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A Refutation of Alternative Chronologies

Of The Passion Week

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A REFUTATION OF ALTERNATIVE CHRONOLOGIES OF THE PASSION WEEK

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Today, there is considerable disagreement over the chronology of the Passion Week – the week of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Some now advocate a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion and a Saturday resurrection instead of the traditional Christian view of a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection. To readers unfamiliar with the details of the issue, some of the arguments for these alternative chronologies may initially appear persuasive. However, the question deserves careful examination, particularly because the dating of the crucifixion affects other important prophetic timelines in Scripture.

In this study, we will examine the major objections raised against the traditional chronology and determine whether they withstand scrutiny. We will also consider the historical and doctrinal background behind the development of the alternative chronologies, particularly the influence of Sabbath-keeping beliefs and the rejection of traditional Christian Sunday worship.

Note: Before continuing, it is recommended that readers first consult the companion study, *The Daniel 9:25 Prophecy: An Exact Timeline for the Arrival of the Messiah*.[1] That study carefully examines the chronological

evidence and establishes that Jesus Christ was crucified on Friday, Nisan 14, the day the Passover lambs were being killed. Nisan was the first month of the Jewish religious calendar and fell roughly during our March and April. The Passover lambs were killed on Nisan 14, while the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on Nisan 15 at sunset, when the next Jewish day began. Readers who wish to focus specifically on the dating of the crucifixion should refer to the chapter entitled "The Dating of the Ending Point (Part 1) - The Date of the Crucifixion." That evidence provides the chronological foundation for this study and effectively rules out a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion.

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1. Michael Filipek, *The Daniel 9:25 Prophecy: An Exact Timeline for the Arrival of the Messiah*, Springfield, NJ: LetUsReason Publishing, 2026.

CHAPTER 2

THE TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN VIEW: FRIDAY CRUCIFIXION AND SUNDAY RESURRECTION

Before examining the alternative chronologies, it is important to establish that the traditional chronology of a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection is not a late Catholic innovation, despite claims made by advocates of the alternative views. It is reflected very early in Christian history, long before the time of Constantine or the later development of the Roman Catholic Church. Some of the earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament associate the resurrection with the first day of the week, and by the middle of the second century we find an explicit description of Jesus being crucified on the day before Saturday and rising on the day after Saturday.

The Epistle of Barnabas, late first or early second century

> We keep the **eighth day** [Sunday] with joyfulness, the **day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead** … [1]

This early testimony directly associates the first day of the week with Jesus' resurrection and shows that Christians were commemorating that day long before Constantine or the later development of the Roman Catholic Church.

Ignatius, c. 110 AD

> If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things [the Jews] have come to the possession of a new hope [Christianity], **no longer observing the Sabbath**, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death … [2]

Ignatius likewise connects the Lord's Day with Christ's resurrection. His testimony is especially important because it comes from the early second century, showing that Christian observance of the Lord's Day was already established centuries before Constantine.

Justin Martyr, c. 150 AD

> **But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly**, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; **and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn** [Saturday]**; and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun**, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.[3]

Justin's testimony is especially significant because he gives the chronology directly. Jesus was crucified on Friday, the day before the Sabbath, and rose on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath. By the middle of the second century, then, the traditional Friday-Sunday sequence was being stated explicitly in Christian writing.

Cyprian, c. 250 AD

> The **eighth day, that is, the first day after the Sabbath, and the Lord's Day.**[4]

Cyprian again identifies the Lord's Day as Sunday, the first day after the Sabbath. His testimony provides yet another example of this terminology continuing in the early Church.

These early Christian sources consistently associate Christ's resurrection with the first day of the week, while Justin explicitly records the Friday-Sunday chronology itself. This evidence is important because it places the traditional understanding firmly within early Christian history rather than allowing it to be dismissed as a much later development.

This historical understanding is also widely recognized in later historical scholarship and standard reference sources.

Encyclopaedia Britannica

> Sunday, the first day of the week. It is regarded by most Christians as the Lord's Day, or the weekly memorial of Jesus Christ's Resurrection from the dead. The practice of Christians gathering together for worship on Sunday dates back to apostolic times, but details of the actual development of the custom are not clear. Verse 10 of the first chapter of the Revelation to John mentions the "Lord's Day"; this was subsequently interpreted by most commentators as a reference to Sunday. St. Justin Martyr [c. 100-c. 165], philosopher and defender of the Christian faith, in his writings described the Christians gathered together for worship on the Lord's Day.[5]

Encyclopedia Americana

> **From the apostolic era to the present it has been customary for Christians to assemble for communal Sunday services ... Civil laws requiring** the observance of Sunday date back **at least** to Emperor Constantine the Great, who designated Sunday as a legal day of rest and worship in 321. This law, however was not specifically Christian, since Sunday was the day of the sun-god for pagans as well as **the Lord's day for Christians.** While Constantine thus managed to **please** the two major religious groups in the Roman empire,

numerous later laws regulating behavior on Sunday have been avowedly Christian.[6]

Collier's Encyclopedia

The New Testament contains clear evidence that from a very early period the first day of the week was observed by Christians as a day of assembly for "the breaking of bread" and perhaps for the collection of freewill offerings. (Acts xx:7 and 1 Corinth xvi:2). Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century describes how "on the day called Sunday" all town and country Christians assembled for instructions in holy writings, for prayer, distribution of bread and wine, and the collection of alms. Tertullian declared that the Christians "made Sunday a day of joy," **but for other reasons than to adore the sun which was not part of their religion.**[7]

These three sources present the same historical picture. *Encyclopedia Britannica* traces Christian Sunday assembly back to apostolic times and connects it with the resurrection of Christ. *Encyclopedia Americana* likewise acknowledges that Christians were already gathering on Sunday before Constantine issued his civil legislation in 321 AD. *Collier's Encyclopedia* points to both New Testament evidence and the testimony of Justin Martyr to show that first-day Christian assembly was already established in the earliest centuries of the Church. These sources therefore provide no support for the claim that Sunday observance originated with Constantine or the later Roman Catholic Church.

The same conclusion is expressed more fully by renowned church historian Philip Schaff, who traces Christian Sunday observance back to the apostolic age.

History of the Christian Church

The celebration of the Lord's Day in memory of the resurrection of Christ dates undoubtedly from the apostolic age. Nothing short of

> apostolic precedent can account for the universal religious observance in the churches of the second century. There is no dissenting voice. This custom is confirmed by the testimonies of the earliest post-apostolic writers, as Barnabas, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr.[8]

Schaff further writes:

> Hence, the first day was already in the apostolic age honorably designated as "the Lord's Day." ... it appears, therefore, from the New Testament itself, that Sunday was observed as a day of worship, and in special commemoration of the Resurrection, whereby the work of redemption was finished. The universal and uncontradicted Sunday observance in the second century can only be explained by the fact that it has its roots in apostolic practice.[9]

Schaff's conclusion reinforces the historical evidence already examined. Christian observance of the first day of the week was rooted in the earliest period of the Church and centered on the resurrection of Christ. Instead of originating with Constantine or the later Roman Catholic Church, it was already firmly established among Christians centuries earlier.

The historical record therefore gives us no reason to regard the traditional Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection as a later Catholic development. The earliest Christian sources associate Christ's resurrection with the first day of the week, and by the middle of the second century Justin Martyr explicitly states that Jesus was crucified on Friday and rose on Sunday. With that historical foundation established, we can now examine how the alternative chronologies arose and the arguments used to support them.

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7. "Sunday," in *Collier's Encyclopedia*, Vol. 21, New York: Macmillan Educational Company, 1985, pp. 632-633.
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9. Ibid., pp. 478-479.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO THE ALTERNATIVE CHRONOLOGIES

We will now turn to the origin and development of the alternative Passion Week chronologies, the best known being the Wednesday crucifixion and Saturday resurrection view. In modern times, this view became especially associated with Sabbatarian movements – groups that believe Christians are obligated to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. These groups also commonly reject the historic Christian practice of Sunday worship, regarding it as a later development influenced by paganism or the Roman Catholic Church.

For Sabbatarians, a Saturday resurrection directly supports the larger argument against Sunday worship. If Christ rose on Saturday rather than Sunday, then the resurrection no longer provides a basis for the historic Christian association of the first day of the week with the Lord's Day, while Saturday remains the biblical Sabbath they believe Christians are required to keep. The chronology of the Passion Week therefore became closely connected with Sabbatarianism.

Sunday Worship and the Sabbath

Several assumptions underlying this position need to be addressed before we examine the chronology itself. Sabbatarians often assume

that Christians who worship on Sunday do so because they believe the Sabbath was changed from the seventh day of the week to the first day.[1] They also commonly argue that Constantine or the Roman Catholic Church later changed Christian worship from Saturday to Sunday.[2] Neither assumption accurately represents the historical Christian position.

Christians did not originally gather on Sunday because they believed it had become a new Sabbath. As established in the previous chapter, the early Christians associated the first day of the week with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They referred to it as the "Lord's Day" and also as the "eighth day," recognizing it as the day following the seventh-day Sabbath. The historical reason for Christian Sunday gathering was therefore the resurrection, not a supposed transfer of the Sabbath from one day to another.

The Gospel accounts themselves provide a natural basis for this association. On the first day of the week, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other women, to the two disciples traveling to Emmaus, and later that same day to the assembled disciples (Matthew 28:8-10; Luke 24:13-35, 36-49; John 20:11-23). John specifically records:

> Then the same day at evening, being **the first day of the week**, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.
>
> -John 20:19

During these "Sunday" appearances, Jesus met with His followers, received worship, ate with them, taught them, and commissioned them. This makes it easy to understand why the first day of the week became closely associated with the resurrection in the earliest Christian tradition.

The New Testament also gives direct evidence that Christians were gathering on the first day of the week while the apostles were still alive. Acts 20 records:

> And upon **the first day of the week**, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.
>
> -Acts 20:7

Here the disciples are specifically described as coming together on the first day of the week, breaking bread, and hearing Paul preach. First Corinthians 16 also shows Paul giving instructions connected with the first day of the week:

> **1** Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. **2** Upon **the first day of the week** let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.
>
> -1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Paul instructed both the Corinthian and Galatian churches to set aside their collections on the first day of the week. Although this passage does not describe a worship service as directly as Acts 20:7 does, it is consistent with the first-day pattern already seen elsewhere in the New Testament.

John also makes the following statement in Revelation:

> I was in the Spirit on **the Lord's day**, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,
>
> -Revelation 1:10

This passage does not itself define which day John meant by "the Lord's Day," but the early Christian evidence examined in the previous chapter does. Ignatius, writing in the early second century, distinguished the Lord's Day from the Sabbath and directly associated it with Christ's resurrection.[3] The biblical and early historical evidence therefore point in the same direction: Christian association with the first day of the week *predates* Constantine by centuries and was rooted in the resurrection of Christ.

Another argument sometimes raised against Sunday worship is that the word "Sunday" has a pagan origin because it means the "day of the Sun," reflecting the ancient pagan veneration of the Sun and of solar deities.[4] But this argument proves far too much. The English names of *all seven days* ultimately descend from the same ancient pagan naming system. Sunday is the Sun's day and Monday the Moon's day; Tuesday is named after Tiw, a Germanic god of war; Wednesday after Woden, or Odin, the chief god in Germanic and Norse religion; Thursday after Thor, the god of thunder; Friday after Frigg, a Germanic goddess; and Saturday after Saturn, the Roman god associated with agriculture.[5] Thus, if the pagan origin of a calendar name makes worship on that day pagan, then the same reasoning would disqualify *every* day of the week.

The inconsistency of this argument is fully exposed by the fact that Sabbatarians themselves worship on Saturday, a day named for the Roman god Saturn, without believing that doing so honors Saturn. By the same reasoning, then, Christians who gather on Sunday to worship Christ are not worshipping the Sun. More importantly, there is no evidence that Christian Sunday worship originated in pagan sun worship. The New Testament and the early Christian testimony examined in the previous chapter consistently connect the first day of the week with Christ's resurrection, not with the worship of a sun god.

Constantine's later legislation does nothing to change this historical sequence. In 321 AD, Constantine issued the well-known decree:

> On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed.[6]

Whatever Constantine's political or religious motives may have been, the historical chronology settles the question of whether he originated Christian Sunday observance. As shown, Christians were already gathering on Sunday and associating that day with Christ's resurrection more than two centuries before this decree. Constantine therefore could not have created Christian Sunday worship or changed

an existing Christian practice from Saturday to Sunday. His legislation came centuries after the practice was already established.

This brings us to another major misconception in the Sabbatarian argument – the claim that Christian Sunday observance represents a replacement of the biblical seventh-day Sabbath with Sunday.[7] But that confuses two separate issues. The position defended in this study is not that Sunday became the Sabbath. The biblical Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, corresponding to Saturday, and it was given to Israel as part of the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-17). Sunday worship arose for a different reason entirely. Christians began gathering on the first day of the week because Jesus rose from the dead on that day. Sunday worship therefore did not involve changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

Are Christians Required to Keep the Sabbath?

With that distinction in mind, the real disagreement with Sabbatarianism is not over which day of the week is the Sabbath, since Scripture already identifies the seventh day as the Sabbath. The disagreement is whether Christians under the New Covenant are still required to observe the seventh-day Sabbath command given to Israel under the Mosaic Covenant.

The New Testament answers this question by showing that the Sabbath was part of the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Law was given specifically to Israel and governed Israel's covenantal life, while also serving a temporary preparatory purpose that pointed forward to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Jesus fulfilled the Law (Matthew 5:17), and through His death inaugurated the New Covenant.

One obvious objection to this argument is that if the Sabbath command no longer remains binding simply because it was part of the Mosaic Law, then why are commands against murder, adultery, and theft still binding today? The difference is that commands against murder, adultery, and theft were not unique to the Mosaic Covenant. Basic morality did not originate with the Mosaic Law but is rooted in the nature and character of God. These moral standards existed before

the Law and therefore transcend the Mosaic Covenant, carrying over into New Covenant times. This is why the New Testament writers repeatedly reaffirm them. By contrast, covenantal observances such as feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths are specifically identified as shadows pointing forward to Christ.

> 16 **Let no man therefore judge you in** meat, or in drink, or in **respect of** an holyday, or of the new moon, or of **the sabbath days**: 17 **Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ**.
> -Colossians 2:16-17

It would have been difficult for Paul to state the point any more directly. He includes Sabbaths among the Old Covenant observances over which Christians are *not* to be judged because they were "a shadow of things to come." The reality to which those shadows pointed is Christ.

Note: For a deeper examination of the distinction between Israel, the Mosaic Covenant, and the Church, please consult the companion study entitled *Understanding the Distinction Between Israel and the Church*.[8]

Hebrews 4 develops this further by showing what the Sabbath rest itself anticipated. The seventh-day rest was not the final rest God intended for His people, but pointed forward to something greater:

> 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "On the seventh day God rested from all his works." … 8 For **if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.** 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.
> -Hebrews 4:4, 8-10 (NIV)

The writer's point is that neither the seventh-day Sabbath nor Israel's entrance into the Promised Land was the full and final rest

God intended for His people. If Joshua had provided that final rest, Scripture would not have spoken afterward of "another day" yet future. Hebrews therefore looks beyond the Old Covenant Sabbath to the greater rest into which the people of God enter through Christ.

Isaiah had also spoken of a future "rest" and "refreshing," saying that God would speak to His people through "another tongue":

> **11** For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. **12** To whom he said, **This is the rest** wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and **this is the refreshing**: yet they would not hear.
> -Isaiah 28:11-12

Isaiah connects the promised "rest" and "refreshing" with God speaking to His people through "another tongue." At Pentecost in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit was poured out and the disciples began speaking in other tongues, marking the birth of the Church. Paul later quotes Isaiah 28:11 in 1 Corinthians 14:21 and applies it to the Church. Isaiah's promised "rest" and "refreshing" therefore point beyond the weekly Sabbath to the greater rest God would provide through Christ and the Holy Spirit under the New Covenant.

These passages help explain why Paul includes Sabbaths among the Old Covenant observances he calls "a shadow of things to come" in Colossians 2:16-17. Christ is the reality to which that shadow pointed. Requiring Christians to return to the shadow after Christ has come reverses the direction of the New Testament teaching. For a fuller treatment of this subject, Dale Ratzlaff provides a detailed study in *Sabbath in Christ*.[9]

Acts 15 gives another direct answer to the claim that Christians remain under the Sabbath command. As Gentiles entered the Church, some believers insisted that they had to be circumcised and "keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5). Peter rejected that demand, asking why they should place upon the Gentile believers a yoke "which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10). James then gave the council's decision:

> **19** Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: **20** But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.
>
> -Acts 15:19-20

The council's decision confirms that Gentile believers were not to be placed under the Mosaic Law. James declares that they should "not trouble them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God" (Acts 15:19), and then gives only a short list of necessary instructions. Some addressed conduct that was morally wrong in itself, such as sexual immorality, while others dealt with practices connected with idolatry and Jewish-Gentile fellowship. What James does not do is place Gentile believers under the Mosaic Law or require them to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. Since the council had been called specifically because some were insisting that Gentile believers must "keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5), the absence of any Sabbath command is part of the council's answer and shows that Sabbath-keeping was not required of them.

Sabbatarians sometimes respond by pointing to passages in Acts where Paul attended synagogues on the Sabbath. But in each case, Paul is going where Jews and God-fearing Gentiles were already gathered so that he could preach the gospel to them (Acts 13:14-16, 42-44; 17:1-3; 18:4). None of these passages describes a Christian church gathering for Sabbath worship. They show Paul using the Sabbath as an opportunity to reach people who were already assembling on that day, not teaching Christians that they were required to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

At the same time, the fact that Christians are not required to keep the seventh-day Sabbath does not mean that Sunday became a new Sabbath. The New Testament tells believers to gather together (Hebrews 10:25), but it never commands them to keep Sunday as a Sabbath or requires Christian worship to take place on one particular day of the week. Paul addresses the observance of days in Romans 14:

> **5** One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. **Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind**. **6** Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord.
>
> -Romans 14:5-6a (NIV)

Consequently, the New Testament neither transfers the Sabbath to Sunday nor requires Christians to keep the seventh-day Sabbath as a binding Old Covenant command. Christians are free to worship God on any day, while Sunday became the customary day for Christian gathering because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week.

The Development of the Alternative Chronologies

Having addressed these Sabbath and Sunday claims, we can now return to the historical development of the alternative Passion Week chronologies. An early documented example of the Saturday-resurrection view appears in 1724, when British Seventh Day Baptist George Carlow published *Truth Defended*. In Chapter 11, Carlow argued for a Saturday resurrection.[10] The view continued among some Sabbatarian groups and became much more widely promoted during the twentieth century.

Herbert W. Armstrong became one of its most influential modern promoters. Armstrong also taught British Israelism and the continued observance of parts of the Mosaic Law, including the seventh-day Sabbath, Old Covenant holy days, and dietary laws.[11] His booklet *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday* argued that Jesus was crucified and buried on Wednesday, that two separate Sabbaths occurred during Passion Week, and that Jesus rose late Saturday afternoon rather than on Sunday.[12]

This historical background explains why Sabbatarian movements became major promoters of a Saturday resurrection. The remainder of this study will now examine the biblical arguments used to support the alternative chronologies and determine whether they actually

require abandoning the traditional Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection.

The four primary objections raised against the traditional chronology are:

1. The claim that Scripture indicates there were two separate Sabbaths between the time Jesus died and rose from the dead, making the crucifixion Wednesday or Thursday rather than Friday.
2. The claim that the King James wording of Matthew 28:1 indicates that Jesus rose on Saturday rather than Sunday.
3. The claim that the timing of the women's purchase and preparation of spices for anointing Jesus' body creates a problem for a Friday crucifixion.
4. The claim that a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection would violate the "three days and three nights" sign of Jonah in Matthew 12:40.

Each of these objections will now be examined in light of the full chronology given in the Gospel accounts. An alternative timeline cannot be built on one isolated expression while ignoring the other passages that identify the sequence and timing of events. The question is whether these objections still hold when the full biblical chronology is considered.

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CHAPTER 4

OBJECTION #1: "SCRIPTURE INDICATES THERE WERE TWO SEPARATE SABBATHS BETWEEN JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION, MAKING THE CRUCIFIXION WEDNESDAY OR THURSDAY RATHER THAN FRIDAY."

The primary passage used to support the claim that there were two separate Sabbaths during Passion Week is Matthew 28:1. This argument was popularized in modern times by Herbert W. Armstrong. In his booklet *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*, Armstrong focused heavily on the Greek word *sabbaton* (Strong's #G4521), which appears twice in Matthew 28:1. He argued that the first occurrence, normally translated "Sabbath" in the singular, should instead be translated "Sabbaths" in the plural.

> In the end of the **sabbath** [Greek – *sabbaton*], as it began to dawn toward the first day of the **week** [again, the Greek *sabbaton*], came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.
>
> -Matthew 28:1

As can be seen, the word *sabbaton* appears twice in the original Greek of Matthew 28:1. Armstrong's argument centered on the first occurrence. He maintained that it should be translated "Sabbaths" in the plural and that this pointed to more than one Sabbath during Passion Week. He identified one as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which he placed on Thursday, and the other as the regular weekly

Sabbath on Saturday. He then used these two supposed Sabbaths to support a Wednesday crucifixion and a resurrection late Saturday afternoon rather than on Sunday.[1]

The traditional chronology, however, recognizes the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the weekly Sabbath as coinciding on the same Saturday during the year Jesus died. Armstrong instead separated them, placing the festival observance on Thursday, followed by an ordinary Friday and then the weekly Sabbath on Saturday. He understood Matthew's statement, "in the end of the sabbaton," to refer to these two allegedly separate Sabbaths and concluded that Jesus rose near the end of Saturday, after both had passed.

Armstrong's interpretation therefore depends heavily upon the claim that the first occurrence of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 must refer to multiple Sabbaths occurring on separate days. But this argument runs into several problems. First, the plural form of *sabbaton* does not necessarily indicate more than one Sabbath day, since Scripture often uses the plural form when only a single Sabbath is in view. Second, *sabbaton* can also mean "week," providing another possible way to understand the passage without changing the traditional chronology. Third, even if more than one Sabbath observance were intended, they would not have to occur on separate days. Finally, the larger chronology given throughout the Gospel accounts leaves no room for the additional day or days required by Armstrong's reconstruction. Each of these problems will be examined shortly.

Before examining them, however, we first need to establish what the Greek word *sabbaton* itself can mean. It is defined as follows:

> **The Sabbath, or day of weekly repose from secular avocations** (also the observance or institution itself); **by extension a week, i.e. the interval between two Sabbaths**; likewise the plural in all the above applications: – Sabbath (day), **week**.[2]

Thus, *sabbaton* can refer either to the Sabbath day itself or, by extension, to a week. This broader meaning will become important as

we proceed. We will begin, however, by examining how the singular and plural forms of *sabbaton* are actually used throughout Scripture.

No Consistent Usage of Sabbaton in the Bible

The first point to recognize is that *sabbaton* frequently appears in a plural form in the Greek New Testament **even when only one Sabbath day is in view**. In other words, the grammatical plural does not necessarily mean that the writer is referring to multiple Sabbaths. This presents an immediate problem for Armstrong's claim that the plural form in Matthew 28:1 must refer to several Sabbath days.

In New Testament passages where *sabbaton* means "Sabbath," the word occurs forty times in a singular form and nineteen times in a plural form. Yet in most of the passages where a plural form occurs, the context indicates that only a single Sabbath day is intended.[3]

Examples:
Matthew 12:1, 5, 10, 11, 12; 28:1
Mark 1:21; 2:23, 24; 3:2, 4
Luke 4:16; 6:2; 13:10
Acts 13:14; 16:13

There is also no consistent distinction between the singular and plural forms when the same event is being described. A good example is the account of Jesus and His disciples walking through the grainfields on the Sabbath. Matthew uses a plural form of *sabbaton* in Matthew 12:1 and a singular form in Verse 2. Luke's account of the same event reverses the usage, employing the singular form in Luke 6:1 and the plural form in Verse 2.[4]

The same pattern appears in the healing of the man with the withered hand. Matthew 12:10-12 and Mark 3:2-4 use a plural form, while Luke 6:6-9 uses a singular form in describing the same event.[5]

Likewise, in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, a plural form is sometimes used where the corre-

sponding Hebrew passage is singular and the context plainly refers to one Sabbath day.[6]

Examples:
Exodus 16:25, 26; 20:8, 10; 35:3
Numbers 15:32
Deuteronomy 5:12

The biblical evidence therefore shows that we cannot determine the number of Sabbath days being described simply by looking at whether *sabbaton* appears in a singular or plural grammatical form. The biblical writers could use either form when referring to one Sabbath, so the context must determine what is intended.

This directly undermines Armstrong's argument from Matthew 28:1. The fact that the first occurrence of *sabbaton* appears in a plural form does not establish that Matthew was referring to multiple Sabbath days. Before such a conclusion could be reached, it would have to be demonstrated from the context rather than assumed from the grammatical form alone.

Sabbaton Could Easily Be Translated as "Week" in Matthew 28:1

Even if someone were to argue that the customary translation "Sabbath" is not the best rendering in this particular phrase, it would still not follow that Matthew intended "multiple Sabbaths." As noted earlier, *sabbaton* can also mean "week." This provides another possible way of understanding the first occurrence of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 without adopting Armstrong's interpretation. And importantly, this alternative would require no change at all to the traditional Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection chronology.

To understand how *sabbaton* came to carry the meaning "week," it is helpful to consider the way the Jews reckoned the days of the week in relation to the Sabbath. Strong defines *sabbaton* as referring to the

Sabbath and, "by extension," to "a week, i.e. the interval between two Sabbaths."[7]

The way the Jews identified the individual days of the week further explains this usage. R.C.H. Lenski notes that because "the Jews had no names for the weekdays," they "designated them with reference to their Sabbath."[8] After spending years examining Jewish writings in the Babylonian Talmud, Hebraist John Lightfoot similarly explained:

> The Jews reckon the days of the week thus; One day (or the first day) of the sabbath: two (or the second day) of the sabbath; [etc.][9]

Lightfoot then cited examples from two different Talmudic tractates. Tractate Maccoth describes witnesses testifying "on the first of the sabbath," followed by judgment "on the second day of the sabbath."[10] Tractate Bava Kama refers to the public reading of the Law "on the second and fifth days of the sabbath" and the washing of clothes "on the fifth day of the Sabbath."[11] In Michael Rodkinson's English translation of the Talmud, these expressions are rendered according to the weekdays they represent: "the first of the sabbath" as Sunday, "the second day of the sabbath" as Monday, and "the fifth day of the sabbath" as Thursday.[12]

This makes it easy to understand why *sabbaton* came to be used as a word referring to the week itself. The Jews reckoned the individual days according to their relationship to the Sabbath, and consequently, *sabbaton* came to describe the seven-day period extending from one Sabbath to another. With this background in mind, consider Matthew 28:1 again:

> In the end of the **sabbath** [sabbaton], as it began to dawn toward the first day of the **week** [sabbaton], came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.
>
> -Matthew 28:1

As we know, *sabbaton* appears twice in Matthew 28:1. What is especially important here is that its second occurrence is already

translated "week" in the phrase "the first day of the week." This reflects the Jewish practice discussed above of identifying the days of the week in relation to the Sabbath, and in this case the phrase refers to Sunday.

If the second occurrence of *sabbaton* can carry the meaning "week," it is at least possible that the first occurrence could as well. Matthew could therefore be describing the transition from the end of one week to the beginning of the next. In practical terms, the first phrase would refer to the end of Saturday and the second to the beginning of Sunday. That reading would therefore preserve the traditional chronology, with Matthew describing the transition from Saturday to Sunday rather than introducing additional Sabbath days.

Expressed that way in English, the verse would read:

> In the end of the **week** [Saturday], as it began to dawn toward the first day of the **week** [Sunday], came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.
>
> -Matthew 28:1

This may sound somewhat repetitive in English, but repetition of this kind is not unusual in biblical language. More importantly, the point is not that Matthew 28:1 *must* be translated this way. Rather, this is simply another legitimate possibility that Armstrong's interpretation fails to account for. Even if someone rejected the traditional rendering of the first *sabbaton* as "Sabbath," the recognized meaning "week" provides another possible understanding of the passage that requires no change whatsoever to the traditional Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection chronology.

Multiple Sabbaths Don't Require Multiple Days

There is yet another problem with Armstrong's argument. For the sake of discussion, suppose he was correct that the first occurrence of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 should be understood as "Sabbaths" in the plural. Suppose further that one of these Sabbaths referred to the

Feast of Unleavened Bread and the other to the regular weekly Sabbath. **Even if both assumptions were granted, it still would not require that the two Sabbaths occurred on different days.**

According to the traditional chronology, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the regular weekly Sabbath coincided during the year Jesus died. In that case, there could be two Sabbath observances associated with the same calendar day rather than two separate Sabbath days with an ordinary day between them. Armstrong's proposed sequence of a Thursday festival Sabbath, an ordinary Friday, and the weekly Sabbath on Saturday is therefore not required even if we grant his assumption that Matthew is referring to more than one Sabbath.

To understand the chronology, we first need to examine the expression "the preparation," or "Preparation Day." All four Gospels identify the day of Jesus' crucifixion as a preparation day (Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42). Because no ordinary work could be done on the weekly Sabbath (Exodus 16:23; 35:3), the preceding day (Friday) was used for preparing food and completing other necessary work. Josephus also provides historical evidence for the use of preparation in connection with the day preceding the weekly Sabbath.[13] More importantly, the Gospel of Mark defines the term for us directly:

> And now when the even was come, because **it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath**,
>
> -Mark 15:42

Mark therefore identifies the Preparation Day as "the day before the sabbath." This places Jesus' death immediately before the weekly Sabbath. The Gospel of John provides another important detail:

> 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 19:31

Notice the sequence. Jesus died on "the preparation," and the Sabbath immediately following was described as a "high day." What made this Sabbath a "high day"? It was not just an ordinary weekly Sabbath, but a Sabbath that coincided with one of the major festival days of Passover week. In the traditional chronology, this was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Jewish Christian scholar Alfred Edersheim describes the same combination:

> The Sabbath about to open was a "high day" – it was both a Sabbath and the second Paschal Day (Nisan 15) [or the Feast of Unleavened Bread][14]

John 19:31 therefore fits naturally with the traditional chronology. Jesus died on the Preparation Day, Friday, and the following Saturday was both the weekly Sabbath and a major festival day of Passover week. Rather than requiring two Sabbath days separated by Friday, the passage describes a weekly Sabbath that carried additional significance because the two observances coincided.

John also refers to the day of Jesus' crucifixion as "the preparation of the Passover":

> And **it was the preparation of the Passover,** and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!
>
> -John 19:14

Some alternative chronology advocates argue that "the preparation" could refer to the day before an annual festival rather than specifically to the day before the weekly Sabbath. But Mark 15:42 directly defines the Preparation Day as "the day before the sabbath," while John identifies that Preparation Day as occurring during Passover. The most natural understanding is therefore that John is describing the Friday of Passover week.

Even if it could be demonstrated that "preparation" was sometimes used in connection with an annual festival, that would not overturn the chronology established by the other passages. John 19:31

specifically says that the Sabbath immediately following Jesus' death "was an high day." The natural implication is that the weekly Sabbath that year coincided with the festival observance.

Luke 24 provides an additional chronological test that creates an even greater problem for a Wednesday crucifixion. The chapter begins by identifying the day:

> Now upon **the first day of the week**, very early in the morning…
> -Luke 24:1a

The setting is Sunday, the first day of the week. Several verses later, the angels remind the women that Jesus had predicted He would rise on the third day:

> Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, **and the third day rise** again.
> -Luke 24:7

Luke then tells us that on "that same day" two disciples were traveling toward Emmaus:

> **13** And, behold, two of them went **that same day** to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. **14** And they talked together of all these things which had happened. **15** And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.
> -Luke 24:13-15

The context therefore remains Sunday. As Jesus walked with them, one of the two disciples, Cleopas, explained the events that had taken place:

> **17** And he [Jesus] said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? **18** And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him,

> Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? **19** And he said unto them, **What things?** And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: **20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.** **21** 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 24:17-21

This is one of the strongest chronological statements in the Passion accounts. Cleopas refers directly to Jesus being delivered over, condemned, and crucified, and then states that Sunday was "the third day since these things were done."

Under the Jewish practice of inclusive reckoning, a part of a day was counted as a whole day.[15] A Friday crucifixion therefore fits the Gospel language exactly: Friday is the first day, Saturday the second, and Sunday the third. Luke 24 confirms this from two directions. On Sunday morning, the angels recall Jesus' prediction that He would "the third day rise again" (Luke 24:7). Later that same Sunday, Cleopas states that "to day is the third day since these things were done" (Luke 24:21), referring to Jesus being condemned and crucified. Luke therefore identifies Sunday as the third day after the crucifixion and as the day on which Jesus was to rise, directly contradicting any possibility of a Saturday resurrection.

The same chronological sequence that identifies Sunday as the third day also rules out a Wednesday crucifixion. Counting inclusively, as the Jews did, Wednesday would be the first day, Thursday the second, Friday the third, Saturday the fourth, and Sunday the fifth. A Saturday resurrection would therefore fall on the fourth day from a Wednesday crucifixion, not the third, while Cleopas' statement on Sunday would fall on the fifth day rather than "the third day since" the crucifixion. Luke's chronology instead fits a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection exactly.

We will examine inclusive reckoning in much greater detail later in

this study. For now, the important point is that the Preparation Day passages and Luke 24 do more than simply support the traditional chronology. Together they require it. The Gospels place Jesus' death on the Preparation Day immediately before the weekly Sabbath, while Luke identifies Sunday as "the third day since" the crucifixion and as the day Jesus rose. The resulting sequence is Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, leaving no room for either a Wednesday crucifixion or a Saturday resurrection.

This brings us back to the specific point of this subsection. Even if the first occurrence of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 were understood as referring to multiple Sabbaths, the evidence does not require them to have occurred on separate days. The weekly Sabbath immediately following Jesus' crucifixion was also a "high day," allowing the festival observance and the weekly Sabbath to have coincided on the same Saturday rather than occurring on different days as Armstrong proposed.

A final question concerns Armstrong's identification of the Feast of Unleavened Bread as one of the "Sabbaths" in Matthew 28:1. His chronology depends on that identification, because he needs one festival Sabbath and one weekly Sabbath occurring on separate days. The traditional chronology does not. We do believe that the Feast of Unleavened Bread coincided with the weekly Sabbath in the year Jesus was crucified, but we do not need Matthew's first *sabbaton* to refer to both observances. This explanation is offered only as an alternative if someone insists that the plural form must refer to more than one Sabbath.

So can a festival day be described using Sabbath terminology? Scripture does use Sabbath-related terminology in connection with certain other annual festival observances in the Old Testament, so it is at least conceivable that the Feast of Unleavened Bread could also be described in Sabbath terms.[16]

However, that possibility alone does not show that Matthew is using *sabbaton* that way in Matthew 28:1, much less that he is referring to two Sabbaths occurring on separate days. As shown earlier, the plural form of *sabbaton* is commonly used even when only one Sabbath

day is in view, so the plural form itself proves nothing about the number of days involved. And even if Matthew did intend more than one Sabbath observance, the Gospel chronology still places the Preparation Day immediately before the weekly Sabbath and Sunday as the third day, leaving no room for Armstrong's proposed sequence of separate Sabbaths with an intervening day.

Armstrong's two-Sabbath chronology therefore fails to establish the sequence it requires. More importantly, the larger Gospel chronology rules out the additional days required by his Wednesday-to-Saturday scheme. We will now look more deeply at that chronology across all four Gospel accounts.

The Biblical Accounts Don't Allow for Multiple Sabbaths With a Day in Between

When the passages dealing with the period between Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection are examined together, **the sequence covers one full day and portions of two others. Under Jewish inclusive reckoning, this constitutes three days.** If the Gospel accounts consistently move from the Preparation Day to the Sabbath and then directly to the first day of the week, Armstrong's proposed additional day between two Sabbaths cannot fit the chronology. We will examine each Gospel account individually.

The Gospel of Mark

As we read through the following chronological passages, notice the sequence Mark presents:

> 42 And now when the even was come, because **it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath**, 43 Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. 44 **And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while**

> **dead.** [45] And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. [46] And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre. [47] And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.
> -Mark 15:42-47

Jesus died and was buried on "the preparation," which Mark specifically defines as "the day before the sabbath." Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead, and Joseph of Arimathaea then took His body and buried Him before the approaching Sabbath. Chapter 15 ends at this point. Chapter 16 begins:

> [1] **And when the sabbath was past**, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. [2] **And very early in the morning the first day of the week**, they came unto the sepulchre **at the rising of the sun.**
> -Mark 16:1-2

Thus, Mark's chronology is:

1. The Preparation Day – the day Jesus was put to death and buried (Nisan 14)
2. The weekly Sabbath (Nisan 15)
3. The first day of the week (Nisan 16)

The sequence is straightforward. There is no additional day inserted between the Preparation Day and the Sabbath. Mark identifies the Preparation Day as the day immediately before the Sabbath, and after that Sabbath had passed, the women came to the tomb on the first day of the week. The sequence corresponds directly to Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew presents the same basic chronology:

> 57 **When the even was come** [Which evening? We find out later in this passage that this is the evening of the preparation, or Friday], there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: 58 He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. 59 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. 61 And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. 62 **Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation**, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, 63 Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. 64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, 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. 65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. 66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.
>
> -Matthew 27:57-66

Jesus was buried on the Preparation Day. Matthew then tells us that "the next day, that followed the day of the preparation," the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate and requested that the tomb be secured, after which the stone was sealed and a guard was posted. This ends Chapter 27. Chapter 28 then immediately begins:

> **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.
>
> -Matthew 28:1

Matthew's chronology is therefore:

1. The Preparation Day – Nisan 14
2. "The next day, that followed the day of the preparation" – Nisan 15
3. "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week" – Nisan 16

Once again, the sequence leaves no room for a separate festival Sabbath, an intervening ordinary day, and then another weekly Sabbath. The day following the Preparation Day is immediately followed in Matthew's chronology by the end of the Sabbath and the dawning of the first day of the week.

The Gospel of Luke

Luke is even more explicit:

> **50** And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just: **51** (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. **52** This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. **53** 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. **54** **And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.** **55** And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. **56** **And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day** according to the commandment.
>
> -Luke 23:50-56

Luke states that Jesus was buried on the Preparation Day and that "the sabbath drew on." The Sabbath therefore immediately followed the day on which Jesus died. The women then rested on that Sabbath according to the commandment. Chapter 23 ends, and Chapter 24 begins:

> [1] **Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning**, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. [2] And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. [3] And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.
>
> -Luke 24:1-3

Luke's chronology is therefore the same as the other Gospel accounts:

1. "That day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on" – Nisan 14
2. "They … rested the sabbath day" – Nisan 15
3. "Now upon the first day of the week" – Nisan 16

Like Mark and Matthew, Luke leaves no room for additional days between the crucifixion and the weekly Sabbath. He specifically states that the Sabbath was already beginning as the Preparation Day ended, and then moves directly from that Sabbath to the first day of the week.

The Gospel of John

John also gives the same basic chronology:

> [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. [32] Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. [33] But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: [34] But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. [35] And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. [36] For these things were done, that the scripture should be

> fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. 37 And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced. 38 And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. 39 And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. 40 Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. 41 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. 42 **There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day**; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.
>
> -John 19:31-42

John identifies the day of the crucifixion as the Preparation Day and explains why the bodies had to be removed before the approaching Sabbath. That Sabbath was also a "high day." Jesus was therefore buried before it began. Chapter 19 ends, and Chapter 20 begins:

> **The first day of the week** cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.
>
> -John 20:1

Again, we find the exact same time sequence:

1. "It was the preparation" – Nisan 14
2. "For that sabbath day was an high day" – Nisan 15
3. "The first day of the week" – Nisan 16

All four Gospel accounts present the same basic sequence: the Preparation Day, the Sabbath, and the first day of the week. None

describes a festival Sabbath followed by an ordinary intervening day and then a second weekly Sabbath.

Mark and Luke make the sequence especially explicit. Mark calls the Preparation Day "the day before the sabbath" (Mark 15:42), while Luke says, "that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on" (Luke 23:54). In both accounts, that Sabbath is followed directly by the first day of the week. Matthew and John present the same order: Preparation Day, Sabbath, first day of the week. Matthew moves from "the next day, that followed the day of the preparation" to "the end of the sabbath" and the first day of the week, while John identifies the day of Jesus' death as the Preparation Day, the following Sabbath as a "high day," and the next recorded day as the first day of the week.

The four Gospel accounts therefore leave no room for the additional days required by a Wednesday crucifixion. Luke 24:21 provides further confirmation by identifying Sunday as "the third day since" Jesus had been condemned and crucified. The claim that Matthew 28:1 requires two separate Sabbaths on different days therefore cannot be reconciled with the chronology supplied throughout the Gospel accounts.

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CHAPTER 5

OBJECTION #2: "THE KING JAMES WORDING OF MATTHEW 28:1 INDICATES THAT JESUS ROSE ON SATURDAY RATHER THAN SUNDAY."

Although the Gospel chronology examined throughout this study has already given us multiple clear reasons to conclude that Jesus rose on Sunday, one particular argument for a Saturday resurrection still deserves separate attention. Some Sabbatarian writers appeal to the King James Version's wording of Matthew 28:1, "*in the end of* the sabbath," and argue that the women came to the tomb while the weekly Sabbath was still continuing. Herbert W. Armstrong's 1972 booklet did not make this particular argument,[1] but it has been advanced by later Sabbatarians.

Norbert Link, a Sabbatarian writer within the larger Armstrong tradition, develops this interpretation in detail. He places the visit described in Matthew 28:1 shortly before sunset of the Saturday Sabbath and then connects that visit with the discovery of the empty tomb and the angelic announcement that Jesus had risen. From this combination, he concludes that Jesus must already have risen earlier on that Sabbath day.[2] The passage reads:

> **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.

-Matthew 28:1

The argument therefore involves two separate claims that must not be confused. First, Matthew 28:1 must be understood as placing the women at the tomb before the Sabbath ended. Second, the discovery of the empty tomb and the announcement of Jesus' resurrection must be understood as belonging to that same visit. A late-Saturday visit by itself would tell us only when the women came to the tomb; it would not tell us that Jesus had already risen.

Link's larger reconstruction involves several separate visits to the tomb. He places Matthew 28:1 shortly before sunset Saturday, while the Sabbath was still continuing. He then places the visits described in John 20:1 and Luke 24:1 after sunset that evening, when the Sabbath had ended and the first day of the week had already begun according to Jewish reckoning. Finally, he understands Mark 16:2 as describing another visit later that same first day of the week, at sunrise Sunday morning.[3]

To support his interpretation of Matthew 28:1, Link appeals to the respected Greek scholar A.T. Robertson. Robertson also understood this verse as describing a visit shortly before the Sabbath ended, but his position differs from Link's in a crucial way. Robertson was not arguing for a Saturday resurrection. He separated the visit mentioned in Matthew 28:1 from the events that follow, understanding verse 1 as a late-Saturday visit but the earthquake and empty-tomb events beginning in verse 2 as belonging to the women's supposed "next visit" before sunrise Sunday.[4] In other words, in his reconstruction, Jesus had not yet risen at the time of the "first visit" in verse 1. Robertson elsewhere states directly that Jesus was buried Friday afternoon and had risen Sunday morning.[5]

Robertson's interpretation demonstrates why these two parts of the argument must be kept separate. Even if Matthew 28:1 were understood as describing a late-Saturday visit, that alone would do nothing to establish that Jesus had already risen. To use Matthew 28:1 as evidence for a Saturday resurrection, Link must establish both that

the women came before the Sabbath ended *and* that the resurrection events that follow belong to that same visit.

Consequently, we need to answer two separate questions. Does the Greek wording of Matthew 28:1 actually place the women at the tomb before the Sabbath ended? And even if this separate late-Saturday visit were granted for the sake of argument, does Matthew establish that Jesus had already risen by that time? The first question concerns the meaning of the Greek expression *opse sabbatōn*. The second concerns the sequence of events Matthew records.

Matthew 28:1 and the Greek Word *Opse*

The first question concerns the Greek expression translated by the King James Version as "in the end of the sabbath." Matthew begins the verse with the words *opse de sabbatōn*. Link argues that *opse* means "late" or "late in the evening" and points to passages such as Mark 11:19 and Mark 13:35, where the word does refer to evening.[6] The problem with this argument is that a word does not have to carry exactly the same meaning in every grammatical context.

In Matthew 28:1, however, *opse* is followed by *sabbatōn*, which is in what Greek grammar calls the genitive case. In this construction, *opse* is used in the sense of "after" something. This particular usage is addressed directly in the standard Greek lexicon commonly known as BDAG. Under *opse*, BDAG gives a distinct use of the word referring to a time after something else and specifically cites Matthew 28:1, giving *opse sabbatōn* the meaning "after the Sabbath."[7] The lexicon is not simply listing "after" as one possible meaning of *opse*; it specifically identifies Matthew 28:1 itself as an example of that usage.

Link's examples from Mark therefore do not determine the meaning of *opse* in Matthew 28:1. They show that the word can refer to "late" or "evening" in other contexts, but Matthew uses it here in a different grammatical construction. The issue is not whether *opse* can ever have those meanings, but what *opse sabbatōn* means in this particular passage.

The interpretation of *opse sabbatōn* as "*after* the Sabbath" is also

well established in Greek scholarship. Adam Clarke explains the expression as follows:

> "In the end of the Sabbath" – Οψε δε σαββατων. **"After the end of the week"** – this is the translation given by several eminent critics; and in this way the word οψε is used by the most eminent Greek writers.[8]

Clarke then cites examples from Greek writers such as Thucydides, Plutarch, and Philostratus in which the expression carries the sense of a time following something rather than occurring during it.[9] His point is not that *opse* can never refer to evening, but that Greek usage also supports the meaning "after" when *opse* is used in a construction like the one in Matthew 28:1.

Ironically, Link's interpretation was also rejected by Samuele Bacchiocchi, a prominent Seventh-day Adventist scholar and strong defender of seventh-day Sabbath observance. In his study *The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection*, Bacchiocchi examined the same interpretation of Matthew 28:1 later advanced by Link – that *opse sabbatō*n places the women at the tomb before the Sabbath had ended and therefore supports a Saturday resurrection – and rejected it. He pointed to Greek usage in which *opse* with a genitive noun carries the sense of "after," and he cited Bauer's Greek lexicon in support of understanding Matthew 28:1 as referring to the time *after* the Sabbath.[10] This is especially significant because Bacchiocchi rejected the same interpretation later advanced by Link, despite coming from a Sabbatarian tradition that strongly defended Saturday Sabbath observance.

Consequently, the interpretation of *opse sabbatōn* as "after the Sabbath" is not an obscure or unusual reading. It is the standard understanding reflected in major Greek lexicons and in the wording of many modern English translations of Matthew 28:1. The King James Version's phrase "in the end of the sabbath" can sound to a modern reader as though the Sabbath were still continuing, but that is not how the Greek expression is commonly understood. The weight of the

lexical and grammatical evidence supports the sense that the women came after the Sabbath had ended.

Does Matthew Record a Saturday Discovery of the Empty Tomb?

The argument now requires us to turn to a second and separate question. Even if Robertson was correct that Matthew 28:1 describes a visit to the tomb shortly *before* the Sabbath ended, would that actually prove that Jesus had already risen by that time – as Link claims? The short answer is no, since Robertson himself does not draw that conclusion. The key issue is not just when the women came to the tomb, but what had happened by the time of that visit.

Robertson does not believe Jesus had risen by the time of the alleged "first visit" described in verse 1. He places the discovery of the empty tomb and the announcement of the resurrection at a later visit before sunrise Sunday. Link, however, connects those later events with the visit in verse 1 and therefore concludes that Jesus had already risen before the Sabbath ended. Link's Saturday-resurrection argument depends on that connection.

To determine whether Link's conclusion is justified, we need to look closely at what Matthew actually says in verse 1. The verse itself says only that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came "to see the sepulchre." It does not say that they found the tomb empty or learned that Jesus had risen. The announcement of the resurrection comes afterward in verses 5-7:

> **5** And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. **6** He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. **7** And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.
>
> -Matthew 28:5-7

Robertson specifically separates these later events from the visit he places in verse 1. Although he understands Matthew 28:1 as describing a visit shortly before the Sabbath ended, he places the earthquake, the discovery of the empty tomb, and the angelic announcement at the women's supposed "next visit" before sunrise Sunday.[11] Under Robertson's interpretation, then, Matthew 28:1 may describe a separate late-Saturday visit, but that tells us only when the women came to the tomb – it tells us nothing about when Jesus rose. Taking verse 1 as a separate Saturday visit therefore does nothing to establish the Sabbatarian claim that Jesus had already risen before the Sabbath ended.

On the other hand, Link must go beyond simply placing the visit in verse 1 before the Sabbath ended. To reach a Saturday-resurrection conclusion, he connects that visit with the discovery of the empty tomb and the angelic announcement that follow. Only by treating these events as part of the same late-Saturday visit can he argue that Jesus had already risen before the Sabbath ended.[12] In other words, the Saturday-resurrection conclusion does not come from the timing of Matthew 28:1 alone; it depends on linking verse 1 with the resurrection events that follow.

This brings us back to the original Sabbatarian argument from the King James wording, "in the end of the sabbath." That argument requires two separate conclusions: first, that Matthew 28:1 places the women at the tomb while the Sabbath was still continuing, and second, that Jesus had already risen by the time of that visit. The previous section showed that the Greek expression *opse sabbatōn* is commonly understood to mean "after the Sabbath," so the first conclusion is not required by the Greek wording. But even if a late-Saturday visit were granted for the sake of argument, the second conclusion still would not follow. Matthew 28:1 itself says only that the women came to the tomb. Unless the discovery of the empty tomb and the announcement of the resurrection are made part of that same visit, the verse tells us nothing about whether Jesus had already risen. The King James wording therefore does not establish a Saturday resurrection, even if a separate visit before the Sabbath ended is allowed.

1. Armstrong, pp. 10-13.
2. Norbert Link, *Jesus Christ – A Great Mystery!*, Church of the Eternal God, 2004, pp. 72-76. (https://www.eternalgod.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Jesus-Christ-a-great-mystery-view.pdf - Retrieved 10/8/26)
3. Link, pp. 74-76.
4. A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 1, Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1930, pp. 240-241.
5. Ibid., pp. 399-400.
6. Link, p. 73.
7. Walter Bauer, "opse," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 746.
8. Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments: The Text Printed from the Most Correct Copies of the Present Authorized Version, Including the Marginal Readings and Parallel Texts, with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, Vol. 5, New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1832, Commentary on Matthew 28:1.
9. Ibid.
10. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection*, Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2001, pp. 32-38.
11. Robertson, Vol. 1, pp. 240-241.
12. Link, p. 72.

CHAPTER 6

OBJECTION #3: "THE WOMEN BOUGHT SPICES AFTER THE SABBATH (MARK 16:1) AND PREPARED SPICES BEFORE THEY RESTED ON THE SABBATH (LUKE 23:55-56)."

Another objection raised against the traditional Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection concerns the spices the women intended to use for Jesus' body. Mark 16:1 says that the women bought spices *after* the Sabbath had passed, while Luke 23:55-56 says that they prepared spices and ointments *before* resting on the Sabbath. Advocates of the Wednesday-crucifixion chronology argue that these statements cannot refer to the same weekly Sabbath. They therefore conclude that the two passages require two separate Sabbaths with an ordinary working day between them.

Some Sabbatarian writers try to strengthen this argument by claiming that, if the crucifixion occurred on Friday, the women could not have purchased the spices during the period between the end of the weekly Sabbath at sunset Saturday evening and their arrival at the tomb around sunrise Sunday morning. They argue that merchants would not have been open during those nighttime hours, leaving no opportunity for the women to purchase the spices after the weekly Sabbath had ended. We will examine that claim separately later in this chapter.

To understand this objection, it is helpful to recall how Armstrong arranges the days in his proposed chronology. He placed Jesus' cruci-

fixion and burial on Wednesday. He identified the following day, Thursday, as the first day of Unleavened Bread and treated it as an annual festival Sabbath. Friday was then an ordinary working day between that festival Sabbath and the regular weekly Sabbath on Saturday. Under Armstrong's reconstruction, the women purchased the spices on Friday after the Thursday festival Sabbath, satisfying Mark 16:1, and then prepared them before resting on the regular Saturday Sabbath, satisfying Luke 23:55-56. Jesus remained in the tomb through Saturday and rose late that day, before the women first came to the tomb Sunday morning.[1]

Armstrong did not present this as just one possible way to reconcile the passages. He argued that there was "only one possible explanation" for the sequence described by Mark and Luke.[2] However, the real question is whether those passages actually require the two-Sabbath chronology he proposed.

To determine whether Armstrong's conclusion is required, we need to look directly at the wording of the two passages. Mark 16:1 reads:

> And when the **sabbath was past,** Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had **bought sweet spices,** that they might come and anoint him.
>
> -Mark 16:1

Luke records:

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

At first glance, these two statements can appear difficult to reconcile. Luke says that the women prepared spices before resting on the Sabbath, while Mark speaks of the women buying spices after the Sabbath had passed. But the two-Sabbath chronology is not the only

way to account for these statements. There are at least two reasonable ways to reconcile Mark and Luke while understanding both passages as referring to the same weekly Sabbath. Neither requires us to abandon the traditional chronology already strongly supported by the biblical evidence examined throughout the preceding chapters. The first possibility comes from the wording of Mark 16:1 itself.

Does Mark 16:1 Require the Spices to Have Been Purchased After the Sabbath?

The first point concerns the King James Version's wording of Mark 16:1. It does not say that the women "bought" the spices after the Sabbath. It says they "had bought" them. In normal English, "had bought" can describe an action that had already taken place before the later event being described. Under this reading, the women could have purchased the spices before the Sabbath and then waited until the Sabbath was over before going to the tomb.

Even so, we should not make more of the King James wording than the Greek itself allows. The Greek word translated "had bought" can also be translated simply as "bought," so the Greek by itself does not prove that the purchase happened earlier. At the same time, "had bought" remains a legitimate way to understand the sentence because the surrounding context can indicate that the purchase had already taken place.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown address this exact issue in their commentary on Mark 16:1. They acknowledge that the Greek word itself is "bought," but state that the King James translators were "perhaps right" to render it "had bought" because Luke 23:56 indicates that the women had already obtained and prepared spices before the Sabbath began.[3] Bengel reaches the same conclusion from Luke 23:56. Since Luke says the women prepared the spices before the Sabbath, Bengel reasons that they must have already purchased them by that time. The Sabbath then came between that spice preparation and their later trip to the tomb.[4]

This explanation also makes good practical sense. According to

the traditional chronology, Jesus was crucified at about 9:00 Friday morning (Mark 15:25) and died at about 3:00 that afternoon (Mark 15:33-37), while the Sabbath was still approaching (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54). The women potentially had as much as nine hours between the crucifixion and the beginning of the Sabbath to obtain the spices, giving them a substantial window of time for the purchase. Once Jesus had been crucified, they would have known that His body would need to be properly anointed, and Luke tells us that they actually prepared spices before the Sabbath began (Luke 23:55-56). Nothing about the traditional chronology makes a Friday purchase difficult to imagine. They could have obtained the needed spices sometime during that large window and prepared them before sunset. Scripture does not tell us exactly when the purchase was made, but it gives us no basis for claiming that there was insufficient time for it to occur.

Under this interpretation, Armstrong's argument breaks down at its starting point. Mark 16:1 says that "when the sabbath was past," the women "had bought" spices. If "had bought" refers to a purchase that had already taken place, then the phrase "when the sabbath was past" does not have to tell us when the spices were purchased. Under the traditional chronology, the women could have purchased and prepared the spices on Friday before the Sabbath began, rested during the Sabbath, and then gone to the tomb after the Sabbath had ended. In that case, Mark 16:1 would be describing the time when they went to the tomb with spices they had already obtained, not requiring a purchase after the Sabbath. Mark and Luke would then fit together naturally without the need for two different Sabbaths or an intervening Friday workday.

A Second Possibility: Additional Spices Purchased After the Sabbath

The explanation just given, however, is not the only way Mark and Luke can be reconciled. Even if we understand Mark 16:1 to mean that the women actually purchased spices after the weekly Sabbath had

ended, there is still no contradiction with Luke's statement that spices had already been prepared before the Sabbath.

Luke 23:55-56 tells us that the women prepared spices and ointments before resting on the Sabbath, but it does not say that these were all the spices they would eventually take to the tomb or that they obtained no additional spices later. In the same way, Mark 16:1 tells us that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices after the Sabbath had passed, but Mark does not say that they had no spices beforehand or that this was their first and only purchase.

The two passages can describe two separate occasions involving the spices without any conflict between them. The women could have obtained and prepared one supply before the Sabbath, exactly as Luke records, and then purchased additional spices after the Sabbath had ended, as Mark can be understood to record. Scripture does not tell us why they may have obtained additional spices, and it does not need to. They may have needed a larger quantity or a different kind of spice, but neither Gospel limits them to a single purchase or a single supply.

A.T. Robertson understands the passages in essentially this way. In his comments on Mark 16:1, he notes that the women had already prepared spices before the Sabbath according to Luke 23:56 and then understands Mark as describing an additional purchase after the Sabbath had ended. Robertson describes this as the women having "secured a fresh supply."[5] His explanation allows both statements to stand exactly as written: Luke records spices prepared before the Sabbath, while Mark records an additional supply obtained afterward.

This gives us a second straightforward way to reconcile the passages without introducing two different Sabbaths. Luke can describe spices that were prepared before the weekly Sabbath began, while Mark 16:1 can describe additional spices purchased after that same Sabbath had ended. The two statements do not conflict unless we assume that there could have been only one purchase or one supply of spices. The remaining objection to this explanation is the claim that the women could not actually have purchased additional

spices after the Sabbath because merchants would not have been open. That claim requires separate examination.

Could the Women Have Purchased Spices After the Sabbath?

Some Sabbatarian writers attempt to rule out this second explanation on practical grounds, arguing that the women could not have purchased additional spices after the weekly Sabbath ended because merchants would not have been open during the nighttime hours before their Sunday-morning visit to the tomb. John Plunkett, a writer from the same Sabbatarian Church of God tradition associated with Armstrong's alternative chronology, makes this argument explicitly in his Bible study *The Sabbath Day*. After discussing Mark 16:1, he asks, "Did the stores open on a Saturday evening after the Sabbath Day was over?" and answers emphatically, "No!" He then uses that claim to place the purchase on Friday between a Thursday festival Sabbath and the regular Saturday Sabbath.[6]

The problem is that this conclusion is asserted rather than demonstrated. Scripture gives us no information about the operating hours of first-century Jerusalem merchants that would allow us to conclusively rule out a spice purchase after the Sabbath ended. Mark certainly gives no indication that such a purchase would have been impossible. Nor do we need to prove that every merchant in Jerusalem was open after sunset. The argument being made is that the women could not have obtained spices during that period, and that stronger claim requires actual evidence.

To the contrary, there are practical reasons why merchants selling burial spices may have been available immediately after the Sabbath. This was Passover week in Jerusalem, and crucifixions had just taken place. Merchants who sold products needed for preparing the dead would have had good reason to expect customers once the Sabbath restrictions ended. It is therefore entirely plausible, if not expected, that some merchants reopened after sunset or otherwise kept unusual hours during such an exceptional period.

We should also be careful about assuming that ordinary modern business hours tell us how merchants operated in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago. Even today, normal business hours often change around holidays and special occasions, with stores opening earlier, staying open later, or operating at times they ordinarily would not because of increased demand. Black Friday is an obvious modern example. There is no reason to assume that merchants in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago must have followed ordinary business hours during Passover week, especially when recent crucifixions could have created an immediate demand for burial supplies.

A.T. Robertson, in fact, understands Mark 16:1 as describing exactly such a purchase. After noting that the women had already prepared spices before the Sabbath according to Luke 23:56, he explains that after the Sabbath ended they "secured a fresh supply" and specifically states that they "could buy them after sundown."[7] Robertson therefore sees no difficulty in understanding Mark as referring to an additional purchase after the weekly Sabbath had ended.

We may not know exactly when the women made the purchase, which merchant supplied the spices, or every circumstance surrounding the transaction, but none of those details is necessary to answer the objection. The point is that the claim that merchants could not have sold spices after the Sabbath has not been established. It is not reasonable to reconstruct the business hours of Jerusalem merchants two thousand years later and then use that assumption to make an entire two-Sabbath chronology necessary. The available evidence simply does not justify such a conclusion.

Ultimately, Armstrong's argument depends on the claim that Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:55-56 require two separate Sabbaths with a working day between them. But as we have seen, there are reasonable ways to reconcile these passages within the traditional Friday-to-Sunday chronology. Whether the women purchased all their spices before the Sabbath or obtained an additional supply afterward, neither explanation requires the two-Sabbath arrangement Armstrong proposed. His claim that this arrangement is the "only one possible explanation" therefore cannot be sustained.

1. Armstrong, p. 13.
2. Ibid.
3. Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton, 1871, Commentary on Mark 16:1.
4. Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. A.R. Fausset, 5 vols., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1858, Commentary on Mark 16:1.
5. Robertson, Vol. 1, Commentary on Mark 16:1.
6. John Plunkett, *Bible Study: The Sabbath Day*, Building Bridges, The Church of God Canada, 2012, pp. 47-48. (https://tcog.ca/Articles/sabbath.pdf - Retrieved 10/8/26)
7. Robertson, Vol. 1, Commentary on Mark 16:1.

CHAPTER 7

OBJECTION #4: "A FRIDAY CRUCIFIXION WITH A SUNDAY RESURRECTION WOULD VIOLATE THE 'THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS' SIGN OF JONAH IN MATTHEW 12:40."

The final major objection to the traditional Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection comes from Jesus' statement concerning the "sign of Jonah" in Matthew 12:40. Advocates of a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion argue that the expression "three days and three nights" requires Jesus to have been in the heart of the earth for three full days and three full nights, or at the very least for some portion of three separate days and three separate nights. Since the traditional chronology places Jesus' death and burial on Friday afternoon and His resurrection by early Sunday morning, it includes parts of three calendar days but only two intervening nights. On this basis, proponents of the alternative chronologies argue that a Friday crucifixion cannot satisfy Jesus' prediction.

Jesus said:

> For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
>
> -Matthew 12:40

Herbert W. Armstrong made this passage one of the central argu-

ments for his Wednesday-crucifixion chronology. He interpreted Jesus' words to mean that exactly seventy-two hours had to pass between His burial and resurrection – three complete twenty-four-hour periods.[1] Working backward from what he believed was a late-Saturday resurrection, Armstrong consequently placed Jesus' burial shortly before sunset on Wednesday.

If "three days and three nights" is understood to require exactly seventy-two elapsed hours, Armstrong's conclusion may initially appear reasonable. But that interpretation cannot be established by isolating the English wording of Matthew 12:40 from the many other passages of Scripture that describe the timing of Jesus' resurrection. The question is how this kind of expression was actually used and understood in Scripture. When the biblical evidence is examined, Jesus' resurrection is repeatedly described as occurring **"on the third day," "after three days,"** and **"in three days."** Since Scripture uses these different expressions to describe the same period of time, they must be understood together rather than interpreting all of them through a rigid seventy-two-hour reading of Matthew 12:40.

This is especially important because Matthew 12:40 is the only passage concerning Jesus' resurrection that uses the particular expression "three days and three nights." Since Scripture is its own best interpreter, this one expression must be understood in light of the many other passages that describe the same event. The New Testament repeatedly states that His resurrection occurred on the third day, while both the Old and New Testaments show that expressions involving days and nights were reckoned inclusively. When this broader biblical testimony is considered, Scripture itself conclusively resolves the question for us.

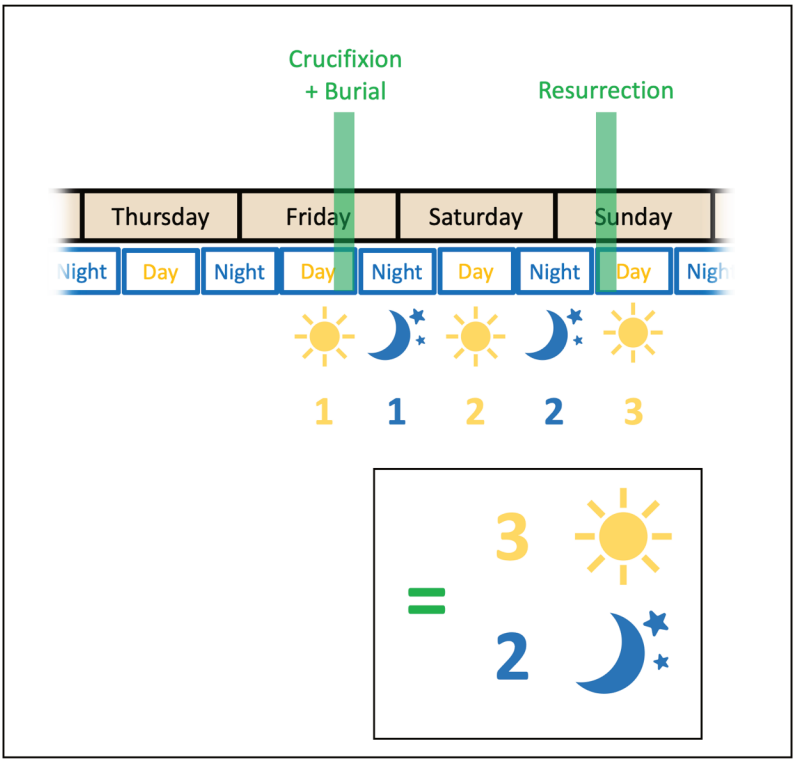
How Inclusive Reckoning Answers the "Three Days and Three Nights" Objection

To properly evaluate this objection, we first need to understand how days were commonly reckoned in Jewish usage, because that directly affects how the phrase "three days and three nights" should be under-

stood. In what is commonly called **inclusive reckoning**, even a portion of a calendar day could be counted as a whole day. The *Jewish Encyclopedia*, for example, explains that in Jewish communal life "part of a day is at times reckoned as one day."[2] This means that an event beginning late on one calendar day and ending early on the next could be counted as two days even though less than twenty-four hours had actually passed. For example, something beginning at 6:00 PM on Friday and ending at 6:00 AM on Saturday would span only twelve hours, but it would touch both Friday and Saturday and could therefore be reckoned as two days.

Applied to the traditional Passion Week chronology, Friday is the first day, Saturday is the second day, and Sunday is the third day. Jesus did not have to remain in the tomb for three complete twenty-four-hour periods for His resurrection on Sunday to be described as occurring "on the third day." This was the established Jewish method of inclusive reckoning, in which even part of a calendar day could be counted as a day. More importantly, Scripture itself repeatedly uses expressions of time in exactly this way, demonstrating that this method of reckoning is firmly established in the biblical text and is not just a matter of historical custom.

The objection, however, is often taken one step further. Advocates of an alternative chronology may acknowledge that part of a day can be counted as a day, but further argue that Matthew 12:40 specifically mentions both "days" and "nights." Advocates of the alternative chronology point out that, under the traditional view, Jesus was buried before sunset on Friday, spent Friday night and Saturday in the tomb, remained there through Saturday night, and had risen by Sunday morning. This gives portions of three calendar days – Friday, Saturday, and Sunday – but only two intervening nights. They therefore argue that the expression "three days and three nights" must require a third night and cannot be satisfied by inclusive reckoning.



That conclusion, however, overlooks the way expressions combining days and nights were actually used in biblical reckoning. As the passages we are about to examine demonstrate, "three days and three nights" did not require three complete days and three complete nights, or even portions of three separately counted days and three separately counted nights. Scripture itself shows us how this kind of language was understood.

How the New Testament Reckons the Resurrection Timeline

The strongest place to begin is with the New Testament's own descriptions of the time between Jesus' death and resurrection. Rather than consistently using the expression "three days and three nights,"

Scripture describes the same period in several different ways. When those passages are compared, they show that these expressions were being used interchangeably to describe a period *extending to the third day*.

"On the Third Day"

By far the most common description is that Jesus would rise "the third day" – that is, *on* the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 10:40; 1 Corinthians 15:4). Although the KJV generally renders the expression simply as "the third day," the underlying Greek construction in these passages carries the sense of "on the third day."[3] For example, Jesus told His disciples:

> And they shall kill him, and **the third day** he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.
>
> -Matthew 17:23

Jesus was therefore saying that He would rise *on* the third day itself, not *after* three complete days had passed. Paul uses the same Greek construction when he summarizes the Gospel:

> **3** For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; **4** And that he was buried, **and that he rose again the third day** according to the scriptures:
>
> -1 Corinthians 15:3-4

This repeated description is significant. Scripture repeatedly places the resurrection on the third day. Any interpretation of "three days and three nights" in Matthew 12:40 must therefore agree with the New Testament's repeated description of the resurrection as occurring on the third day.

"In Three Days"

The New Testament also describes Jesus' resurrection as occurring "in three days." In John 2:19, Jesus said:

> Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and **in three days** I will raise it up.
>
> -John 2:19

John then explains exactly what Jesus meant:

> **21** But he spake of the temple of his body. **22** When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.
>
> -John 2:21-22

Jesus described His resurrection as occurring "in three days," while numerous other passages say it would occur "the third day." Again, these statements concern the same death and resurrection and cannot reasonably be treated as competing mathematical formulas.

"After Three Days"

The comparison becomes even more decisive when we examine the expression "after three days." In Mark 8:31, Jesus said:

> 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**.
>
> -Mark 8:31

In modern technical English, "after three days" and "on the third day" would not describe the same point in time. If "after three days" were taken to mean that three complete twenty-four-hour periods had to elapse, the resurrection could not occur until after seventy-two hours had passed – placing it on the fourth day. By contrast, "on the

third day" places the resurrection sometime during the third day itself. Under that kind of precise modern reckoning, the two expressions cannot mean the same thing.

The parallel Gospel accounts allow us to see directly whether the biblical writers actually understood these two expressions as referring to different points in time. Mark 8:31, Matthew 16:21, and Luke 9:22 all record the same prediction made by Jesus on the same occasion in His ministry, yet they express the timing slightly differently. Mark records Jesus as saying that He would rise "*after* three days," while Matthew says He would be "raised again the third day," and Luke likewise says He would be "raised the third day." **Because these are parallel accounts of the same statement by Jesus, the comparison shows that the Gospel writers used "after three days" and "the third day" equivalently to describe the same resurrection timing.**

Matthew 27 provides an even more conclusive example because both expressions appear within the same immediate discussion. After Jesus had been buried, the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate and said:

> **63** Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, **After three days** I will rise again. **64** Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure **until the third day**, 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.
>
> -Matthew 27:63-64

Notice how naturally the two expressions are used together in the same timing context. In Verse 63, the chief priests and Pharisees recall Jesus' prediction as "*After* three days I will rise again." Yet in the very next verse, when asking Pilate how long the tomb should be secured, they request that it be guarded only "*until* the third day." If "after three days" meant that Jesus could not rise until three complete twenty-four-hour periods had passed, then securing the tomb only until the third day would not adequately address the very prediction they were concerned about. **Their own request shows that "after**

three days" and "the third day" were understood as referring to the same period.

This gives us direct biblical evidence for how these expressions were understood. The parallel Gospel accounts use "after three days" and "the third day" for the same prediction made by Jesus, while Matthew 27 uses both expressions within two consecutive verses to describe the same expected resurrection timing. Scripture itself therefore demonstrates that these phrases were not being used as technically distinct measurements of elapsed time in the way a modern reader might understand them. In the biblical context, "in three days," "after three days," and "the third day" were equivalent expressions describing the same period – one extending to the third day.

How the Old Testament Confirms the Traditional Chronology

The New Testament has already shown that the expressions "in three days," "after three days," and "on the third day" were used equivalently to describe the same resurrection timing. The Old Testament provides further confirmation that this was part of the broader biblical way of reckoning time. Its examples show that a stated number of days did not require each day to consist of a complete twenty-four-hour period and, even more importantly for Matthew 12:40, that expressions specifically mentioning both days and nights were still understood according to inclusive reckoning. This directly supports the traditional Friday-to-Sunday chronology and soundly refutes the claim that "three days and three nights" must require seventy-two complete hours or portions of three separately counted days and three separately counted nights.

We see this first in Genesis 42:17-18. Joseph placed his brothers in custody for "three days," yet on "the third day" he spoke to them, kept Simeon behind, and allowed the others to return to Canaan. Since their confinement ended during the third day itself, seventy-two hours had not passed, nor had three complete days and three complete nights elapsed. Yet Scripture still describes the period as "three days"

because the portions of the first and third days were included in the reckoning. This is the same method of counting time reflected in the New Testament descriptions of Jesus' resurrection.

The same principle appears in 1 Kings 20:29. Israel and Syria are said to have remained encamped opposite one another for "seven days," yet the battle began "in the seventh day." If the expression "seven days" required seven complete twenty-four-hour periods to pass, the battle could not have begun until the eighth day. Instead, Scripture counts the seventh day itself as part of the stated seven-day period. Once again, the biblical method of reckoning time does not require every numbered day to be completed in full before the period can be described by that number.

Second Chronicles 10:5, 12 gives us an even closer parallel to the resurrection language of the New Testament. Rehoboam told the people, "Come again unto me *after* three days," yet when they returned "*on* the third day," Scripture specifically says they came back "as the king bade." The writer therefore treats "after three days" and "on the third day" as equivalent descriptions of the same period. This is the same pattern we have already seen in the Gospel accounts, where Mark says Jesus would rise "after three days," while Matthew and Luke describe the same prediction as occurring on "the third day." Both Testaments use the expressions in the same way.

The next two examples address the objection even more directly because they use expressions that specifically mention both days and nights. Advocates of an alternative chronology may acknowledge that "three days" can be reckoned inclusively, but argue that the addition of "and three nights" in Matthew 12:40 requires the period to include at least part of three distinct nights. Yet the Old Testament itself demonstrates that the addition of "and three nights" does not create such a requirement.

In 1 Samuel 30:11-13, an Egyptian servant is described as having eaten no bread or drunk any water for "three days and three nights." In the very next verse, he explains that his master had abandoned him when he became sick. The King James Version says this occurred "three days agone [ago]." The underlying Hebrew more literally indi-

cates that he was speaking on the third day since he became sick.[4] [5] The same period is thus described as "three days and three nights" even though the third day itself had not yet been completed. This provides another clear example of biblical inclusive reckoning and shows that the explicit mention of both days and nights did not require three complete days and three complete nights to elapse.

Esther provides an even stronger example because it not only mentions both days and nights, but also tells us exactly when the action connected with that period took place. In Esther 4:16, she instructed the Jews to fast for her for "three days, night or day," after which she would go before the king. If that expression required three complete days and three complete nights, or even portions of three separately counted days and three separately counted nights, she could not have gone before the king until that entire period had elapsed. Yet Esther 5:1 says that she went before the king "*on* the third day."

This directly answers the objection raised from Matthew 12:40. Esther's fast was specifically described in terms of both days and nights, yet the terminating action connected with it took place "on the third day." The explicit reference to nights did not create a requirement for three separately counted nights. The expression was reckoned inclusively and reached its fulfillment on the third day.

In light of this evidence, the Old Testament confirms the same method of inclusive reckoning seen in the Gospel accounts. A stated period of days did not require complete twenty-four-hour periods, "after three days" could refer to the third day itself, and even expressions that explicitly included nights were still counted inclusively, with the stated period extending to and terminating on the third day. Matthew 12:40 must therefore be understood according to this consistent biblical usage, not as requiring seventy-two complete hours or three separately counted nights.

Historical Confirmation of This Jewish Reckoning

The biblical evidence itself is sufficient to establish how these expressions were used. But the strength of this conclusion does not rest on the biblical examples alone. Historical Jewish usage confirms the same method of reckoning and shows that expressions involving days and nights were not understood as requiring every stated day and night to be counted as a complete, separate period.

As noted earlier, John Lightfoot was especially well qualified to address this question because of his extensive study of Jewish and Talmudic writings. In discussing Jesus' statement that He would be "three days and three nights" in the heart of the earth, Lightfoot specifically explains how that expression was understood in Jewish reckoning. He cites a rabbinic principle concerning an *Onah*, a Jewish term used for a period of time involving a day or a night, and applies it to the meaning of "three days and three nights." Lightfoot quotes the tradition as stating, "A day and a night make an Onah, and a part of an Onah is as the whole."[6]

Lightfoot's explanation confirms from historical Jewish usage exactly what the biblical examples have already shown. "Three days and three nights" did not require three complete twenty-four-hour periods or three separately counted nights. Under this method of reckoning, a portion of the stated period could be counted as the whole, allowing the expression to extend to and terminate on the third day. Understanding Matthew 12:40 this way is not a departure from literal interpretation, but an interpretation consistent with both Scripture's own usage and the Jewish method of reckoning behind the expression.

Luke 24 – The Decisive Chronological Anchor

With the biblical and historical meaning of these expressions now established, Luke 24 gives us an even more direct way to test the competing chronologies. Earlier in this study, we examined this passage in connection with the timing of Jesus' resurrection, but it

deserves renewed attention here because it bears directly on the "three days and three nights" objection. Luke identifies the resurrection day as Sunday and then explicitly states that this same Sunday was "the third day" since the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion. This provides a direct chronological anchor against which the Friday, Thursday, and Wednesday crucifixion views can be compared. Luke records:

> **1** Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. **13** And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. **20** And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. **21** 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 24:1, 13, 20-21

Luke lays out the sequence very plainly. Verse 1 identifies the day as "the first day of the week" – Sunday. Verse 13 then tells us that the two disciples traveled to Emmaus "that same day," establishing that their conversation later in the chapter is still taking place on Sunday. In Verse 20, they specifically refer to Jesus being delivered up, condemned to death, and crucified. Then, in Verse 21, while speaking on that same Sunday about those events, they state that "to day is *the third day* since these things were done."

Because the disciples had just identified Jesus' condemnation and crucifixion as the events under discussion, their statement that Sunday was "the third day" must be understood in relation to those events. Counted inclusively, the sequence fits the traditional chronology exactly: Friday is the first day, Saturday is the second day, and Sunday is the third day.

When the alternative chronologies are compared with Luke's statement, the problem becomes immediately apparent. If Jesus had been crucified on Thursday, Sunday would be the fourth calendar day in the

sequence: Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. If He had been crucified on Wednesday, Sunday would be the fifth: Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Neither chronology fits Luke's explicit statement that Sunday was "the third day" since the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion.

Luke 24 consequently places an important restriction on how Matthew 12:40 can be interpreted. Jesus' statement that He would be "three days and three nights" in the heart of the earth must be understood according to the same inclusive reckoning Scripture consistently uses elsewhere, and it cannot be interpreted in a way that conflicts with Luke's explicit identification of Sunday as the third day since His crucifixion. Counted inclusively, Luke's chronology is straightforward: Jesus was crucified and buried on Friday, Saturday was the second day, and He rose on Sunday, the third day.

Therefore, the Sabbatarian objection based on Matthew 12:40 ultimately fails because it imposes a method of counting that Scripture itself does not require. As we have seen, expressions such as "after three days," "on the third day," and even "three days and three nights" were understood according to inclusive reckoning. Luke 24 confirms that Sunday was the third day since Jesus' crucifixion, which fits the traditional Friday-to-Sunday chronology. When we interpret Matthew 12:40 according to the way Scripture itself uses this kind of language, there is no contradiction to resolve and no reason to adopt an alternative chronology.

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1. Armstrong, p. 7.
2. Hirsch and Friedländer, "Day (Hebrew, 'yom')," p. 475.
3. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996, pp. 155-157.
4. Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, Vol. 1, London: S. Holdsworth, 1840, Commentary on 1 Samuel 30:12.
5. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 2: *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996, Commentary on 1 Samuel 30:13.
6. Lightfoot, Vol. 2, pp. 210-211.

CHAPTER 8

FURTHER EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE TRADITIONAL CHRONOLOGY

The preceding chapters have answered the major objections raised against the traditional Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection. But there are additional lines of evidence that place even tighter limits on the possible chronology of the Passion Week. A proposed crucifixion date cannot simply fit one or two isolated passages. It must also agree with the known Jewish calendar, the astronomical data that allow that calendar to be reconstructed, and the prophetic chronology given in Daniel 9. When these additional factors are considered, the possible dates narrow considerably and provide further confirmation of the traditional chronology.

#1 – Astronomical Evidence

One important limitation comes from the Jewish calendar itself. Because the first-century Jewish calendar was based on the lunar cycle, astronomical calculations can be used to reconstruct when the month of Nisan most likely began in the possible years of Jesus' crucifixion. Since the crucifixion took place on Nisan 14, this allows us to determine which days of the week Nisan 14 could reasonably have fallen on

and then compare those dates with the proposed Passion Week chronologies.

Unlike our modern fixed calendar, the first-century Jewish calendar depended upon observation of the moon. Each month began when the new lunar crescent first became visible shortly after sunset.[1] By calculating when that crescent would have been visible from Jerusalem, astronomers can reconstruct the likely dates on which the Jewish months began and, from there, determine the corresponding date and day of the week for Nisan 14.

Colin J. Humphreys and W.G. Waddington performed such calculations using astronomical data to determine the visibility of the lunar crescent from Jerusalem.[2] Humphreys and Waddington examined the years 30-36 AD, the period in which the crucifixion could have occurred, and calculated the corresponding dates of Nisan 14 for each year:

The Dates of Nisan 14 (Passover) in Jerusalem Between 30 and 36 A.D.

Year (A.D.):	New Moon time:		Deduced date of Nisan 14 (Passover):	
30	22 March	19:55	Friday	7 April †
31	12 March	0:25	Tuesday	27 March
32	29 March	22:10	Sunday	13 April *
33	19 March	12:45	Friday	3 April
34	9 March	5:25	Wednesday	24 March
35	28 March	6:10	Tuesday	12 April
36	16 March	17:50	Saturday	31 March

The time of new Moon is given as calculated apparent (sundial) time of conjunction for Jerusalem (± 5 min). The deduced date is the Julian day (from midnight to midnight), starting at 6th hour Nisan 14 and ending at 6th hour Nisan 15.

* Nisan 14 27 A.D. and 32 A.D. could have been on the following day if the new Moon was not detected due to poor atmospheric transparency.

† In each of these cases it is not impossible, but highly improbable, that Nisan 14 would have occurred on the preceding day.

-Colin J. Humphreys and W.G. Waddington, "The Jewish Calendar, A Lunar Eclipse And The Date Of Christ's Crucifixion," in *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.2, 1992, pp. 331-351, and Table 1, p. 335.

The significance of these calculations becomes immediately apparent when they are compared with the alternative chronologies. A Wednesday-crucifixion view requires a year in which Nisan 14 fell on Wednesday, followed by Nisan 15 on Thursday. Of all the years shown in the table, 34 AD is the only one in which Nisan 14 falls on a Wednesday. None of them has Nisan 14 on a Thursday.

This creates a serious limitation for the alternative views. A Wednesday crucifixion is essentially forced toward 34 AD, while a Thursday Nisan 14 does not appear as a possibility in any of the years within this range. The traditional Friday chronology, by contrast, is possible in both 30 AD and 33 AD. Astronomy by itself does not determine which of those two Friday dates is correct, but it sharply

narrows the possible dates and shows that any proposed crucifixion day must match the actual Jewish calendar for that year.

The remaining evidence then becomes decisive in distinguishing between those possibilities. As demonstrated in our companion study on Daniel 9:25 introduced in Chapter 1, eight additional biblical and chronological considerations point to 33 AD rather than 30 or 34 AD.[3] In that year, Nisan 14 fell on Friday, April 3, followed by Nisan 15 on Saturday. The astronomical evidence therefore fits the traditional Friday crucifixion exactly while placing the alternative chronologies under severe chronological difficulty.

The next consideration strengthens this conclusion even further, because the crucifixion year must not only fit the Jewish calendar but also align with the prophetic timeline given in Daniel 9:25.

#2 – The Daniel 9:25 "Countdown to the Messiah"

The astronomical evidence greatly narrows the possible dates of the crucifixion, but another independent chronological test must also be satisfied. Any proposed crucifixion year must fit the prophetic timeline given in Daniel 9:25. This prophecy provides a specific countdown to the coming of the Messiah, and the dates involved must agree with whatever Passion Week chronology is proposed.

In the preceding verse (verse 24), Daniel is told that seventy "weeks," or groups of seven, are determined for Israel and Jerusalem:

> Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.
>
> -Daniel 9:24

These seventy weeks represent seventy groups of seven prophetic years, or 490 prophetic years in total. Daniel 9:25 then focuses on the first sixty-nine weeks and gives both the starting point and the ending point of that prophetic countdown:

> Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto [until] the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.
>
> -Daniel 9:25

The prophecy begins with the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. As demonstrated in our companion study mentioned above, that command was issued by the Persian king Artaxerxes Longimanus in the month of Nisan in 444 BC. The ending point is the appearance of "Messiah the Prince," which we identify as Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. That terminal event can be dated to Monday, Nisan 10, in 33 AD, and falls exactly at the end of the sixty-nine weeks – the 483 prophetic years required by the prophetic timeline. Jesus was then crucified just days later, on Friday of that same week. The sixty-nine weeks of Daniel therefore form a chronological framework that any proposed date for the Passion Week must fit. A crucifixion date cannot simply be selected because it appears to solve one isolated objection. It must also agree with the prophetic timeline leading directly to the Messiah's arrival.

When this requirement is combined with the astronomical evidence already examined, the alternatives become even more restricted. The astronomical calculations allow a Friday Nisan 14 in both 30 AD and 33 AD, but the Daniel 9:25 chronology points decisively to 33 AD. That places the Triumphal Entry on Nisan 10 and the crucifixion on Friday, Nisan 14, of that same week.

The importance of this point is that the Passion Week dates cannot be treated independently from the rest of biblical chronology. The date of the crucifixion must fit the Jewish calendar, the astronomical data, and the prophetic countdown of Daniel 9:25 at the same time. When these independent lines of evidence are brought together, they converge on the same chronology: Jesus entered Jerusalem as Messiah the Prince in 33 AD and was crucified that Friday on Nisan 14. This is the only chronology that accurately aligns with all of the

evidence and provides a consistent dating of the Passion Week of Jesus Christ.

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1. "The Jewish Month," Chabad.org. (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/526874/jewish/The-Jewish-Month.htm - Retrieved 11/10/18)
2. Colin J. Humphreys and W.G. Waddington, "The Jewish Calendar, A Lunar Eclipse and the Date of Christ's Crucifixion," in *Tyndale Bulletin*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1992, Table 1, p. 335.
3. Filipek, *The Daniel 9:25 Prophecy*, Ch. 6.

CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

As we bring this study to a close, the evidence we have examined points consistently to the traditional chronology of a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection. That chronology is not a late development introduced by the Roman Catholic Church or Emperor Constantine. It is reflected in the Gospel accounts themselves and in the earliest surviving Christian testimony, long before Constantine. The historical evidence shows that Christians associated Sunday with Jesus' resurrection from the earliest centuries because they believed that He rose on the first day of the week.

We have also seen that the debate over the Passion Week chronology is closely linked with the larger Sabbath controversy, revealing one of the major doctrinal motivations behind the development and promotion of these alternative timelines. For many Sabbatarian advocates, a Sunday resurrection creates a problem for their broader rejection of Sunday worship because it provides the historical basis for Christians gathering on the first day of the week. Placing the resurrection on Saturday removes that connection and therefore supports their larger Sabbatarian argument.

However, doctrinal objections to Sunday worship cannot be allowed to determine the chronology of the resurrection. The histor-

ical question must be decided by the biblical and historical evidence itself. As we have seen, that evidence places the resurrection on Sunday and shows that Christians began gathering on the first day of the week because Jesus rose on that day. Whether someone believes Christians should observe the Sabbath is a separate theological question and cannot be used to move the resurrection to Saturday.

When the Gospel accounts themselves are examined chronologically, they consistently support the traditional sequence. Jesus was crucified and buried on the Preparation Day, the weekly Sabbath followed, and the women came to the tomb on the first day of the week. Mark identifies the crucifixion day as "the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath" (Mark 15:42), while Luke states that "that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on" (Luke 23:54). The Gospel narratives then move directly from that Sabbath to the first day of the week. There is no need, and no textual basis, for inserting additional days or an additional Sabbath between the crucifixion and resurrection.

The major objections raised against this chronology also fail when examined carefully. The plural form of sabbaton does not establish two separate Sabbaths. The resurrection passages do not place Jesus' resurrection on Saturday. The accounts concerning the women's purchase and preparation of spices do not require a working day between two Sabbaths. And Jesus' statement that He would be "three days and three nights" in the heart of the earth does not require seventy-two complete hours or three separately counted nights.

The "three days and three nights" objection is especially instructive because Scripture itself shows us how this kind of chronological language was used. The same resurrection timing is described as occurring "in three days," "after three days," and "on the third day." The Old Testament uses the same method of inclusive reckoning, even in passages that explicitly mention both days and nights. Luke 24 then directly identifies Sunday as "the third day" since the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion. Matthew 12:40 therefore agrees naturally with a Friday-to-Sunday chronology when it is interpreted

according to the way Scripture itself consistently uses these expressions.

The additional chronological evidence points in the same direction. Astronomical reconstruction of the first-century Jewish calendar sharply limits the possible dates on which Nisan 14 could have fallen, while the prophetic chronology of Daniel 9:25 independently points to 33 AD. Together, these lines of evidence support the traditional chronology. Jesus entered Jerusalem as Messiah the Prince on Monday, Nisan 10, during the Passion Week in 33 AD and was crucified on Friday, Nisan 14, just days later.

For these reasons, there is no sound basis for abandoning the traditional chronology of the Passion Week. Jesus Christ was crucified and buried on Friday, Nisan 14, remained in the tomb through the Sabbath, and rose from the dead on Sunday, the first day of the week. The traditional chronology withstands the objections raised against it because it is the chronology that consistently accounts for the complete body of evidence.

In the end, the chronology must be determined by Scripture rather than by an external theological commitment imposed upon Scripture. When every relevant passage is allowed to speak in its own context and is then compared with the rest of the biblical testimony, the evidence points consistently in the same direction. The traditional Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection do not stand simply because they are traditional. They stand because they are what the evidence itself establishes.

APPENDIX

A RECONCILIATION OF PASSION WEEK CHRONOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES – JOHN VS. THE SYNOPTICS

While examining the chronology of the Passion Week, there is one additional issue that deserves attention. Although it does not directly concern the debate between the traditional chronology and the alternative chronologies examined throughout this study, it involves a longstanding difficulty concerning the timing of the Passover and Jesus' crucifixion and is therefore worth addressing here.

The apparent difficulty involves the chronology presented in John compared with that found in the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Critics have sometimes pointed to these accounts as evidence of a contradiction and have used the issue to challenge the inerrancy of Scripture. If the Gospel accounts give conflicting chronologies of the same events, the question naturally arises as to how they can both be accurate. Because this apparent discrepancy has direct implications for the reliability of Scripture, it deserves careful examination.

The central question concerns whether Jesus was crucified on the day the Passover lambs were killed, Nisan 14, or on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 15. At first glance, a comparison of the relevant Gospel passages can make John's chronology of the final

night and day of Jesus' life appear to conflict with the chronology presented in the Synoptics.

To understand the issue, we first need to recognize that the term "Passover" was not always used in its narrowest technical sense. In broader usage, it could refer to the entire festival period surrounding Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Nisan 14 was the day on which the Passover lambs were killed and prepared. At sunset, Nisan 15 began, marking the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when the prepared lamb was eaten at the Passover meal. The festival continued through the following days, including the Feast of First-fruits, and concluded on Nisan 21, the final day of Unleavened Bread.

Unleavened bread was eaten throughout this festival period, which helps explain why Scripture can also refer to it broadly as "the days of unleavened bread" (Exodus 23:15; Leviticus 23:6; Numbers 28:17; Deuteronomy 16:3). We should therefore be careful not to force the terms "Passover" and "Unleavened Bread" into narrower definitions than Scripture itself uses. Matthew and Mark provide an important example:

> Now the **first day of the feast of unleavened bread** the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?
>
> -Matthew 26:17

> And the **first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover,** his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?
>
> -Mark 14:12

These passages show that the Gospel writers could refer to the day on which the Passover lambs were killed, Nisan 14, as the "first day of unleavened bread." Strictly speaking, the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on Nisan 15 at sunset, but the terminology could be used more broadly for the Passover preparation period immediately preceding it. Nisan 14 was the day known as *Erev Pesach*, or the Eve of Passover.

With that terminology established, we can now see where the apparent difficulty arises. According to the Synoptic Gospels, the disciples prepared the Passover meal during the day described as the "first day of unleavened bread," when the Passover lambs were killed (Mark 14:12; cf. Matthew 26:17; Luke 22:7-8). Jesus and His disciples then ate what is clearly presented as a Passover meal that evening, and Jesus was crucified the following day.

John, however, appears to present a different sequence. In his account, the Judean authorities had not yet eaten their Passover meal when Jesus was brought before Pilate early on the morning of His crucifixion. We read:

> Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: **and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.**
> -John 18:28

John tells us that the Judean authorities refused to enter the Praetorium because they did not want to become ceremonially defiled before eating the Passover. This indicates that their Passover meal had not yet taken place. Jesus was then crucified later that same day (John 19:16-18), meaning that their Passover meal would not be eaten until after nightfall, following His crucifixion.

This creates the apparent discrepancy. Why had Jesus and His disciples already eaten what the Synoptic Gospels describe as a Passover meal when the Judean authorities had apparently not yet eaten theirs? How could the daylight period in which the disciples prepared Jesus' meal be called the "first day of unleavened bread," when the Passover lambs were killed, while John indicates that the next day the Judean authorities still had not eaten their Passover and intended to do so after Jesus was crucified?

The problem becomes even clearer when we express it in terms of the Jewish calendar. Matthew and Mark describe the daylight period in which the disciples prepared the Passover meal as the day associated with the killing of the Passover lambs. Yet when that

sequence is placed alongside John's account, the disciples' preparations would appear to have taken place on Nisan 13 according to the Judean reckoning. John tells us that the Judean authorities still intended to eat the Passover after nightfall on the day Jesus was crucified. Since that meal would be eaten as Nisan 15 began, the daylight hours of Jesus' crucifixion would correspond to Nisan 14, making the preceding daylight period in which the disciples prepared their meal Nisan 13. This creates the apparent difficulty, because the Passover lambs were ordinarily killed on Nisan 14, not Nisan 13.

If we instead assume that the daylight period in which the disciples prepared the meal was Nisan 14 according to the same reckoning used by the Judean authorities, another problem immediately follows. Jesus would have eaten His Passover meal as Nisan 14 turned into Nisan 15. The Judean authorities in John 18:28 would then still be waiting to eat their Passover a full day later. On the other hand, if the Judean authorities were correctly preparing to eat their Passover as Nisan 14 turned into Nisan 15, then the disciples' preparations described by Matthew and Mark would appear to have occurred a day too early.

John 19:31 adds another important piece of information. The Sabbath immediately following Jesus' crucifixion is described as a "high day," meaning that the weekly Sabbath coincided with one of the important festival days.[1] In the Passover setting of John's account, this points to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 15, coinciding with the weekly Sabbath. If that Sabbath was Nisan 15, then the preceding day of Jesus' crucifixion would correspond to Nisan 14. This would again place the preceding daylight period, when Jesus and His disciples prepared their Passover meal, on Nisan 13 according to the Judean reckoning.

The apparent problem can therefore be stated plainly. The events from the disciples' preparation of Jesus' Passover meal through His crucifixion occurred over two consecutive daylight periods, yet the terminology in the Gospel accounts appears to associate both with the beginning of Passover. Jesus and His disciples prepared and ate what the Synoptic Gospels present as a Passover meal, while the Judean

authorities were still anticipating their Passover meal the following evening. How could both accounts be correct?

We believe the answer to this apparent dilemma lies in two different methods of reckoning the Passover that were used during this period – one associated with the Galileans and Pharisees and another associated with the Judeans and Sadducees. Bible scholar Harold Hoehner writes:

> The Pharisees celebrated the Passover immediately (Nisan 13/14) while the Sadducees waited until the usual time (i.e., Nisan 14/15).[2]

According to this understanding, Jesus and His disciples observed the Passover according to the Galilean or Pharisaic reckoning, while John describes the Judean or Sadducean reckoning followed by the Temple authorities. Jesus therefore ate the Passover with His disciples on Thursday evening, while the Judean authorities ate theirs on Friday evening after Jesus had been crucified.

This practice of observing the beginning of Passover over two days may also have served an important practical purpose. Jerusalem received enormous numbers of pilgrims during Passover, all of whom required lambs to be sacrificed for their households. Josephus reports that approximately a quarter-million lambs were slaughtered during one Passover celebration.[3] Modern historians have recognized the logistical difficulty of slaughtering such an enormous number of animals during the limited period available for the Temple sacrifices.[4] Even if Josephus's number was exaggerated, the number of Passover sacrifices would still have been immense.

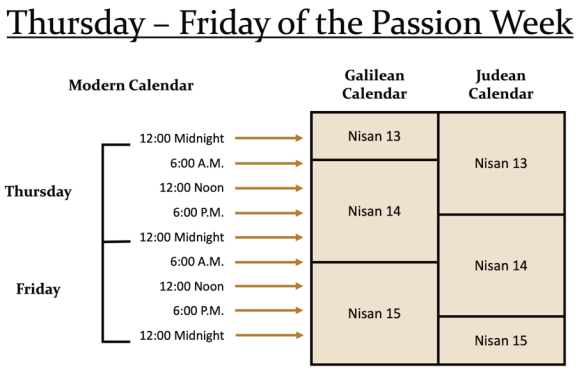
Spreading the slaughter of the Passover lambs over two days would therefore have helped accommodate the enormous number of sacrifices. Hoehner explains:

> There arose the custom where the Galileans slew their lambs on Nisan 13 … whereas the Judeans celebrated on Nisan 14.[5]

Hoehner also argues that the Galileans and Pharisees may have

reckoned the beginning and ending of a day differently from the Judeans and Sadducees:

> It is thought that the Galileans used a different method of reckoning the Passover than the Judeans. The Galileans and Pharisees used the sunrise-to-sunrise reckoning whereas the Judeans and Sadducees used the sunset-to-sunset reckoning.[6]



This helps explain the terminology found in Mark 14:12. According to Judean reckoning, the daylight period on Thursday was still Nisan 13. Under the Galilean reckoning described by Hoehner, however, that same daylight period could already be regarded as Nisan 14 because their day was reckoned from sunrise to sunrise. The disciples could therefore have approached Jesus that Thursday morning to prepare the Passover, had the lamb slaughtered later that day, and eaten the meal that evening. What was still Nisan 13 according to the Judean reckoning could already be regarded as Nisan 14 according to the Galilean reckoning.

According to this reconstruction, we can summarize the two methods of reckoning as follows:

- **The Galilean Jews reckoned the day from sunrise to sunrise.** Under this reckoning, Thursday's daylight period could be regarded as Nisan 14. This allowed the disciples to have the Passover lamb slaughtered that Thursday afternoon and to eat the Passover meal with Jesus that evening. The Last Supper could therefore properly be described as a Passover meal according to their reckoning.

- **The Judean Jews reckoned the day from sunset to sunset.** Under their reckoning, Thursday's daylight period was still Nisan 13. Nisan 14 began Thursday evening and continued through Friday afternoon, when the Judeans slaughtered their Passover lambs. They then ate their Passover meal after sunset as Nisan 15 began, which also marked the beginning of the High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread.

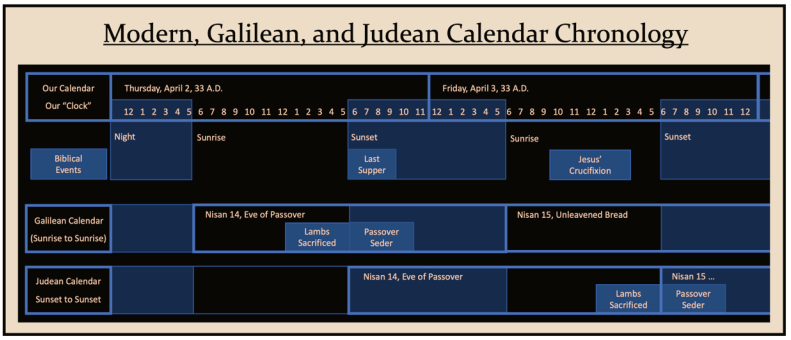
From a theological perspective, it is also interesting to consider how remarkably this arrangement fits the Passover typology. God established the Levitical Feasts as divine appointments that would ultimately find their fulfillment in His redemptive plan. If Jesus was to fulfill the role of the ultimate Passover Lamb, His death appropriately occurred on the day the Passover lambs were being slaughtered. This proposed distinction between the two methods of reckoning allowed Jesus to eat a Passover meal with His disciples beforehand while still being crucified on the day associated with the slaughter of the Judean Passover lambs.

With this calendrical distinction in view, the apparent contradiction between John and the Synoptics can be reconciled. Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples on Thursday evening according to the Galilean reckoning. He was arrested later that night and crucified during the daylight hours of Friday. According to the Judean reckoning, that Friday corresponded to Nisan 14, when the Judean authorities slaughtered their Passover lambs. They then ate their Passover

meal after sunset as Nisan 15 began. Jesus was buried before that sunset, as the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the High Sabbath were about to begin.

Because three different systems of reckoning are involved – the Galilean, the Judean, and our modern calendar – the chronology can be difficult to visualize at first. The following chart provides a visual comparison of these systems and shows how the Gospel accounts can be understood together.

Thursday – Friday of the Passion Week



The purpose of this appendix has been to address an apparent contradiction that has often been raised concerning the Gospel accounts of the Passion Week. Once the different uses of Passover terminology and the differing methods of calendrical reckoning are distinguished, John and the Synoptics can be understood without placing them in conflict with one another. Rather than undermining the chronology established throughout this study, the apparent difficulty can be reconciled within the same Friday crucifixion framework.

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1. Edersheim, Book V, p. 613.
2. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977, p. 82.

3. Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, VI.9.3.
4. E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 B.C.E.-66 C.E.*, Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992, p. 126.
5. Hoehner, p. 82.
6. Ibid., p. 86.

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