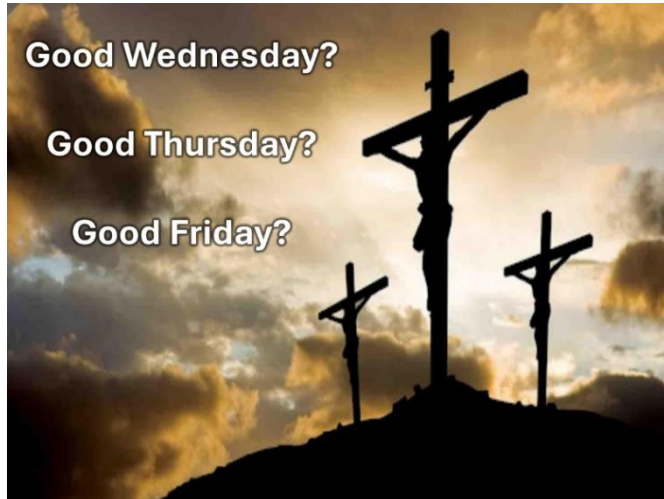


On What Day Was Christ Crucified?

(Wednesday, Thursday, Friday?)

Pastor Kelly Sensenig



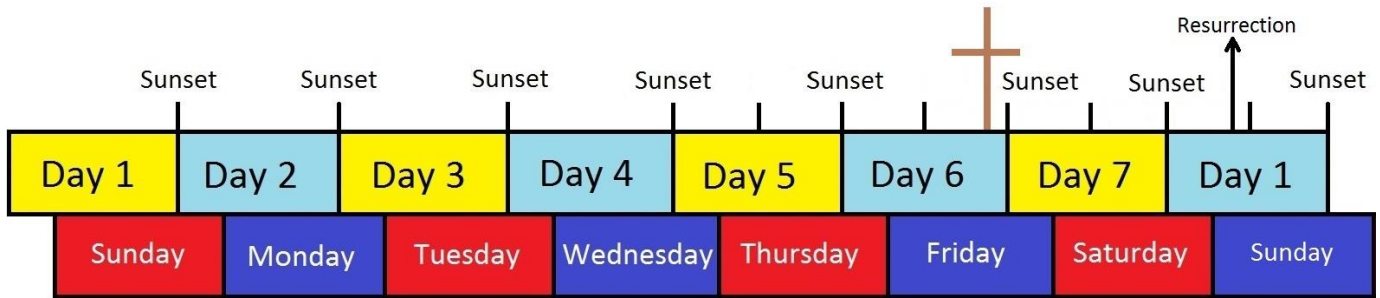
Did Christ's crucifixion occur on Good Friday, or should it actually be Good Thursday or Good Wednesday? After much consideration and healthy debate with fellow comrades who have diligently searched the Scriptures on this subject, I have personally come to espouse the traditional Friday crucifixion view as being the correct understanding of the timing related to Christ's death. However, there is much

disagreement among the brethren on the day of Christ's crucifixion. Of course, there is no disagreement on the fact that Christ died and rose again from the dead! Together we espouse the absolute authority of Scripture even though in our personal study (2 Tim. 3:16) we sometimes have differing viewpoints. Suggestions have been made for a Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday crucifixion, with Friday taking prominence as the most likely day.

A Friday Crucifixion

Jesus was crucified on a Friday. If according to Jewish custom we understand the term "day and night" as an idiom for a 24-hour period and that any part of a day or night fulfills the requirement for a whole day, then a Friday crucifixion works.

- ✓ Thursday Evening: Jesus eats the Last Supper or Passover fellowship meal with His disciples (Matt. 26:2, 17-19; Luke 22:15).
- ✓ Late Friday: Jesus is crucified and buried.
- ✓ Early and late Saturday (the Sabbath): Jesus is in the tomb.
- ✓ Early Sunday: Jesus rises from the dead, and the women find the empty tomb.



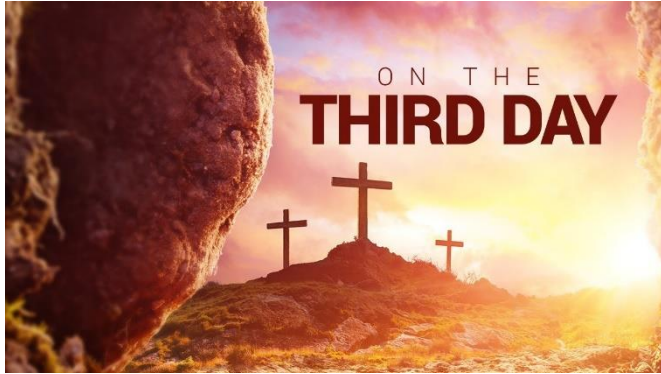
(Chart Created by Pastor Paul Reiner)

Specifically, John mentions that Jesus was crucified on the day of preparation (John 19:31), that is, the Friday before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42). Therefore, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is believed by most expositors of the Bible to have occurred on Friday. This is because the Friday crucifixion day is not only is rooted in strong church tradition, but all four Gospels agree that Jesus died a few hours before the commencement of the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday), and prior to nightfall on a Friday (Matt 27:62; 28:1; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31, 42).

How were days measured in the Jewish calendar? A day was measured from sunset to sunset. This means that according to Mark's timeline (Mark 15:42), Jesus ate the Last Supper (Passover meal) on Thursday evening (Matt. 26:20; Mark 14:17; John 13:30; 1 Cor. 11:23) and was killed the next day, (Friday late in the day) which according to the Jewish reckoning of time was still the same day: Passover. Jesus was slain when the other Pashal lambs were slain. In view of the Jewish calendar, Jesus was crucified on the Day of Passover, not before the Passover as the Thursday and Wednesday advocates assert. Jesus actually died on Good Friday.



A Good Friday crucifixion of Jesus is a traditional belief that dates well into the early Church. The early Church never held the Lord's Crucifixion on any other day of the week. The theory that Christ died on a Wednesday is only about 300 years old, whereas the Good Friday tradition is nearly 2000 years old.



To declare that Christ laid in the tomb for 72 hours leads us away from understanding certain Bible facts concerning Passover week and the traditional Sabbath. It also overlooks Jewish customs and idioms and forgets that Jesus was raised on the third day (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46;

John 2:19-22; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4) which means He could not fulfill a 72-hour prediction. *Obviously, if Christ rose on the third day, He could not already have been buried for three whole nights and three whole days.* Qualifying a “day” with a number (day one) can mean a part of the earth-rotation-cycle which suggests an entire 24-hour period of three days (totaling 72 hours) is not in view. The Jewish people understood that part of a day could be considered a whole day (a figure of speech known as synecdoche).

Being in the tomb parts of three days, perhaps about 36 hours (which a Friday crucifixion-Sunday resurrection would allow) is enough to demonstrate that the Jewish custom of counting partial days as full days is to be understood in the crucifixion and resurrection scenario. Jesus said in John 11:9, “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” Of course, this is not denying the days are ordinary days like the day-age interpretation of Genesis but that they are parts or wholes of day.

The Angus-Green Cyclopedic Handbook of the Bible, page 351, says:

“It is to be observed that the Jews and other Orientals generally speak of any part of a day, or a period of time as if it were the whole. In like manner, fractions of a day are in England treated as legally whole days.”

E. W. Bullinger, in his Figures of Speech (pages 845-846) states the following:

“The expression ‘three days and three nights,’ is an idiom which covers any parts of three days and three nights. In 1 Samuel 30:12, it is said that a certain Egyptian had not eaten bread and drunk water for “three days and three nights,” and yet it was only three days since he fell sick (v. 13), not four days. In Esther 4:16, Esther says she and her maidens will fast “three days and three nights,” and yet it was on “the third day” that Esther went in to the king; not the fourth day, which it must have been if the expression were literally understood.”

George Zeller provides us with an illustration supporting the shortening of the day: “For example in Esther 4:16, Esther tells the people to fast for three days and three nights and after these three days of fasting she will then go see the king. Left to itself that might imply that a three full twenty-four hour fast, and on the fourth day she will see the king. However, in Esther 5:1, it is on the third day that she goes to see the king and there is no way to squeeze three twenty-four-hour periods from that passage, nor is it necessary in light of Jewish reckoning.”

So an important aspect of Biblical counting is that sometimes part of a day was considered as a whole day in the Jewish way of thinking. This is most clearly seen by the fact that Jesus was raised “on the third day” (Mark 9:31; Luke 24:46) without the completion of the entire day. Therefore, the first day would be Friday, even though Jesus was only dead for about 3 hours that day. However, the length of the portion of the day is irrelevant. That portion of the day is counted as the first day. The second day started at sunset on Friday and went through sunset on Saturday. The third day was on Sunday (a partial day) which is the day Jesus rose from the dead. We don’t know the exact time when Jesus was raised, but it was apparently early Sunday morning before sunrise. But it is still the third day.

When Christ concludes that He will spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40), He is then referring to the end of Friday, all of Saturday and the beginning of Sunday, in keeping with the way Jewish people understood the beginning and ending of days.

Dan Wallace concludes that it is also significant that every occurrence of “the third day” with reference to Jesus’ resurrection in the Gospels is put in the dative case without an accompanying preposition (Dan Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basic*, Zondervan, p. 156). The significance of this is that nouns used in the dative case like “the third day” express a point in time rather than duration of time. So it means, “at a point in time, on the third day.”

The Jewish calendar had its own months, and since all the Gospels agree that Jesus died during the week of Passover, He probably died in the month known as Nisan which coincides with March-April on the civil calendar. The traditional view is that Jesus was crucified on a Friday. In fact, according to the best estimates of Biblical scholars and historical evidence, many believe that Jesus died on Friday, April 3rd, AD 33, at approximately 3 PM, a few hours before the beginning of Passover day

and the Sabbath. This is the date in the Julian calendar, which was introduced in 45 BC and follows the convention that historical dates adhere to the calendar used at the time.



Harold Hoehner concludes:

“Astronomers can determine the day of the week on which Nisan 14 fell in Christ’s time with great certainty ... the calculations of astronomers would lime the probable years of Christ’s crucifixion on Friday, Nisan 14, to the years 30, 33, and 36, with A.D. 27 as an unlikely possibility. Assuming His birth to have been in the winter of 4/5 B.C. and the

commencement of His ministry in the summer or autumn of A.D 29, He would have been thirty-two years of age with the thirty-third birthday approaching in the winter of A.D 29/30. This is in keeping with the tenor of Luke 3:23 ... In conclusion, the A.D 33 crucifixion date best fits the evidence of astronomy and the chronological aspect of the life of Christ.”

According to the Biblical timeline, Jesus was killed on the day of preparation, which ended with the Passover on the Jewish Friday (Nisan 14). According to the Jewish reckoning of time, from sunset to sunset, both events (the preparation and Passover) occurred on the same day. This was the time to eat the Passover meal and to ready the dwellings for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which began the next day, Saturday (Nisan 15). The fact that Jesus was killed on Passover aligns well with 1 Corinthians 5:7, which calls Christ “our Passover lamb.”

The Passover lamb was killed in the late afternoon of Nisan 14 and eaten with unleavened bread, after sunset that same night, during the early hours of Nisan 15 (Exod. 12:6–14, 29, 33, 42, 51; 13:3–7; Numb. 9:1–5; 33:3; Deut. 16:1–7). The death of Christ took place on a Friday afternoon (Mark 15:42 to 16:2; Luke 23:54 to 24:1; John 19:31, 42, 20:1), about the time of the evening sacrifice. Christ was the real Passover Lamb on this eventful night! At the same time Israel was slaughtering their Passover lambs on Nisan 14, Jesus as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29) was dying on

a cross. Therefore, He was fulfilling the type and symbolism of the Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7).

In John's Gospel, it is stated that the day of Jesus' trial and execution was the day before Passover (John 18:28 and 19:14). This means John places the crucifixion on 14 Nisan. Likewise, the apostle Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, implies Jesus died on a 14 Nisan ("For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" - 1 Cor 5:7), and was resurrected on the Jewish festival of the first fruits on 16 Nisan (1 Cor 15:20). The Friday view believes Christ was offered as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) in conjunction with the Passover lambs and becomes a fulfillment of the Passover.

The meaning of the "preparation day" (John 19:14) does not refer to a separate day or a different sabbath day as the Thursday and Wednesday views must have to create their 72-hour timeline for Christ's death. The preparation began early in the Jewish day and was finished in the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb which occurred before the weekly Sabbath. By the first century the word "preparation" (paraskeue) became a technical term for Friday since Friday was a preparation for Saturday (the Sabbath). Also, the understanding behind the word "passover" in John 19:14 refers to the Passover Week or the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread that immediately followed the initial slaughtering and eating of the Passover lamb on the evening of Nisan 14.

Again, Passover (14th) was observed and then immediately followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the 15th -21st. Popular usage merged the two festivals and treated them as a unity. So John 19:14 is not talking about Christ's personal Passover which occurred a night earlier, knowing He would be crucified before the evening of the 14th. Christ was not following a different calendar. This was the night before the weekly Sabbath.

In addition, in the immediate context it specifically states that the bodies should be taken off the cross on the day of preparation so that they would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath. They also put Jesus in the tomb on the Jewish day of "preparation" (John 19:31, 42). It is certain that this is Friday, and the Sabbath refers to the weekly Sabbath. So there is no reason to conclude that there was a Passover Sabbath taking the place of the common weekly preparation for the Saturday Sabbath as Wednesday and Thursday proponents teach.

Goerge Zeller quotes Vine and adds further comments on this time of preparation: "W. E. Vine wrote, 'The reference would be to the 6th day of the week [Friday]. The title arose from the need of preparing food etc. for the Sabbath. Apparently it was first applied only to the afternoon of the 6th day; later to the whole day' [Vine's Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words, under "Preparation"]. The use of the term 'Preparation' as a technical term for Friday is seen in the Didache (or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), dated between 70 to 120 A.D. where Christians are told to fast on 'the fourth day (Wednesday) and Preparation (Friday)' (8:1)."

Below are the verses for the preparation day (the Sabbath) which was actually part of the one Jewish day from sunset to sunrise.

Mark 15:42

"And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath,"

Luke 23:53-54

"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."

John 19:14

"And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!"

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."

John 19:41-42

"Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation *day* (for the sabbath); for the sepulchre was nigh at hand."

Matthew 27:62

“Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate.”

Goerge Zeller again comments:

“All four Gospels state clearly that the crucifixion took place on the preparation day, the day before the Sabbath. The most natural understanding of this is that the crucifixion took place on the day before Saturday—Saturday being the weekly Sabbath.”

In summary, the Friday view has Jesus in the tomb for three days by reckoning part of a day as a full day: Jesus was buried late in the day Friday (Day 1) and was entombed Saturday (Day 2) and the first part of Sunday (Day 3). Another argument for Friday points to verses such as Matthew 16:21 and Luke 9:22, which say that Jesus would rise “on the third day.” Sunday is the third day from Friday.

Friday Crucifixion According to Jewish Time

Here are the Friday crucifixion figures according to a Jewish Day. Remember again that the Jews viewed their days as beginning in the evening (at 6:00 p.m.) and they viewed part of a day as an entire day. Jesus followed this Jewish idiom and custom with His three-day and three-night prediction in the grave (Matt. 12:40). The expression of three periods of daylight and night are simply used to convey a period of three days which according to Jewish custom could be broken down into parts of three days as Jesus taught (John 11:9). The Jewish reckoning of time was different than ours today for they spoke of part of a day as being an entire day.

The Jews calculated time from 6:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

➤ DAY ONE according to Jewish Friday

Thursday sunset – Friday sunset (6:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.)

*Christ was buried before 6:00 pm – late on Good Friday (Luke 23:54). Being in the grave for approximately 3 hours is considered day one.

➤ DAY TWO according to Jewish Saturday

Friday sunset-Saturday sunset (6:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.)

*This was “silent Saturday” for the Bible says nothing about this day.

➤ DAY THREE according to Jewish Sunday

Saturday sunset – Sunday sunset (6:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.)

Jesus had risen from the dead early on Sunday morning sometime before dawn to complete the three-day prediction (Matt. 12:40) and this is the day the early Church began to meet in commemoration of Christ’s resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).

Mark 16:9 says:

“Now when *Jesus* was risen early the first *day* of the week (*Sunday*), he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.”

Jesus rose on Sunday. The Bible speaks for itself. Jesus was in the tomb only about 36 hours, but because these hours spanned across parts of three consecutive days, the Jews counted the period as three days long (Matt. 12:40).

Friday Crucifixion According to Roman Time

The Romans calculated time from 12:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m.

➤ DAY ONE according to Roman Friday

Thursday morning – Friday morning (12:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m.)

Christ was buried before 6:00 pm – late on Good Friday (Luke 23:54).

➤ DAY TWO according to Roman Saturday

Friday morning-Saturday morning (12:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m.)

➤ DAY THREE according to Roman Sunday

Saturday sunset – Sunday sunset (12:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m.)

Again, Jesus rose from the dead early on Sunday morning sometime before dawn to complete the three-day prediction.

Mark 16:9 declares:

“Now when *Jesus* was risen early the first *day* of the week (*Sunday*), he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.”

Matthew 28:1 similarly states:

“In the end of the sabbath (*after the sabbath was over at 6:00 a.m. Sunday morning*), as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week (*Sunday*), came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.”

The authors of Scripture have given us different ways to understand the three days but they all mean the same thing.

Matthew 27:63 states it in this way:

“After three days I will rise again” (*at the conclusion of three days He would rise from the dead*).

Mark 8:31 also states that Christ would “be killed, and after three days rise again.”

Mark 9:31 adds:

“For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.”

The Gospel message also reminds us that Christ’s “rose again the third day” (1 Cor. 15:4).

Matthew 27:63-64 adds one more concept to the resurrection scenario:

“Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day (*the completion of time allotted for Christ to be dead*), lest his

disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.”

How do we reconcile these passages of Scripture that teach Christ rose “on the third day” but also “after three days” and “until the third day?” All these different expressions obviously mean the same thing. It should be noted that “after three days” must have been understood by the Pharisees as being equivalent to “the third day” otherwise they would have asked for a guard of soldiers until the fourth day (Matt. 27:62-66). The phrase “after three days” simple means in accordance with the allotted time for Christ’s death in relation to how the Jews calculated days and hours.

In summary, *after the completed or allotted number of days* in the grave (in accordance with Jewish calculation) Jesus would rise from the dead. At one point early on the first day of the week (a Jewish or Roman Sunday morning) in conjunction with *the third day* (“on the third day”) Jesus would rise from the dead. This would occur *after* Christ’s three days of death were officially ended and take place on *the third day* (Sunday).

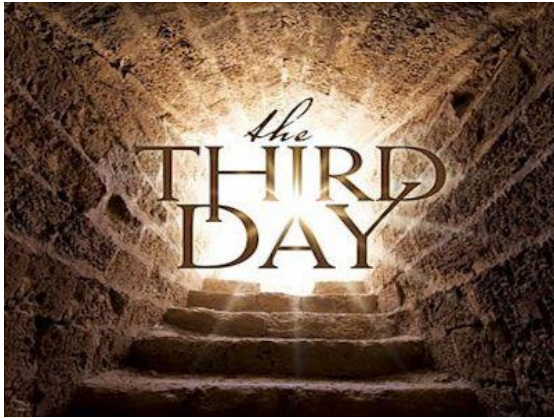
The Jewish scholar, Arnold Fruchtenbaum wrote:

“He did rise ‘on the third day’ because Friday before sundown was the first day, Saturday was the second day, and Saturday evening when three stars became visible was the beginning of the third day, Sunday. Because part of Sunday counts as all of Sunday, He also rose “after three days”. And the phrase “three days and three nights” refers to any period of time that touches three days, because part of a day counts for the whole day, both the daylight and night time of it.

“For example in Esther 4:16, Esther tells the people to fast for three days and three nights and after these three days of fasting she will then go see the king. Left to itself that might imply that a three full twenty-four hour fast, and on the fourth day she will see the king. However, in Esther 5:1, it is on the third day that she goes to see the king and there is no way to squeeze three twenty-four hour periods from that passage, nor is it necessary in light of Jewish reckoning.”

So Jesus did not rise from the grave *until* the third day but also *on* the third day after His divinely allotted time of death was ended. According to Matthew 28:1 the tomb was already empty at sunrise (6:00 a.m.). Therefore, it’s understandable that Jesus

rose from the dead at some point on Sunday morning before 6:00 a.m. *after* completing His three-day cycle of His death.



Let's briefly interact with the other views on the timing of Christ's crucifixion. It should be understood that both the Thursday and Wednesday views are basically built on one verse, which is Matthew 12:40, and which is interpreted to mean three 24-hour days. Of course, these days are literal days, but the Jews understood parts of a day as referring to a whole day. The most glaring problem when espousing the 72 hours is that the

Scriptures teach that Jesus rose "on the third day" (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 46; 1 Cor. 15:4) which would essentially dismiss the Thursday and Wednesday view for 72 hours would not allow Christ to be raised from the dead on the third day. Therefore, it is evident that Jesus was raised on the third day (a part of one day) and not necessarily after seventy-two hours.

A Thursday Crucifixion

Those who teach that Jesus was crucified on a Thursday conclude:

- ✓ Late Thursday: Jesus is crucified and buried.
- ✓ Late Thursday through early Sunday: Jesus is in the tomb.
- ✓ Early Sunday: Jesus rises from the dead, and the women find the empty tomb.

A Thursday view suggests there were too many proceedings that happened between Jesus' burial and the day of His resurrection (Sunday) for Jesus' death to occur on Friday. Scroggie names many events that needed to occur. Wescott also adopts this view. The view holds that the Friday view has only one full day between Friday and Sunday which was Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath). But adding full days to the crucifixion scenario takes care of the problem. Therefore, the Thursday view presses Jonah's experience as consisting of three literal nights as well as three literal periods of daylight (Matthew 12:40). If the crucifixion occurred on Thursday

afternoon, the three days and three nights are all accounted for in Christ's resurrection.

Luke states that Jesus was taken down from the cross because "the sabbath was about to begin" (Luke 23:54). The Thursday view points out that there were actually two Sabbaths during this week (a Passover Sabbath and regular Sabbath day). The first Sabbath started at sundown on Thursday, followed by the regular Sabbath starting at sundown Friday. However, in rebuttal of this idea of two sabbaths, John 19:31 seems to be speaking about the weekly Sabbath day during Passover week when it states: "The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day." The bodies on the cross had to be taken down before the Saturday Sabbath day began.

As previously mentioned, the meaning of the "preparation day" does not refer to a separate day or a different sabbath day. The preparation began early in the Jewish day and was finished with the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb which occurred before the normal weekly Sabbath. The Thursday view is forced to make the expression "the preparation for of the passover" (John 19:14) as preparing for the Passover rather than its normal usage referring to Friday, the day of preparation for the Sabbath. Once again, the statement in John 19:14 has reference to the Friday in the Passover week rather than the day before the Passover. Both the Scriptures (Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42) and Josephus (a Jew living during the days of Jesus) indicate the day of preparation is the day before the weekly Sabbath (Friday).

There is no evidence that the day of preparation for the Passover is the day before the actual Passover which occurred on Friday, but there is evidence for preparation for the Sabbath day which occurred on Friday. Leon Morris speaks of this evidence in "The Gospel according to John" (pp. 776-777) as well as other authors such as A.J.B. Higgins ("The origins of the Eucharist") and Charles C. Torrey ("The Date of the Crucifixion according to the Fourth Gospel") in the *Journal of Bible Literature* (December 1931, pp. 233-237) and also "In the Fourth Gospel the Last Supper was the Paschal Meal" in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, XLII (January, 1952, pp. 239-40).

In rebuttal of the Thursday crucifixion argument, Mark 15:42 seems to teach that Jesus' death and burial happened on the day before the weekly Sabbath, which is always from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. So the Last Supper, Passover,

and Christ's death occurred from sundown Thursday to sundown Friday in relation to the Jewish calendar. This means Jesus eats the Last Supper with His disciples on Thursday night and dies on Friday on the day of Passover. According to the Jewish calendar these events occurred on the same day and not two different days. Hence, creating several sabbath days seems unnecessary to make a Thursday crucifixion.

Thursday advocates also point to several passages that indicate the number of days between the crucifixion and the resurrection were three full days (John 2:19). Three full days from Thursday is Sunday. In addition, when Jesus appears to the two men on the road to Emmaus on resurrection Sunday, they state that "to day is the third day since these things were done." (Luke 24:21). A natural reading of this sentence would place the crucifixion on Thursday. But again, according to the Jewish way of reckoning a day as only part of a day, one can conclude that the Emmaus disciples with this Jewish understanding of days would be speaking of three days without an exact 24-hour period timetable.

Harold Hoehner concludes that Christ did not die on Thursday:

"Therefore, it appears that Jesus' Last Supper (which occurred on Thursday night) was not a Passover and that Jesus was tried and crucified on Friday, Nisan 14, just before the eating of the Passover. This is substantiated by Paul when he mentions that Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed (1 Cor. 5:7), as well as the Gospel of Peter that says that Jesus was delivered to the people 'on the day before the Unleavened Bread, their feast' and by the Babylonian Talmud, which probably refers to Christ when it says: 'On the eve of the Passover, Jeshu (ms. M: the Nazarean) was hanged.'"

A Wednesday Crucifixion

Those who teach that Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday conclude:

- ✓ Late Wednesday: Jesus is crucified and buried.
- ✓ Early Thursday (Passover) through late Saturday (Sabbath): Jesus is in the tomb.
- ✓ Friday (between the two Sabbaths): the women buy and prepare the spices.
- ✓ Early Sunday: Jesus rises from the dead, and the women find the empty tomb.

Once again, the main problem with this view is that 72 hours from a Wednesday crucifixion would not allow Jesus to rise “on the third day” (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 46; 1 Cor. 15:4) but would have Him rising on the fourth day! Furthermore, as we have seen, it is a well-known fact that the Jews any part of a day as a whole day. So the Matthew 12:40 passage is not a great obstacle or hurdle to overcome as the proponents of this view would have us believe. It was simply an idiomatic expression that could include parts of a day and not the whole.

Those who argue for a Wednesday crucifixion agree with the Thursday view that there were two Sabbaths during the week, but the Wednesday advocates separate these two sabbath days with a non-sabbath day. The first Sabbath, in this view, was the Passover Sabbath starting Wednesday evening following the crucifixion (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:52–54). Then came a non-Sabbath day (Friday) and then the weekly Sabbath starting Friday evening. The women purchased spices after the Sabbath, according to Mark 16:1—meaning the Passover Sabbath.

Luke 23:56 says that, after the women saw where Jesus was buried “they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.” The Wednesday argument states that the women could not purchase the spices after the Sabbath and prepare those spices before the Sabbath unless there were two Sabbaths during the week, separated by a day.

Again, there is no reason to press for several sabbaths since the events of the Last Supper, Passover, and Christ’s death can occur within the framework of a Jewish day (from sundown to sunrise). Also, another difficulty with the Wednesday view is that the disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus did so on the same day of His resurrection (Luke 24:13). The disciples, who do not recognize Jesus, tell Him of Christ’s crucifixion (verse 20) and say that “to day is the third day since these things were done” (verse 21). But how can this be if there are four days between Wednesday and Sunday?

My friend Pastor Paul Reiner accurately assesses the facts when stating:

“The translational controversy is settled by the testimony of the Emmaus Road disciples. While on their journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus they were approached by Jesus, although they did not recognize Him. Jesus asked them what they had been talking about and they began to tell Him of the crucifixion. And then they said,

‘But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.’ (Luke 24:31) If Wednesday was the day of the crucifixion and it was not being counted as one of the three days, then day #1 would be from sunset Wednesday to sunset Thursday, day #2 from sunset Thursday to sunset Friday and day #3 from sunset Friday to Sunset Saturday. According to the disciple this was the third day since the crucifixion and it was Sunday. Therefore, a Wednesday crucifixion seems to be impossible.”

But Wednesday advocates will conclude that they may have started their count on Wednesday evening at Christ’s burial, which begins the Jewish Thursday, and Thursday to Sunday could be counted as three days. But this is highly speculative and forced exegesis.

The Wednesday view also means the Triumphal Entry had to occur on the Sabbath which is highly unlikely since Jesus riding on an animal would be considered making the animal to work (Deur. 5:14) and cutting down branches from the trees would also constitute a form of labor or work and violate the Law (Deut. 5:15; Numb. 14:32-36).

Although I have not exhausted all the details, we can rest assured that Christ was crucified on Good Friday! Despite some of the Thursday and Wednesday arguments for the crucifixion, the evidence for the traditional Friday crucifixion, also known as Good Friday, still holds prominence for several important reasons.



First, since Jesus rose on the “third day” (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 46; 1 Cor. 15:4) He could not remain in the grave for 72 hours. So the Wednesday and Thursday position can be dismissed on this primary understanding. You cannot rise on the third day and literally fulfill 72 hours of remaining in the grave.

Second, the Jewish reckoning of days included two components different from modern times. This included the day beginning in the evening (as stated in Genesis 1, “evening and morning”). Jewish people in the First Century considered a portion

of one day to be an entire day. Since Jesus was in the tomb for part of Friday, all day Saturday, and a portion of Sunday, this is considered to be three days.

Second, Mark 15:42 says that Jesus was put to death "the day before the Sabbath." Since this is referring to the weekly Sabbath (which is Saturday), then Jesus would have been crucified on Friday. With this perspective, a Friday crucifixion was the first day. Jesus was buried on Friday afternoon before sunset (day 1). He remained in the tomb Friday night through Saturday afternoon (evening/day 2). Jesus continued in the tomb Saturday evening and rose on Sunday morning (evening/day 3), which was the third day. Jesus also taught He would rise on the third day (Matthew 16:21; Luke 9:22).



Third, the traditional Friday crucifixion view understands the parallel Jesus gave with Jonah being in the belly of the fish for three days and nights in Matthew 12:40 as referring to three days in general rather than a strict three days consisting of literal, twenty-four-hours. This is in accordance with Jewish understanding.

John MacArthur points out in his commentary on Matthew:

“The matter of three days and three nights is often used either to prove Jesus was mistaken about the time He would actually spend in the tomb or that He could not have been crucified on Friday afternoon and raised early on Sunday, the first day of the week. But as in modern usage, the phrase ‘day and night’ can mean not only a full 24-hour day but any representative part of a day ... The Jewish Talmud held that ‘any part of a day is as the whole.’ Jesus was simply using a common, well-understood generalization” (p. 329).

D.S. Carson adds his insight in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*:

Jonah spent ‘three days and three nights’ in the fish (Jonah 1:17). But if the normal sequence of Passion Week is correct, Jesus was in the tomb only about 36 hours. Since they included parts of three days, by Jewish reckoning Jesus was buried ‘three days’ or, to put it another way, he rose ‘on the third day’ (16:21). But this does not cover more than two nights.” In rabbinical thought a day and a night make an onah, and a part of an onah is as the whole ... Thus according to Jewish tradition, “three days and three nights” need mean no more than “three days” or the combination of any part of three separate days.

Craig L. Blomberg in *The New American Commentary* concurs when he observes: “‘Three days and three nights’ represents a Semitic idiom for any portion of three calendar days. So there is no need to see a contradiction with the traditional Holy Week chronology, including a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection, or to propose any alternative chronologies (pp. 206-207).

Perhaps Gleason Archer, in his classic *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, offers the most comprehensive answer/explanation/reconciliation: “It is perfectly true that a Friday Crucifixion will not yield three full 24-hour days. But neither will a Thursday afternoon Crucifixion, nor a Wednesday afternoon Crucifixion, either. This results from the fact that Jesus died at 3 p.m. and rose at or about 6 a.m. The only way you can come out with three 24-hour days is if He rose at the same hour (three days later, of course) that He was crucified, namely, 3 p.m.

“Actually, however, He rose ‘on the third day’ (I Cor. 15:4). Obviously, if He rose on the third day, He could not already have been buried for three whole nights and three whole days. That would have required His resurrection to be at the beginning of the fourth day.

“What, then, is the meaning of the expression in Matthew 12:40: ‘three days and three nights in the heart of the earth?’ This can only refer to three 24-hour days in part or in whole. That is to say, Jesus expired at 3 p.m. near the close of Friday (according to the Hebrew method of reckoning each day as beginning at sundown), which would be one day.

“Then Friday 6 p.m. to Saturday 6 p.m. would be the second day, and Saturday 6 p.m. to Sunday 6 p.m., would constitute the third day – during which (i.e., Sunday 6 a.m. or a little before) Christ arose ... when you wished to refer to three separate 24-hour days, you said, ‘Three days and three nights’ – even though only a portion of the first and third days might be involved.

“A similar usage is apparent from the narrative in I Samuel 30:12, where ‘he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights’ is equated with ... ‘three days ago’ – which could only mean ‘day before yesterday.’ But if the Egyptian slave

fell ill on the day before yesterday ... then he could not have remained without food or water for three entire 24-hour days. We simply have to get used to slightly different ways of expressing time intervals (p. 328).

“We can say with assurance that Christ was crucified on Friday and resurrected on Sunday and still be in tune with what Jesus said in Matthew 12:40. Let us conclude with the words of Theodore of Heraclea recorded in the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: When ‘Christ says he will spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth He is referring to the end of Friday, all of Saturday and the beginning of Sunday, in keeping with the way people understood the beginning and ending of days’” (p. 256).

Don't be alarmed! In shortening the length of the days I'm not concluding that the days in Genesis chapter one are billions of years and not literal days (Ex. 20:11). We can be sure that Jesus was not in the grave for three billion years! However, as we have discussed, days related to the Jewish way of thinking can be part of a day. For this reason and others, it seems that the New Testament account and the earliest church history support Good Friday as the day Jesus died, and thus the traditional Friday crucifixion stands the test of time.



Yes, Good Friday is still good! Of course, while the day of the crucifixion is debated, the day of the resurrection is absolutely clear. Scripture teaches that Jesus rose on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9). What is more important than knowing the day of Jesus' death is believing that He did die paying sin's penalty on our behalf (1 Pet. 2:24) and that He rose from the dead on the third day to give us the promise of everlasting life (John 6:47). Ultimately, Good Friday is one of the greatest pictures of God's love for us because it shows the sacrifice our sin required. The good news

is that putting our trust in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-4) results in eternal life (John 3:16, 36). This is true whether Christ was crucified on a Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday.