30:8; 12:6; Leviticus 23:5). The first evening (phase 1) was the period on the brink of sunset; the second evening (phase 2) was the period of the actual sunset.<sup>3</sup> The Phoenicians, Numidians and other nations in that region followed the same custom.

The following is a breakdown of the Jewish day:

*First Watch - Sunset to 9 PM*

*Second Watch - 9 PM to Midnight*

*Third Watch - Midnight to 3 AM*

*Fourth Watch - 3 AM to Sunrise*

*First Watch - Sunrise to 9 AM*

*Second Watch - 9 AM to Noon*

*Third Watch - Noon to 3 PM*

*Fourth Watch - 3 PM to sunset*

The usage of evening and morning (day and night) was a term employed even in the day of Christ to refer to the whole day. In John 11:9 it is noted that there are twelve hours in the day. This is a reference to the period from 6:00 AM till 6:00 PM. Thus it can also be said that there are twelve hours in the night (6:00 PM till 6:00 AM). The Jews also followed the Creation narrative for the names of the days of the week: First Day, Second Day and so forth concluding with the Shabbat (i.e. Sabbath) on the Seventh Day as a day of rest.

### **The Feast of Israel in Relation to the Death of Christ**

According to Hebrews 8:1-10:39, the Jewish Feasts were not merely historic, but prophetic. They are signposts pointing to the Messiah. It is necessary to recreate the calendar for the year in which Christ died to see the literal fulfillment of the prophetic signposts. One of the difficulties in doing this is to understand that the calendar in use during the first century followed the Julian system, whereas the modern calendar follows the Gregorian system (beginning circa 1582). The difficulty with the Julian system was that after 131 years it became out of sync with the equinoxes and solstices by one day. By 1582, the Julian system was out of sync by twelve days. In 1582, by papal bull of Pope Gregory, the Gregorian system was put into place. Ten days were omitted from

the calendar and new rules were established for leap year. All dates in history though between 46 BC and AD 1582 follow the Julian system.<sup>4</sup> Thus, to determine when a specific date fell (i.e. the death of Christ) on a specific day (i.e. Wednesday, Thursday or Friday), one would need to keep in mind the difference between the two systems.

History does record that the Vernal Equinox occurred on March 11, AD 325 (Julian system). As well, the Vernal Equinox occurred one day earlier for every century prior to AD 325. Thus the Vernal Equinox would have fallen on March 8th during the first century AD. As noted, the Jewish religious year began following the first New Moon after the Vernal Equinox. Since the Vernal Equinox fell on March 8th, the New Moon occurred on March 9th and the New Year would begin on March 10th. By counting 14 days from the 10th, Passover would fall on March 23rd. Using the calculation provided by Joseph Doan (1895) the Passover can be determined for the years AD 31, AD 30 and AD 29 as follows:<sup>5</sup>

Year	Date	Day	Jewish Reckoning
AD 31			
	March 10	Saturday	Nisan 1
	March 23	Friday	Nisan 14
AD 30			
	March 10	Friday	Nisan 1
	March 23	Thursday	Nisan 14
AD 29			
	March 10	Thursday	Nisan 1
	March 23	Wednesday	Nisan 14

Therefore, if Christ died in AD 31, He died on a Friday; if Christ died in AD 30, He died on a Thursday; if Christ died in AD 29, He died on a Wednesday.

It must be stated again, the Jewish Feast were signposts pointing to the Messiah. That being true, consider Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-17, 23-35; 27:16-25; Numbers 36:4). Jubilee is the fiftieth year following the end of the seven Sabbatical Cycles (forty-nine years). The Jubilee year then began the first year of the next Sabbatical Cycle. It is proclaimed by the blowing of a ram's horn on the Day of Atonement. The Year of Jubilee is a time for restoration of land, inheritance, etc. and a reflection upon their rescue from slavery in Egypt. According to Isaiah 61:1-11 the Messiah will be the fulfillment of Jubilee when He rescues His people from enslavement to sin and Satan and ushers in His kingdom. During the first year of His earthly ministry Jesus taught in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). The text states that He opened to Isaiah 61:1-3 and declared Himself to be the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-3. Sadly, the Jews rejected Him as their Messiah and the Kingdom program was placed on hold.

During the Second Temple Period, the Year of Jubilee was no longer celebrated in the fiftieth year but in the forty-ninth year of the Sabbatical Cycle.<sup>6</sup> Working from 1444 BC, the first Jubilee would have been celebrated in 1395 BC. During the time of Christ, the Jubilee year would have been celebrated from October of AD 27 through September of AD 28.<sup>7</sup> If Jesus began His earthly ministry during the Year of Jubilee (AD 27-28) His death would have been in the year AD 29.<sup>8</sup> Further, there is an early Patristic tradition that dates the crucifixion to AD 29.<sup>9</sup> This fits with the premise of a Wednesday, Nisan 14 crucifixion. How fitting that Jesus the Messiah came to offer the fulfillment of Jubilee in the very year of Jubilee!

But what about Luke 3:1 which states that John the Baptist began his ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberius' reign? Tiberius became ruler of Rome in August of AD 14. This would make the fifteenth year of his reign AD 29 and would leave no room for the ministry of John and Jesus as presented in the Bible. This is not an issue though when consideration is given to the way in which he came to power. When the Roman Senate declared Augustus to be the emperor, they did so on the condition that his authority would end at death. Upon his death, the Senate would choose a new heir to the throne. Augustus circumvented the condition by appointing a co-regent to whom he conferred power. In AD 4, Augustus selected his son-in-law to be his co-regent and then adopted him as his legal heir. As of AD 11, Tiberius became co-regent with Augustus. By dating from August of AD 11, the fifteenth year of Tiberius' reign would be August of AD 26. John the Baptist began his ministry in AD 26. Six months later (AD 27) Jesus began his ministry and went to the cross in AD 29.<sup>10</sup>

The following is an overview of the Jewish Feast days that prominently played a role in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ during His final days on earth.

#### *Nisan 09*

John 12:1 states that Christ arrived in Bethany by way of Jericho six days prior to Passover. Since Passover begins the evening of Nisan 14 and continues until Nisan 15, it would place Christ arrival in Bethany on Nisan 9. That evening, a feast is held at the house of Simon the Leper. At this feast, Jesus is anointed by Mary in preparation for His burial (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:2-8). Judas in response to the supposed waste went to the Chief Priests and offered to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:6-16; Mark 14:3-11). Note that Judas went to the Chief Priest 'after supper'. This would place it after sunset and therefore on Nisan 10. Nisan 10 is when the lambs were purchased for sacrifice on Nisan 14. The Lamb of God was sold / bought on Nisan 10 for thirty pieces of silver.

The Gospel of John places this feast prior to the Triumphant entry (John 12:1 - six days prior). However by comparing with the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26:1-3; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2) it appears that this feast and the subsequent anointing happened two days prior to Passover. Some scholars believe that John likely included these events in chapter 12 because it is the last mention of Bethany in John's Gospel.<sup>11</sup> However, John's Gospel is always chronologically accurate. It is more likely that the Synoptics present these events logically rather than chronologically to relate the anointing to Judas' betrayal, which was finalized two days prior to the Passover.

#### *Nisan 10: The Great Sabbath:*

The following day, Nisan 10, Christ triumphantly enter Jerusalem. This was the Sabbath immediately preceding the Passover. According to the Talmud, Israel left Egypt on Thursday, Nisan 15. Nisan 10 was the day on which the lambs were selected for sacrifice. By working back through the dates, Nisan 10 would have fallen on the weekly Sabbath that year. By choosing the Lamb on Nisan 10 and sacrificing it on Nisan 14, it allowed time for examination for blemish and personal identification with the family it represented (Exodus 12:3-6) Jesus was the Lamb of God without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:19).

If Nisan 14 fell on a Wednesday, Nisan 10, the Great Sabbath, would have fallen on the weekly Sabbath. This raises the question, "How would Jesus travel from Bethany to Jerusalem on the Sabbath Day in light of a 'Sabbath Day's Journey' (Acts 1:12). A Sabbath Day's Journey was considered to be approximately 2,000 cubits (3,000-3,600 feet/@1/2 mile) based on Rabbinical interpretation of Joshua 3:4 (the distance between the people and the Ark of the Covenant). By the time of Christ, the Scribes had created various methods to increase the distance up to 4,000 cubits (5,000 to 5,600 feet/@ 1 mile).<sup>12</sup>

According to Scripture, Bethany was near Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives (Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29; John 11:18). Bethany was about fifteen furlongs away from Jerusalem. Fifteen furlongs equals about two miles. This would be about one and a half miles further than a Sabbath Day's journey. However, it should be noted that Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath and not bound by man-made traditions (Matthew 12:9; 22:8; Luke 6:5; 13:15). The fact that Christ would make such an entrance into Jerusalem on the Sabbath in spite of man's traditions further establishes that He is not only the Savior (i.e. Messiah) but Lord (i.e. Jehovah) as well. Is it no wonder that the Pharisees were so incensed (Luke 19:39, 47; John 12:19, 43)? How fitting that the Lamb of God would enter the city as the Messiah the very day that the lambs were chosen for the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12:3).

### *Nisan 13: The Preparation for the Passover begins*

Preparation began at evening on Nisan 13 and lasted through Nisan 14. As part of the preparation, the house was cleansed of leaven. The head of the household would search the house by candle light looking for any leaven. This is called the 'Bedikat Chametz'.<sup>13</sup> If leaven was found, it would either be disposed of or locked away until after the Passover and the eight days of unleavened bread. This action is based on Zephaniah 1:12, "*And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.*"<sup>14</sup>

This evening the disciples entered the Upper Room and ate the Last Supper. Much discussion is given as to whether or not this was a Passover Seder or just a final meal. The Synoptics all agree that this Last Supper was a Passover Seder (Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7). The Gospel of John seems to indicate otherwise (18:28; 19:10). Another sticking point for the Last Supper being a Passover Seder is that it is the evening of Nisan 13 (Tuesday evening). The Passover Seder was traditionally eaten on the evening of Nisan 14 (Wednesday evening). There are several facts that point to it being an actual Passover Seder:

- This meal was eaten in Jerusalem as required by the Law (Matthew 26:18; Mark 14:13; Luke 22:10; John 18:1). What is of note is that Jesus and the disciples had been staying in Bethany each evening up to this point.
- The meal was eaten during the evening and extending into the night (Exodus 12:8; Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:17; John 13:30; 1 Corinthians 11:23). Typically, the Jews ate late in the afternoon.
- The bread was eaten during the middle of the meal (Mark 14:20-22; Luke 22:18-23). Typically, the Jews ate their bread at the beginning of their meal.
- The departure of Judas was not disturbing. The guest believed that he either left to purchase some needed last minute items for the dinner or that he went to offer alms for the poor (John 13:29). The offering of alms for the poor was something done in connection with the Passover Seder.
- The meal ended with the singing of the Hallel Psalm (Mark 14:26; Matthew 26:30). Typically, meals did not end with singing.
- It was customary during the Passover for the Father or head of the group to describe the significance of certain items (Exodus 12:26-27; 13:8; Deuteronomy 26:5-11). Jesus described the significance of the bread and wine (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).
- The meal was eaten in a reclining position (Mark 14:18; John 13:23-28).
- The meal was observed with levitical purity (John 13:10).

- Red wine was present at the meal (Mark 14:23-25). While this was unusual for a typical meal, four cups of red wine were required for the Passover Seder.<sup>15</sup>

The issue then is whether or not Jesus and the disciples could have legitimately eaten a Passover Seder at the end of Nisan 13 and beginning of Nisan 14. According to the book of Jubilees, which was used by the Essenes at Qumran, Passover could be eaten on the Tuesday evening prior to the actual Passover. The two Passovers were observed on the basis of two different methods of reckoning the day. The Essenes reckoned a day from sunrise to sunrise. The Galileans and the Pharisees followed the same method, whereas the Judeans and the Sadducees reckoned a day from sunset to sunset.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Nisan 14 would have begun a day earlier for the Galileans. This arrangement was accepted as a means to alleviate the strain on the Temple complex.<sup>17</sup> In 65 AD, the Roman counted the sale of 265,000 lambs. If one lamb could be offered for every ten people, this would multiply out to be about three-million people.<sup>18</sup> That number would only be slightly less in 29 AD. As well, it would help to reduce regional and religious conflicts between the Galileans and Judeans. It also helps to clarify why the Upper Room was fully prepared and ready for use.

Obviously, Jesus as a Galilean could legitimately eat the Passover a full day before. The fact that the previous day (Nisan 13) was a Tuesday, many would have already been making preparations for the Passover Seder. As to the difference between the Synoptic's and John's reckoning, the Synoptic Gospels recorded the events following the sunrise to sunrise method employed by the Galileans while John recorded the events following the sunset to sunset method employed by the Judeans.

#### *Nisan 14: The Preparation for the Passover continued & Passover begins*

Beginning the morning of Nisan 14, the fast of the firstborn began commemorating the sparing of the firstborn prior to the Exodus.<sup>19</sup> At the time of the morning prayers (9:00 AM) a package of leaven was burned. All work ceased from noon onward. All Israelite males able and within fifteen miles of Jerusalem were to appear in Jerusalem with an offering. The Paschal lambs were offered as a sacrifice, 'between the evenings' beginning at 3:00 PM and lasting till about 6:00 PM (Exodus 12:6; Leviticus 23:4).<sup>20</sup> Further, when the lambs were offered not a bone was broken (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20). When Jesus' body was examined at the time of His death it was noted that not a bone of His body was broken (John 19:36).

After Jesus death, Joseph began to prepare for His burial. Mark 15:42 states, "*And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath.*" This has led many to believe that Christ died on Friday; however according to John 19:14, Jesus was tried and put to death on the Preparation of the Passover. This is not the day before the weekly Sabbath, but the day before the Passover Sabbath. This will be discussed momentarily.

The Paschal meal was eaten at evening. The Rabbis insisted that the meal be eaten in a reclining position. The left elbow was placed on the table with the head resting on the left hand. Sufficient room was given for movement of the right hand. This positioning caused the person on one's right to lean back onto the person to their left in order to hear them.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Nisan 15: Passover continues and the Feast of Unleavened Bread*

Passover began between 3:00 and 6:00 PM on Nisan 14 and continued until 6:00 PM on Nisan 15. The Passover always came on the same date each year and that day was the day following the night of the full moon. The Passover was also the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast was a seven day celebration beginning on Nisan 15 and extending until Nisan 21. Nisan 15 is referred to as 'the morrow of the Passover' (Numbers 33:3; Joshua 5:11). This day was a 'holy convocation' and treated as a Sabbath (except for the preparation of food) along with the seventh

day of the celebration (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:7; Numbers 28:16-18).<sup>22</sup> This would have indicated that anytime Nisan 15 falls on any day other than a Saturday, the Jews would have celebrated two 'Sabbaths' that week. As well, during the length of the celebration, only unleavened bread was to be eaten.

Matthew 27:62 and 63 states that, "*On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation*" the religious rulers cajoled Pilate to set a guard and seal the tomb, "*lest His disciples come... and steal Him away.*" Since the Day of Preparation was Wednesday, then the next day would be Thursday (Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread). Thus, from Thursday until the end of the third day (Saturday evening) the soldiers would not have allowed the body to be disturbed.

### *Nisan 16*

The women would not have been allowed to have access to the body until after the three day period. Luke 24:1 states that when the women came to the tomb early on the first day of the week that they brought with them the spices they had prepared. Mark 16:1 states that when the Sabbath was past, the women purchased the spices to anoint the body. Luke 23:52-54 states that the women prepared the spices and rested on the Sabbath. How is it possible that the women bought the spices after the Sabbath and then prepared them before the Sabbath? The answer lies in the fact that the 'Sabbath' mentioned in Mark 16:1 is the 'holy convocation' otherwise known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 15. The Sabbath mentioned in Luke 23:52-54 is the weekly Sabbath. In other words, the woman would have purchased and prepared the spices on Friday, Nisan 16. Saturday, Nisan 17 the women would have marked the weekly Sabbath. That evening, after the Sabbath they would approach the tomb to anoint the body.

### *Nisan 18*

Immediately following the weekly Sabbath's end, the women came to the tomb and found it to be empty. The question that is raised is when did they come to the tomb? Matthew 28:1 states, "*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.*"

Note the phrase, '*in the end of the Sabbath*' (οψε δε σαββατων). First, it should be noted that the term 'Sabbath' (singular) should be translated as 'Sabbaths' (plural). This is because the term 'σαββατων' (sabbaton) is a genitive *plural* noun. Since the term is plural, it provides for the celebration of more than one 'Sabbath' that week. As noted above, the First Day of Unleavened Bread was a holy convocation and treated as a Sabbath day. Second, the term 'οψε' (opse) from which the word 'end' is translated, means 'late in the day; i.e. evening; the period 'normally after sunset, but before night.'<sup>23</sup> As well, when 'δε' (de) is followed by a term in the genitive case (such as 'σαββατων') it means 'at the end of, at the close of.'<sup>24</sup> This phrase should then be rendered as 'the Sabbath(s) having just passed' or 'at the end of the Sabbaths'.<sup>25</sup> The Sabbaths (the first day of Unleavened Bread - Nisan 15 and the weekly Sabbath) would have come to an end at 6:00 PM on Saturday evening.

The next phrase, '*as it began to dawn*' (τη επιφωσκουση) is often understood as being the period leading up to the rising of the sun (just prior to 6:00 AM). However, it should be noted that the 'verb (επιφωσκουση - epipsokouse) has the meaning to draw near'.<sup>26</sup> In Luke 23:54 this term is used to denote that the Jewish Sabbath (which began in the evening) was drawing near. Thus the phrase 'as it began to dawn' should be translated as 'it was drawing on towards...'

The two phrases together could be translated literally as either:

- 'late in the week, toward the first of the week'.<sup>27</sup>

- 'in the evening of the Sabbaths when the Jewish day was drawing on towards the first day of the week'
  - 'in the end of the week as the first of the week was drawing near'
- Also consider the Wycliffe and Tyndale translations of this verse:<sup>28</sup>
- "Forsothe in the evenyng of the Saboth, that sheyneth in the firste daye of the woke" (Wycliffe Bible)
  - "The Saboth daye at even, which dauneth the morowe after the Saboth" (Tyndale Bible)
- It is noteworthy that the translations directly point to the fact that the women did not come to the tomb prior to sunrise, but rather just after sunset. Remember, that the beginning (i.e. 'dawning') of a day began at 6:00 PM by Jewish reckoning.

### *Nisan 18 - The Feast of First-fruits*

The Feast of First-fruits began during the Feast of Unleavened Bread and ended by the time of Pentecost (i.e. the Feast of Weeks). The celebration of the Feast of First-fruits consisted of gathering a sheaf of barley and waiving it before the Lord to acknowledge Him as the Giver of the harvest (Leviticus 23:9-12). This offering occurred on 'the morrow after the Sabbath' of the Passover week. In Leviticus 23:9-12, the 'morrow after the Sabbath' is to be understood as the day after the weekly Sabbath.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, Leviticus 23 commands that the Day of Pentecost be counted from this weekly Sabbath. Pentecost was called the Feast of Weeks because the timing of the Feast was determined by 'counting' seven Sabbaths (i.e. seven weeks). The term 'Pentecost' is a Greek term which designates the counting of fifty (fifty days or seven weeks and one day). The counting was to begin on the day after the Sabbath and number seven Sabbaths (weeks from that day). Pentecost would begin on the day after the seventh Sabbath. If the Day of Pentecost was counted from the day following the first day of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 16), then Pentecost would always fall on the same day of the same month each year (Sivan 6). However, it should be noted that there is no designated date during the month of Sivan on which Pentecost falls. Scripture mandates a count and that the first day of the week when First-fruits is offered must fall during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 15-21).

As well, the 'morrow after the Sabbath' was a source of contention between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees chose and offered the First-fruits the day following the first day of Unleavened Bread (i.e. day of holy convocation). Thus, the Feast of Pentecost would always fall on Sivan 6 (50 days after Nisan 16). This method requires no counting of days until Pentecost. The Sadducees chose and offered the First-fruits the day following the weekly Sabbath during the week of Passover. This method required counting fifty days from the Sabbath in order to arrive at the proper day of Pentecost. During the days of Christ and lasting until AD 70, the Sadducees were the keepers of the Temple and the High Priest of Israel. Their system for establishing the Day of Pentecost would have been the system used at the time of Christ's crucifixion.

Finally, 1 Corinthians 15:23 states that '*Christ is the first-fruits of the resurrection*'. In John 20:11-18, it is recorded that Mary is the first to see the resurrection Jesus. Jesus tells her not to touch Him, because He had not yet ascended to his Father. This He did on Nisan 17, the first day of the week, the Feast of First-fruits. Christ presented Himself to the Father as the 'waive-sheaf' or first-fruit and fulfilling Leviticus 23:9-14. It is clear, He must be presented before God to be acceptable for man (Leviticus 23:11).

### **Three Days and Three Nights**

In Matthew 12:39-40, Jesus stated that '*as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, so He would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*'. Just as the 'sign



of Jonah' was a sign to the evil and adulterous generation of his day, so Christ being buried for three days and three nights would be a sign to the evil and adulterous generation of His day. Those who accept a Thursday or Friday crucifixion claim that 'parts' of the days is what is meant by 'three days'. This argument is based on the usage of a Hebrew idiom that states that when a number is associated with a day, month or year it can refer to any part of the day, month or year.<sup>30</sup> This is often seen in reckoning the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah. While there is no reason to dispute the usage of Hebrew idioms it must also be noted that when the number of nights are used with the number of days it is no longer an idiom, but a statement of fact.<sup>31</sup> As noted previously, the usage of day and night consisted of a twenty-four hour period. Dr. Charles Halff, Director of the Christian Jew Foundation, in writing "The Fallacies of Easter" stated: "Sometimes people ask, 'Didn't the Jews count part of a day as a whole day or part of a night as a whole night?' Let me say this, beloved. Whenever you have the expression 'day and night' mentioned together in the Hebrew Scriptures, it always means a full day and a full night. . . For instance, if you will turn to Esther 4:16; 5:1; 1 Samuel; 30:12-13, and of course Jonah 1:17, you will find the expression 'three days and three nights.' And in every instance it means full days and full nights - not part of a day and part of a night."<sup>32</sup> When Christ gave three days and three nights as a sign, He was speaking of three twenty-four hour periods.

On the other hand, there are a number of other passages that refer to only three days. Does this undermine the statement of Matthew 12:40? To answer this question, consideration must be given to these statements.

The first statement for consideration is Luke 24:21 - "*But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done.*" This text takes place as part of the conversation between Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. As Jesus meets these men and begins to converse with them, they are unaware that it is Jesus Himself who is speaking to them. Cleopas and the other disciple explain the events of the last several days, as well as their belief that Jesus was the Messiah and had claimed that he would rise again the third day.

The question is raised regarding the statement, "beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done." It should be noted that according to Luke 24:13 this event transpired the same day on which the women came and found the empty tomb. Since the women came to the tomb 'at the end of the Sabbath as the first of the week was drawing near', Jesus appeared to these two disciples sometime on Sunday. If that is the case, then it would appear that the statement, 'today is the third day since these things were done' would imply that the third day was Sunday. However, a careful examination of the text needs to be given.

The first phrase 'and beside all this' (αλλα γε συν πασιν τουτοις) is an emphatic and pointed statement. When the two Greek words αλλα (alla) and γε (ge) are joined together, it makes the statement emphatic, fixes attention to the statement and can be translated as 'but indeed, moreover'.<sup>33</sup> According to A. T. Robertson, "[this term's] function is to bring into prominence the particular word with which it occurs... feelings are sharply involved when γε is present."<sup>34</sup> The next word in this phrase is the preposition συν (sun) which implies 'over and above'<sup>35</sup> which is followed by the terms πασιν τουτοις (pasin toutois). The term πασιν when connected with a demonstrative pronoun (such as τουτοις) is translated as 'all these things'. The term τουτοις in itself is interesting because it sometimes refers not to the nearest things but to the chief topic of discourse.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, this phrase can be translated, "but indeed, moreover in addition to all these things."

The next phrase 'today is the third day' (τριτην ταυτην ημεραν αγει σημερον) is one of contempt. The demonstrative pronoun ταυτην (tauten) when used in an emphatic statement (as

above) mostly implies anger, impatience or scorn.<sup>37</sup> This term along with the previous phrase shows the heart of the disciples after the crucifixion. The terms τριτην ημεραν (triten hemeran) translate as 'third daylight period'. When the term appears in the accusative case (as it does here) it implies duration and emphatically denotes a set day.<sup>38</sup> The next term is the verb αγει (agei) and when related to a term of time means to pass or spend.<sup>39</sup> The final term σημερον (semeron) is an adverb denoting that the spending or passing is at present.<sup>40</sup> Since there is no nominative case noun to supply the subject for the verb, the verb supplies its own subject. The verb αγει (agei) is in the 3rd person singular. Thus this phrase can be translated as, "it is presently passing the third daylight period".

The final phrase to consider from this verse is 'since these things were done' (αφ ου ταυτα εγενετο). The preposition αφ (aph) when connected to a relative pronoun such as ου (ou) means 'from what time'.<sup>41</sup> The demonstrative pronoun ταυτα (tauta) meaning 'these things' is in the nominative case and supplies the subject for the following verb. The verb εγενετο (egeneto) is in the aorist tense and means 'to have begun to be'.<sup>42</sup> This phrase can be translated then as, 'from what time these things have begun to be'. Consider as well, the following translations of this phrase:

*"but he is dead, and that is three days ago!"* - Moffat Translation<sup>43</sup>

*"Moreover, three days have already passed, since all these events occurred."* - The New Berkely Version in Modern English<sup>44</sup>

*"...an lo, three days have passed since all these things have occurred."* - The Syriac New Testament<sup>45</sup>

Bringing these three phrases together within the context of a literal grammatical hermeneutic provides the following translation: *"but indeed, moreover in addition to all these things it is presently passing the third daylight period from what time these things have begun to be."* As noted the first phrase shows the anger and scorn of the disciples. The second phrase indicates that it is the third day since His crucifixion is past. Jesus had spoken about rising on the third day yet the third day was past and as far as they knew He was still dead and their hopes were shattered. Jesus met with these disciples the same day that the women had come to the tomb, the first day of the week (Luke 24:13). Since the Emmaus Road disciples had knowledge of the tomb event (Luke 24:22-24), this meeting must have occurred later on in the day. This text clearly supports the fact that the disciples were awaiting some event to occur on the third day and that the first of the week was not the third day since the events of the crucifixion, but the day after the third (i.e. the fourth).

The following is a chart of the other 'three days' statements. The first and second columns contain the Scripture reference and the statement as found in the text. The third and fourth columns contain the Greek preposition used in the statement and the literal rendering of the preposition based on the context of the passage.

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Greek Preposition</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Matthew 26:61	"in three days"	δια (dia)	'through' or 'during'
Matthew 27:40	"in three days"	εν (ev)	'within' or 'in the course of'
Matthew 27:63	"after three days"	μετα (meta)	'after a point in time'
Mark 8:31	"after three days"	μετα (meta)	'after a point in time'
Mark 14:58	"within three days"	δια (dia)	'through' or 'during'
Mark 15:29	"in three days"	εν (ev)	'within' or 'in the course of'
John 2:19	"in three days"	εν (ev)	'within' or 'in the course of'

The issue here is two-fold. First, can these statements be harmonized with one another? Secondly, can these statements be harmonized with the statement of Matthew 12:39-40?

As to the first issue consider how the prepositions are being used.  $\delta\iota\alpha$  (dia) is used as genitive of time meaning "of a period of time within which something occurs during" such as "within three days."<sup>46</sup>  $\epsilon\nu$  (ev) is used as a dative of "time meaning how long a space or period which anything takes place in or within, such as within or in three days."<sup>47</sup>  $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha$  (meta) is used as an accusative of time meaning a "marker of time after another point of time [...] with the time expressly given."<sup>48</sup> Each of these preposition are being used as markers of time and are thus related. The difference in their case (genitive, dative, accusative) is simply due to their usage in the sentence (object of the preposition, indirect object, direct object). "With regard to expressions of time, the simple genitive tends to be used to indicate "time within which"; the simple dative, "time when"; the simple accusative, "time how long". This usage is not rigid and much depends on the meaning of the words used and the context." The answer is 'yes' these statements can be harmonized with each other.<sup>49</sup>

The second issue is resolved by looking for the connection with idiomatic expressions. It has been said that, "any usage is good usage if there be enough of it."<sup>50</sup> In other words, a word or expression can be used in a manner contrary to its regular usage to the point it becomes acceptable. Therefore is the phrase '*three days and three nights*' equal to '*in three days*', '*after three days*' or '*within three days*' in Jewish usage? In Esther 4:16, Queen Esther states that she will fast by having nothing to '*eat nor drink for three days, night or day*'. In Esther 5:1 it states that it came to pass '*on the third day*' that Esther finished her fast. Due to the context, these two expressions are equal to one another. In 2 Chronicles 10:5, Rehoboam commanded the people to come back to him '*after three days*'. Later in verse twelve it states that the people returned '*on the third day*'. Again, based on context, these two expression are equal. Therefore, the afore mentioned phrases regarding the third day can not only be harmonized with each other, but can be harmonized with the phrase '*three days and three nights*'.

### Conclusion:

Christ died on Wednesday, Nisan 14, AD 29. A Thursday or Friday crucifixion violates the literal interpretation of Scripture, grammatically, historically, prophetically, etc. While some may not believe that this is an issue of importance, what issues of Christ's death are important? If Christ did not go to the cross and die in accordance to Scripture, than His death is worthless.

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