

ON WHAT DAY WAS JESUS CRUCIFIED?

What day of the week was Jesus crucified? Several years ago a letter to the editor of a local newspaper appeared in which a gentleman advocated that Jesus was **not** crucified on Friday, but either on Wednesday or Thursday. I responded with an answer, to the delight of the newspaper editor. I remember a gospel preacher from the 1960's who argued similarly. Just recently a member of the 2nd Advent Christian Church submitted an article to the local newspaper, condemning the practice of "Good Friday," as based on the contention that Jesus was **not** crucified on Friday, but on Wednesday of that notable week. He based his argument on Matt. 12:40, where Jesus was to "be three days and three nights in the heart (grave) of the earth." The writer claims that if we contend that Jesus was crucified on Friday, we contend that Jesus was wrong. He attempted to support his position by referring to Daniel, who supposedly stated in Dan. 9:27, that Jesus would be crucified "in the MIDST of the week," which would be on Wednesday, and that God did not choose Daniel to witness a lie.

The writer then argued from the New Testament that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, for Mark declared that when some came to Jesus' tomb on Sunday (the first day of the week) that Jesus was "already risen", with the implication that He was already risen **before** "the first day of the week", or, "on the sabbath day" which would give credence to belief in the blessing of the "seventh day" in some systems of Adventism. He states that Jesus was placed in the tomb on Wednesday, and stayed there for seventy-two hours, until late Saturday, supposedly being exactly three days and three nights. If we calculate that Jesus died on the Wednesday, and was in the tomb for 72 hours, and came out on "our" Friday in the evening, that would put His being resurrected on Friday, the 6th day of the week (unless we make our Friday evening the first part of a Jewish day). Thus, his conclusion that when the disciples came to the tomb "the first day of the week", He was "already risen" (on the 7th day). Confusing??

We need not attempt to discredit the doctrine of "Good Friday" by creating a false doctrine about the time of the crucifixion. Jesus **was** indeed put to death on the 6th day of the week, or our Friday, as we propose to establish in this article. We shall examine the contexts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—in this order.

First, from the book of Matthew. He states that "**just before**" dawn (28:1) that the angel said, "**he is risen**" (28:6). "Before dawn" would be just before daylight, or about half way from the beginning of the first day till it ended at the next sunset, as it had begun at sundown a few hours before. Matthew does not record how long Jesus had been risen at this point.

Second, from the book of Mark. He states "**the sabbath was past**" (chapter 16) telling us that the events being described were after the seventh day, thereby being on the first day of the week. Their sabbath had ended at sundown (our Saturday evening), and now it was "**early in the morning**" and it was "**the first day of the week**", and the time of the day was "**at the rising of the sun**" (v. 2). This would be our Sunday morning as we observe Roman time. If Jesus was entombed "late Wednesday", He would have to have been resurrected "late Saturday", or just before Sunset to complete a 72 hour period. Question: "Where was Jesus roaming around prior to the rising of the sun?" Mark then states, "**Jesus was risen early the first day of the week**" (v. 9). So, Jesus was **not** risen on the sabbath day, but "early in the morning", "early the first day of the week", "at the rising of the sun" (vs. 2, 9). His breaking out of darkness into the light of

the sun seems symbolic of His mission to lead men out of darkness to light.

Third, from the book of Luke. In chapter 24, he states that **“upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning”** (v. 1). The two men (angels) truthfully declared that Jesus Himself had said that He (Jesus) would be crucified, and **“the third day rise again”** (v. 7). They “remembered” His having said this (v. 8). That **“same day”** (v. 13), two disciples were walking to Emmaus, just a short distance from Jerusalem. Jesus appeared to them (v. 15). They did not recognize Jesus, but they spoke of the “things” that had just occurred (v. 18). Jesus asked, “What things?” (v. 19). They responded that they were discussing the **death** of Jesus (v. 20). and that **“today is the third day since these things were done”** (v. 21). Two days back would put the crucifixion on the 6th day of the week, or “our” Friday. In the conversation, the disciples mentioned that it was right then **“toward evening, and the day is far spent”** (v. 29). Before the day ended, the Lord Himself said that He was fulfilling the scripture that He was **“to rise from the dead the third day”** (v. 46). Jesus was the one that likened His own time in the grave as three days and three nights as being fulfilled on **“the third day”** (v. 46). His statement about the “third day” agrees with the disciple’s conclusion that the events that had just occurred were ON that **“third day”** (v. 21). The “second day” would have been the sabbath (the seventh day of the week, our Saturday), and the “first day” would have been the day He was crucified (Friday, or the day of the Preparation for the sabbath). This is the way Jews measured time. If something involved 3 days, they would say “after three days.”

Fourth, from the book of John. John states, **“The first day of the week....while it was yet dark”** (John 20:1), that Mary Magdalene came **“early”** to the sepulchre or tomb of Jesus. Now let's go back a little in time. In John 19:28, as Jesus was about to die, said “I thirst”, in connection with **“all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled.”** These “all things” would refer to His death and His resurrection in regards to what He had said regarding these things. Jesus died on the day of **“preparation”** (v. 31). The “preparation” identifies the events of the day **before** the sabbath. Jesus was removed from the cross and placed in the tomb. After this, we are told, **“When the even was come”** which was after the death of Jesus on the 9th hour. The NKJV reads “Now when evening had come”, which was before the sabbath actually began. The Jews thought of two evenings: the first being from 3 until 6, and the second being after 6 (cf Matt. 14:15,23). Vine's Dictionary of New Testament words confirms this custom of the Jews. It is believed that Joseph came in the first evening, for Jesus body was still on the cross, and it would have been illegal for it to have remained till after 6 (John 19:31), so it was early evening. He came “because” it was the **“preparation, that is the day before the sabbath”** (Mark 14:42). thus, **the day before the sabbath**, Jesus was crucified—the day of preparation and the day before the sabbath.

John states **(for that sabbath day was an high day)** (v. 31). What **was** a “high sabbath?” The usual Passover celebration was to begin on the 15th day Nisan, and any time the Passover fell on **that** day, it was considered a “high” sabbath, or a “great” sabbath. On the Passover, the Jews were to present themselves in the temple according to the command of Exo. 23:17, plus it was the time of the sheaf of the firstfruits being offered. Then, with the usual observance of the weekly sabbath, it all became a “high” sabbath, and it **was on the seventh day**. This was the day **after** the preparation, and the day after Jesus was crucified. John reveals that Joseph, and Nicodemus, took the body to the sepulchre in a garden nearby, and did it on **the Jews preparation day** (19:42). (Now we have 2 days involved: the day of the crucifixion and the preparation,

then the day of the high sabbath.) The third day would follow, being the first day of the following week. In Matthew 27:62, the Jews went to Pilate and asked him to secure the sepulchre **“until the third day”**, lest Jesus' body be stolen by the disciples. They were concerned only about watching it until that day. The next day would be the third day, as the Jews reckoned time chronologically.

Now, what or whom shall we believe? All the evidence points to Friday being the day of Jesus' crucifixion. But, what about Daniel's prophecy about the “midst of the week?” That's a good question, and we shall deal with it. Daniel says, “But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering” (Dan. 9:27). Does this mean Jesus was to **die** in the middle of the week, or on Wednesday? Let's examine it!

In Daniel 9, God is revealing the future of His people Israel. Daniel begins by saying there would be 70 weeks from the time of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, until the “end” (vs. 24, 27). That 70 week period is broken down into 7 weeks and 62 weeks and 1 week—making a total of 70 weeks. The first 7 weeks would be spent in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Then, there would be 62 weeks until the Messiah would begin His mission of confirming the covenant, making a total of 69 weeks at this point. Then, in the middle of the 70th week, He (the Messiah) would be cut off, which would bring an end to sacrifice and offering. The last half of the 70th week would be the time remaining for the finality of Jerusalem's reign of Judaism. The argument is made that Jesus' being cut off in the middle of the week mean He would be crucified on Wednesday, the middle day, and not Friday.

We **must** point out that the word “week” in Dan. 9 is never used to describe a “literal” period of **7 days**, but is used figuratively or symbolically. This should be no surprise to the student of “prophecy” from the word of God. There are literal uses of the word “week” in the scripture, then there are figurative uses. For instance, when the 12 spies spent 40 days in searching out Canaan, God decreed that the unbelieving Israelites would spend 40 years in the wilderness. “According to the number of the **days** in which you spied out the land, forty **days**, for each **day** you shall bear your guilt one **year**, namely forty **years**, and you shall know my rejection” (Num. 14:34). Then, we have this statement in another passage: “And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of house of Judah forty **days**. I have laid on you **a day for each year**” (Ezek. 4:6). We are absolutely certain that that is under consideration in Daniel 9, for if we take the 1 week literally in this context, we have to take all 70 of them literally. If we take the 70 literally, that would mean that God's wrath would be poured out to end Judaism in less than 2 years from the command was given to rebuild Jerusalem, and it took longer than 2 years to get the job completed. Then, the 70th week itself (one of the seven) must also be used symbolically. This is **not** foretelling the time of a literal week in which Jesus would be cut off, but rather the middle of the 7 years of the 7th week, or a period of 3 and 1/2 years, which coincides with the time from the time Jesus began His ministry of confirming the covenant, but He would be “cut off” in the middle of that week. The remaining half of that week would be the events from the middle of the week until the final outpouring of God's wrath in .A.D. 70 in Jerusalem's fall. Study the chronology in the Bible from the time the command was given to rebuild Jerusalem until Jerusalem's ultimate fall, and you will get **exactly 490 years**, which be the result of multiplying 70 times (weeks) times 7 (the number of days in a week). So, Dan. 9 does not help the advocates maintaining that Jesus was “cut off” in the middle of a literal week, as Daniel was using the word figuratively.

Now, we come to **the icing on the cake**. After all the evidence we have thus far

presented showing that Jesus was crucified on Friday, we are saving the most powerful evidence of all to conclude this study. Remember the Paschal lamb of the Old Testament? That “lamb” prophetically refers to the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). The Passover lamb was to be without blemish, with no bones broken, **as** was the Lamb of God. There are numerous other resemblances between the 2 lambs in scripture. But note, when you read Exodus 12, where the Passover celebration was instituted, God decreed that the Passover lamb was to be **killed** on the 14th day of the 1st month (Nisan) of the year. **That was a requirement to be observed throughout their generations** (Exo. 12:2,6,17). A careful study of the death of Jesus in the books by the gospel writers (as we have studied above) shows that Jesus was crucified on the day before the “high” day of the Passover, meaning that it was on the 14th of Nisan (just as the time for the killing of the lamb in “preparation” for the feast to be celebrated on the 15th of Nisan, which happened to be on the sabbath that year, making it a “high” day. They used Friday as the preparation for the feast to be observed on the 15th. God, in His great wisdom, has portrayed from the Passover celebration, the exact day of the death of His Son, the Lamb of God.

We are in agreement that special “feast” days and celebrations should not be made where the Lord has not revealed. We observe the death of Christ when we are baptized into His death (Rom. 6:3), and remember His death each Lord's day as we observe the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:26), and as we live the Christian life, being crucified with Him (Gal. 2:20).

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