

Sermon – Three Days and Three Nights?

Was Jesus three days and three nights in the grave, as He said in **Matthew 12:40**? Can you figure three days and three nights between sunset "Good Friday" and sunrise Easter Sunday?

It is commonly supposed today that Jesus was crucified on Friday, and that the resurrection occurred about sunrise on Easter Sunday morning.

Few professing Christians have ever thought to question or to prove this "Good-Friday-Easter" tradition. Yet the Bible tells us to prove (test) all things. For proof there is but one dependable authority, a sole historical record -- the Bible.

The doubting Pharisees were asking Jesus for a sign -- supernatural evidence -- in proof of His Messiahship. Jesus answered: "... A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, in like manner the Son of man shall be in the heart of the earth **three days and three nights**." (**Matt. 12:39-40**).

He expressly declared that the only sign He would give to prove He was the Messiah was that He should be just three days and three nights in the rock-hewn sepulcher in "the heart of the earth." These Christ-rejecting Pharisees demanded proof. Jesus offered but one evidence. That evidence was not the fact of the resurrection itself. It was the length of time He would repose in His grave, before being resurrected.

No wonder Satan has caused unbelievers to scoff at the story of Jonah and the "whale"! No wonder the devil has set up a tradition that denies Jesus is the Messiah!

This one and only supernatural PROOF ever given by Jesus for His Messiahship has greatly bothered the commentators and the higher critics. Their attempts to explain away this sole proof for Christ's divinity (deity) are ludicrous in the extreme. For explain this away they must, or their "Good-Friday-Easter" tradition collapses.

One commentator says, "Of course we know that Jesus was actually in the tomb only half as long as He thought He would be!" Some expositors impose upon our credulity to the extent of asking us to believe that "in the Greek language, in which the New Testament was written, the expression 'three days and three nights' means three periods, either of day or of night."

Even if that were true, it does not account for three periods of day and night unless one redefines what a day and a night are. And that's just what the early Catholic church did! Let's notice! From the "Syriac Didascalia", composed shortly before the time of Constantine, we have a record of what happened in those early days. False teachers began to interpret the three days and three nights in the following clever fashion:

They claimed Jesus suffered on the cross, supposedly on Friday, for about six hours. The daylight hours from nine in the morning to noon they counted as one day. The hours from noon to three o'clock -- when the land was darkened -- they reckoned as the first night. Then the time from three o'clock to sunset was reckoned as the second day. Friday night to Saturday morning became the second night; the daylight of Saturday, the third day; and Saturday night to Sunday morning, the third night.

The Bible Definition

But the Bible definition of the duration of "nights and days" is simple.

Even these same higher critics admit that in the Hebrew language, in which the book of Jonah was written, the expression "three days and three nights" means a period of 72 hours -- three twelve-hour days and three twelve-hour nights.

Notice **Jonah 1:17**: "*And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*" This, they admit, was a period of 72 hours. And Jesus distinctly said that AS Jonah was three days and three nights in the great fish's belly, so He would be the same length of time in His grave.

As Jonah was in the "grave" (see marginal reference, **Jonah 2:2**) 72 hours, after which he was supernaturally resurrected by God, by being vomited up, to become a saviour to the people of Nineveh upon proclaiming the warning to them, so should Jesus be 72 hours in His grave, thereupon being resurrected by God to become the saviour of the world.

Did Jesus know how much time was in a "day" and in a "night"? Jesus answered in **John 11:9-10**, "*Are there not twelve hours in a day ... but if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth.*"

Notice the Bible definition of the expression, "the third day." Text after text tells us that Jesus rose the third day. Notice how the Bible defines the time required to fulfill "the third day."

In Genesis 1:4 God "*divided the light from darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening [darkness] and the morning [light] were the first day And the evening [darkness] and the morning [light] were the second day And the evening [now three periods of darkness called night -- three nights] and the morning [now three periods of light called day -- three days] were the third day*" (**Gen. 1:4-13**).

Here we have the only Bible definition which explains and counts up the amount of time involved in the expression "*the third day.*" It includes three dark periods called "night," and three light periods called "day" -- three days and three nights, and Jesus said they contained twelve hours for each period -- a total of 72 hours.

That ought to be conclusive! An average seven-year-old, near the end of the second grade, could figure it easily.

What Is Wrong?

What is wrong with these plain, simple words of Jesus? How do these wise and prudent theologians know Jesus was crucified “Good Friday” and rose “Easter Sunday”?

The simple answer is, they do not know it -- for it is not true! It is merely tradition, a tradition we have been taught from childhood and carelessly assumed! Jesus warns against “*making the word of God of none effect through your tradition*” (**Mark 7:13**). We have examined two scriptural witnesses, in Matthew and in Jonah, both setting the duration of the body of Jesus in the tomb as three days and three nights, which the Scriptures plainly define as 72 hours of time. Now let us examine four other scriptural witnesses that prove the same thing.

Notice **Mark 8:31**, “*And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and AFTER three days rise again.*”

If Jesus had been killed on Friday, and then after one day He had risen, the resurrection would have occurred on Saturday evening. If after two days, it would have occurred Sunday evening, and if after three days, it would have occurred Monday evening!

Examine this text carefully. You cannot, by any process of arithmetic, figure any less than a full 72 hours -- three days and three nights -- in a resurrection which occurred three days after the crucifixion. If Jesus was in the grave only from Friday sunset to Sunday sunrise, then this text too, must be torn out of your Bible or else you must reject Jesus Christ as an impostor! If He rose after three days, it might have been more than 72 hours, but it could not have been a second less.

Notice now **Mark 9:31**, “... *They shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.*” The duration expressed here must be between 48 and 72 hours. It could not be one second past 72 hours, and Jesus still rise the third day. And it could not be Friday sunset to Sunday sunrise, because that it only 36 hours, carrying us into the middle of the second day, after He was killed. In **Matthew 27:63** Jesus is quoted as saying, “*After three days I will rise again.*” This cannot possibly be figured as less than 72 full hours.

And notice in **John 2:19-21**, “*Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and IN three days I will raise it up But he spake of the temple of his body.*” To be raised up IN three days after being destroyed, or crucified and buried, could not be more than 72 hours.

If we are to accept all the testimony of the Bible, we must conclude that Jesus was exactly three days and three nights -- three full 24-hour days -- 72 hours in the grave, or the only supernatural proof He gave must fail.

The Time of Day of Resurrection

Now notice carefully this fact: In order to be three days and three nights -- exactly 72 hours -- in the tomb, our Lord had to be resurrected at exactly the same time of day that His body was buried in the tomb.

Let us realize that very vital fact.

If we can find the time of day of the burial, then we have found the time of day of the resurrection. If the burial, for instance, were at sunrise, then for the body to be left an even three days and three nights in the tomb, the resurrection likewise had to occur at sunrise, three days later. If the burial were at noon, the resurrection was at noon. If the burial were at sunset, the resurrection was at sunset, three days later.

The crucifixion day was called "*the preparation*," or day before "*the Sabbath*" (**Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54**). This day ended at sunset, according to Bible reckoning (**Lev. 23:32**). Jesus cried out soon after "*the ninth hour*" or three o'clock in the afternoon (**Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46**). Yet Jesus was buried before this same day ended -- before sunset (**Matt. 27:57; Luke 23:52-54; John 19:42**). John adds, "*There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day.*"

According to the laws observed by the Jews all dead bodies must be buried before the beginning of a Sabbath or feast day. Hence Jesus was buried before sunset on the same day He died. He died shortly after 3 p.m.

Therefore -- notice carefully -- the burial of Christ's body was in the late afternoon! It was between 3 p.m. and sunset as these scriptures prove.

And since the resurrection had to occur at the same time of day, three days later, the resurrection of Christ occurred, not at sunrise, but in the late afternoon, near sunset. Startling as this fact may be, it is the plain Bible truth!

If Jesus rose at any other time of day, He could not have been three days and three nights in His grave. If He rose at any other time of day, He failed to prove, by the only sign He gave that He was the true Messiah, the Son of the living Creator. Either He rose near the END of a day near sunset, or else He is not the Christ! He staked His claim on that one and only sign.

So a time-honored tradition must be shattered.

What Sabbath Followed the Crucifixion?

Now we come to an objection some may raise, yet the very point which proves this truth. Perhaps you have noticed that the Scriptures say the day after the crucifixion was a Sabbath. Hence, for centuries, people have blindly assumed the crucifixion was on Friday.

Now we have shown by all four Gospels that the crucifixion day was called "*the preparation.*" The preparation day for the Sabbath. But for what Sabbath?

John's Gospel gives the definite answer: "*It was the preparation of the Passover... For that sabbath day was an high day*" (**John 19:14, 31**) Just what is a "high day"? Ask any Jew! He will tell you it is one of the annual holy days, or feast days. The Israelites observed seven of these every year -- every one called a Sabbath! Annual Sabbaths fall on certain annual calendar dates, and on different days of the week in different years, just like the Roman holidays now observed. These Sabbaths might fall on Monday, on Thursday, or on Sunday.

If you will notice the following texts, you will see these annual holy days were all called Sabbath days: **Leviticus 16:31; 23:24, 26-32, 39.**

Notice **Matthew 26:2**: "*Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.*" And if you will follow through this chapter you will see that Jesus was crucified on the Passover!

And what was the Passover? In the twelfth chapter of Exodus you will find the story of the original Passover. The children of Israel killed the lambs, and struck the blood over the doorposts and on the side posts of their houses, and wherever the blood had thus been applied the death angel passed over that house, sparing it from death. Following the Passover was a holy convocation or annual Sabbath.

Observe the dates: "*And in the fourteenth day of the first month is THE PASSOVER of the Lord. And in the fifteenth day of this month is the FEAST*" (**Num. 28:16-17**).

The Passover lamb, killed every year on the 14th of the first month called "Abib," was a type of Christ, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Christ is our Passover, sacrificed for us (**I Cor. 5:7**).

Jesus was slain on the very same day the Passover had been slain every year. He was crucified on the 14th of Abib, the first Hebrew month of the year. And this day, the Passover, was the day before -- and the preparation for -- the Feast Day, or annual high day Sabbath, which occurred on the 15th of Abib. This Sabbath might occur on any day of the week. Frequently it occurs and is observed, even in modern times, on a Thursday. For instance, this "high-day" Sabbath came on Thursday in 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2020.

Refer to the Chart on the preceding page for the remainder of this sermon.

And the Hebrew calendar shows that in the year Jesus was crucified, the 14th of Abib, Passover day, the day Jesus was crucified, was Wednesday. And the annual Sabbath was Thursday. This was the Sabbath that drew on as Joseph of Arimathea hastened to bury the body of Jesus late that Wednesday afternoon. There were two separate Sabbaths that week!

What Day Was the Resurrection?

Now which day of the week was the resurrection day? The first investigators, Mary Magdalene and her companions, came to the sepulcher on the first day of the week (Sunday) very early, while it was yet dark, as the sun was beginning to rise, at dawn (**Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20: 1**).

Now here are the texts most people have supposed stated the resurrection was at sunrise Sunday morning. But they do not say that!

When the women arrived, the tomb was already open! At that time Sunday morning while it was yet dark, Jesus was not there! Notice how the angel says, "*He is not here, but is risen*" (**see Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6; Matt. 28:5-6**).

Jesus was already risen at sunset Sunday morning! Of course He was. He rose from the grave in the late afternoon, near sunset! And since we know Christ was buried late Wednesday afternoon, and that the resurrection took place at the same time of day three days later, we now know the resurrection of Christ occurred late Saturday afternoon.

The Sabbath day ended at sunset. It was late on that day, before the beginning of the first day of the week. It was not, then, a Sunday resurrection at all. It was a Sabbath resurrection!

Did Christ Fulfill His Sign?

Now all this is based on the supposition that Jesus did fulfill His only sign of being three days and three nights in the grave. All our evidence is based on the claims of Jesus before His crucifixion. But some of the higher critics and doctors of divinity tell us that Jesus made a mistake -- that He was only in the tomb half as long as He expected to be. Let us have proof as to whether He did spend the exact amount of time in the grave He said He would.

Notice that in **Matthew 28:6**, the angel of the Lord gives this testimony, which we now present as evidence. "*He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.*" And He certainly did not rise AS He said unless He rose at the precise TIME that He had said! So we have the proof of the angel of the Lord, recorded in the sacred Word of God that Jesus did fulfill His sign -- He was three days and three nights in the earth -- He did rise Sabbath afternoon, and not on Sunday morning.

Another proof that Christ was in the grave the full length of time He expected to be is found in **I Corinthians 15:3-4**: *"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."*

His death and burial were according to the Scriptures -- not contrary to them.

The third day following His Wednesday burial was the Sabbath; three full days spent in the grave ended Saturday afternoon just prior to sunset, not Sunday morning.

Which Day Was the Crucifixion?

Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, the middle day of the week. He died shortly after 3 p.m. that afternoon; was buried before sunset Wednesday evening. Now count the three days and three nights. His body was Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights in the grave -- three nights. It also was there through the daylight part of Thursday, Friday and Saturday -- three days. He rose Saturday the Sabbath -- late afternoon, shortly before sunset, at the same time of day that He was buried!

It is significant that in Daniel's prophecy of the "seventy weeks" (**Dan. 9:24-27**), Jesus was to be cut off *"in the midst of the week."* While this prophecy has the application of a day for a year, so that this 70th week became a literal seven years, Christ being *"cut off"* after three-and-a-half years' ministry, as He was, yet it is significant that He was also *"cut off"* on the middle day of a literal week.

Honest Objections Examined

Someone is sure to notice **Mark 16:9**, thinking this text says the resurrection was upon Sunday. But if you read the whole sentence, it does not say that at all. The expression *"was risen"* is in the perfect tense. What was Jesus' condition early the first day of the week? Does it say He "was rising" or that He "did rise" from the grave? No, early the first day of the week, at the time He appeared to Mary Magdalene, He was risen. Of course He was! He had risen the late afternoon before, so naturally He was risen Sunday morning. The text does not in any way refute the other texts we have given.

Another passage that might confuse is **Luke 24:21**: *"... And beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done."* "These things" included all the events pertaining to the resurrection -- the seizing of Jesus, delivering Him to be tried, the actual crucifixion, and, finally, the setting of the seal and the watch over the tomb the following day, or Thursday. Study verses 18-20, telling of "these things" and also Matthew 27:62-66. "These things" were not completed until the watch was set, Thursday. And the text says Sunday was the third day since these things were done. Sunday truly was the third day since Thursday. But it was not the third day since Friday, so this text could not prove a Friday crucifixion.

There is yet one final clinching proof of this truth. A careful comparison of two biblical passages shows that there were two Sabbaths in that week. This is obvious when one views these scriptures with an understanding of God's annual holy days. But because they don't keep the biblical holy days of Leviticus 23, most professing Christians today fail to understand that there are weekly Sabbaths and there are **annual** Sabbaths, which we call high holy days. We know that Jesus was crucified on the day before a Sabbath, but just what Sabbath was it? John gives us the answer.

John 19:31, *"The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an **high day**) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away."*

It was a "high" day, one of God's seven annual holy days or festivals. But which one?

Mark 14:1, *"After two days was the feast of the **Passover**, and of **Unleavened Bread**: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death."*

During Christ's time, and even today, the Jews had begun to confuse these two separate occasions. The Passover is the first of God's annual festivals, but it is not a high day and it can fall on any day of the week. In 30 AD, the year Jesus was killed, the Passover was on a Wednesday. The First Day of Unleavened Bread is a high day and it is always the day after the Passover. In 30 AD, this fell on a Thursday. Now let's see why people get confused.

There are two passages that describe the efforts of the women to prepare spices and ointments with which to anoint the body of Jesus. Because of the Greek verb tense used and the way it has been translated into English, it can be very confusing as to when these events occurred in relation to the death of Jesus. Let's read and examine them carefully.

Luke 23:52-54, *"This man [Joseph of Arimathaea] went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. And that day was **the preparation**, and **the Sabbath** drew on."*

Most people assume that this is referring to the weekly Sabbath. Therefore they also assume it was a Friday, hence the reason for the Good Friday myth. We will see that this cannot be so. It HAD to have been the annual Sabbath – the First Day of Unleavened Bread which followed the Passover, the day Jesus died.

According to **Mark 16:1**, Mary Magdalene and her companions did not buy their spices to anoint the body of Jesus until after the Sabbath was past. Now days end at sundown and they didn't have all-night spice and ointment store in those days. They must have bought them on the following day AFTER the Sabbath.

Mark 16:1-2, “Now *when the Sabbath was past*, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.”

Another problem is the way Mark jumps from their buying the spices to their intended use of them. It appears that they bought them on a Sabbath (Saturday) night and brought them to the tomb early on Sunday morning. But was this Sabbath that Mark mentions the annual Sabbath (Thursday that year) or was it the weekly Sabbath (Saturday)? We need to go back to Luke for the answer. Remember, they had just laid Jesus in the tomb “*And that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on.*” Let’s continue...

Luke 23:55-56 “*And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment.*”

After preparing the spices and ointments, they rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment. But according to **Mark 16:1**, they didn’t buy the spices and ointments until **after** the Sabbath. They couldn’t have bought spices **after** a Sabbath and then rested **before** a Sabbath if it was the same Sabbath. There had to have been **two** Sabbaths that week. And indeed there were – the “high day” Sabbath on Thursday, the First Day of Unleavened Bread and the regular weekly Sabbath.

Here’s what really happened according to the Scriptures. Jesus died on the Passover of 30 AD, which fell on a Wednesday. He died around 3:00 in the afternoon, shortly before the beginning of the annual “high day” Sabbath – the First Day of Unleavened Bread. According to **Mark 16:1**, the women waited for this Sabbath to be over before purchasing spices and ointments. This must have taken place on the following day, which was a Friday – a normal business day on which one could buy such things. According to **Luke 23:55-56**, they prepared these spices and ointments, then “*rested the [weekly] Sabbath day according to the [4th] commandment.*” Then finally, as **Mark 16:2** points out, they set out early on Sunday morning to anoint the body of Jesus.

But what happened when these women got to the tomb? Did they find Jesus rising in an Easter Sunday sunrise ceremony? No! They found an angel.

Matthew 28:5-6, “*And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said...*”

He is risen, not he is rising. Jesus was already risen, “*as He said.*” And just when did Jesus say He would rise?

Matthew 12:39-40, “*But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign*

*of the prophet Jonas: 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.**"*

As the only sign of His being the Messiah, Jesus said that He would be in the grave [the heart of the earth] for exactly three days and three nights. That means the He must have risen exactly three days and three nights – 72 hours – after He was buried. It would have taken Joseph of Arimathaea some time to go to Pilate and ask for Jesus' body, then to take Him down from the cross and place Him into the tomb. Since Jesus died around 3:00 in the afternoon and they had to bury Him before the "high" Sabbath day, He must have been buried near the evening, just before sunset. Therefore, Jesus must have risen from the tomb three days and three nights later, just before sunset on the weekly Sabbath. This explains why He wasn't there when the women arrived early on Sunday morning "*while it was yet dark*" (**John 20:1**).

We don't celebrate Sunday because Jesus did NOT rise on a Sunday. He rose on the Sabbath, since He is Lord of the Sabbath (**Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5**).

Conclusion

Does any of this really matter? Will knowing or not knowing the precise timing of Christ's death and resurrection keep us from eternal life in God's Kingdom? In and of itself, no. But these accounts were placed in the Bible for a reason. Jesus said man shall live by **every** word from God, so we need to study every word from God. If for no other reason, they will keep us from believing fables and man-made traditions, like trying to fit three days and three nights into the Good Friday/Easter Sunday myth.

In conclusion, please turn to **II Tim. 2:15**, "*Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*"

The more we study God's Word, the better able we'll be to teach it to others in God's soon-coming Kingdom.