

A REFUTATION OF ALTERNATIVE CHRONOLOGIES

OF THE PASSION WEEK



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today, there exists much confusion surrounding the dating of the Passion Week events (the Passion Week refers of course to the week of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection). There are those who now are advocating for a Wednesday or a Thursday crucifixion and a Saturday resurrection – instead of the traditional view of a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection. To the casual onlooker who is unschooled in the original languages of the Bible, and who is unfamiliar with this subject, their points may initially appear to have some validity. But because this issue is so important – in that it affects other critical date-sensitive prophetic timelines in the Bible – it is imperative to go into further depth in order to examine these points. In this study, we will touch on some of the major objections put forward by those who reject the traditional viewpoint of a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection – and explore their validity. We will also explore the underlying doctrinal reasons (mainly Sabbath-keeping) that motivate many promoters of the alternative chronologies to actively advocate for their views.

Note: Before continuing, it is recommended to first refer back to the companion study in which we carefully and precisely go through the

available data in order to conclusively prove the exact day in history that Jesus Christ was crucified (this study is entitled “The Daniel 9:25 Prophecy – An Exact Timeline For The Arrival Of The Messiah”). Although understanding the entire study is preferable, if you are just looking for the part where we specifically examine the dating of the crucifixion of Christ, look for the chapter entitled The Dating Of The Ending Point (Part 1). Within that study, we clearly show that Jesus Christ could have only been crucified on a **Friday**, the **14th of Nisan**, the **eve of Passover**, on the same day the Jews were killing their Passover lambs. Understanding that information effectively eliminates any possibility of an alternative chronology involving a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion. For that reason, it is strongly recommended to be familiar with that study first, before going through this one. After understanding why Christians have always believed in a Friday crucifixion, then return to this study where each of the “alternative” arguments will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2

THE TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN VIEW: FRIDAY CRUCIFIXION AND SUNDAY RESURRECTION

In this chapter, some of the ancient sources will be examined that clearly describe the traditional Christian view of the timing of the two most important events in world history – the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is important to point out right at the start that there is abundant historical data that supports the traditional view, but *none* that supports the alternative views. The following are some examples of very early Christian documentation of the belief in a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection.

Barnabas, c. 100 AD

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

Ignatius, c. 100 AD

On the day of the preparation, then, at the third hour, He received the sentence from Pilate, the Father permitting that to happen; at the sixth hour **He was crucified**; at the ninth hour He gave up the ghost;

and before sunset He was buried. During the Sabbath He continued under the earth in the tomb in which Joseph of Arimathaea had laid Him. At the dawning of the Lord's day He arose from the dead, according to what was spoken by Himself, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man also be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The day of the preparation, then, comprises the passion; the Sabbath embraces the burial; the Lord's Day contains the resurrection.²

In other words, Ignatius provided a simple and straightforward timeline – on the day of preparation (or Friday), Christ was crucified, then on the Sabbath (or Saturday), Christ rested in the tomb, and then at the dawning of the Lord's day (or Sunday), He arose. Ignatius then neatly summarized this simple three-day chronology by saying, "The day of the preparation, then, comprises the passion; the Sabbath embraces the burial; the Lord's Day contains the resurrection." It's that easy – Friday was the crucifixion, Saturday He was in the tomb, and Sunday was the resurrection. Ignatius was clear, and his chronology leaves no hidden days in between.

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

Cyprian, c. 200 AD

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

Thus, it can be seen that the earliest of Christian sources agree on the traditional view of a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection. But what do the modern sources say? The following are several examples of the abundance of modern sources that plainly declare the traditional Christian view as being the long-held view going all the way back to the early Church.

Encyclopedia 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

Let's recognize exactly what this quote is saying in order to avoid drawing the wrong conclusion. First, it plainly states that throughout Christian history, Sunday worship was always standard. Then it states that because Sunday worship was **already practiced** by Christians, Constantine was able to please Christians by not changing it to a different day when he created civil laws regarding days of worship.

In other words, Constantine simply legalized what was *already being practiced*. Obviously, as a biblical Christian, I am no fan of Constantine, nor of civil laws requiring worship; however, this historical admission proves that **he did not change Saturday worship to Sunday worship**, as is often assumed by advocates of the alternative chronologies in their attempts to convince others that the earliest Christians worshipped on the Saturday Sabbath.

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

The History Of The Christian Church (by renowned Church historian Philip Schaff)

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.

A Refutation Of Alternative Chronologies Of The Passion Week

This custom is confirmed by the testimonies of the earliest post-apostolic writers, as Barnabas, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr.⁸

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

As can plainly be seen from the witness of both documented Church history, and supported by the testimony of modern academia, the verdict is simple and well-agreed upon. Their plain and clear testimony rests completely on the side of the traditional view. There is no alternative documentation to be found anywhere. Thus, through this brief examination, it should be clear that since the beginning of recorded Christian history, the traditional view has always acknowledged the crucifixion as taking place on Friday and the resurrection as taking place on Sunday.

Now that the traditional view has been historically established, in the next chapter, we will begin to examine where, how, and why the alternative views came into being.

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CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO THE ALTERNATIVE CHRONOLOGIES

Let's now look into the origin of the alternative chronologies – the most well-known being the Wednesday burial/ Saturday resurrection view. It seems that this idea originated somewhat recently, with those who advocate the belief that Christians are obligated to keep the Sabbath (called Sabbatarians). These folks also typically regard the Christian tradition of Sunday worship as being a result of pagan and Roman Catholic influence – an incorrect assumption, as is seen not only from the witness of the early pre-Catholic Church fathers examined in the previous chapter, but also through the clear New Testament support of Sunday worship in the early days of the Church, while the Bible was still being written. Largely because of their contempt for Sunday worship, many Sabbatarians attempt to assert a chronology that supports their ideas regarding Sabbath (Saturday) worship. This chronology involves a Saturday resurrection, in order to avoid any Christian connections with Sunday – which they regard as pagan.

As has been alluded to already, these Sabbatarians have a number of false premises at the foundation of their claims. First, they often assume that Christians who meet on Sunday (the first day of the week) are doing so out of a belief that Sunday is the “new Sabbath

day” for Christians (in other words, that the seventh-day Sabbath was *changed* to the first-day of the week).¹

Secondly, they believe Christians worship on Sunday instead of Saturday because of their false notion that the Roman Emperor Constantine, or the Roman Catholic Church, changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday in the centuries following the New Testament era.² These are their two main false assumptions, which have a host of obvious problems.

The reason Christians worship on Sunday has nothing to do with Constantine, the Catholic Church, or even the Sabbath itself. The early Christians referred to Sunday, or the first day of the week, as the “Lord’s Day” (as many of the quotes from the previous chapter demonstrate). It was also called “the eighth day,” as it followed the seventh day. The reason they met and worshipped together on the first day of the week is because Jesus’s resurrection took place on this day. This will be established beyond any doubt in this study. Thus, the early Church began to meet together on Sunday in memorial of Christ’s Sunday resurrection.

Another reason for the ancient gathering of Christians on Sunday is due to Jesus’s many Sunday post-resurrection appearances to visit with His followers. After Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, there were forty days in between that time and His ascension. During that period, the Bible records seven times where Jesus appeared to His followers. On five of those occasions, the Bible goes out of its way to record that He met them on the **first day of the week – or Sunday** (Matthew 28:8-10; Mark 16:9-13, 14-18; Luke 24:13-34, 36-44; John 20:11-18, 19-23, 26-29). For example, John 20:19 says:

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 allowed Himself to be

worshipped, ate meals with them, and taught and commissioned them. It was in memorial of this that the early Christians began to meet, worship, eat meals, and learn from the scriptures on the first day of the week.

As was established in the previous chapter, the writings of the early Church fathers (which pre-date Constantine, I might add) verify this. But there's also much Biblical evidence indicating that the early Church had begun this practice during the New Testament era, while the books of the New Testament were still being written! This is seen quite clearly several times in the New Testament. For example, in Acts 20, it 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

This passage specifically mentions the Christians meeting together on the first day of the week, Paul's preaching to them, and their communal partaking of a meal. It is also alluded to in 1 Corinthians 16 regarding the freewill offerings that were collected when Christians gathered together to worship on Sunday.

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

In this passage, Paul instructs the Corinthian church, as he apparently had instructed the Galatian church before them, to lay up an offering for those experiencing famine in Jerusalem, and to do it on the first day of the week. There would appear to be no other reason to specifically mention the first day of the week unless they were already meeting on this day.

Yet another mention is found in Revelation 1, which records this statement by John:

I was in the Spirit on **the Lord's day**, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

-Revelation 1:10

Here, John mentions "the Lord's day." It is known from the writings of the early (pre-Catholic) Church fathers, such as Ignatius (who himself was a student of the apostle John) and Cyprian, that the Lord's day referred to the day the Lord rose from the dead – Sunday. Once again, these statements were seen clearly in the previous chapter. But let's also examine another telling example from the writings of Ignatius that also addresses the early Christian observance of the Lord's day, as well as the discontinuation of the Sabbath observance for those Jews who came to belief in Christ. Ignatius said the following.

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...³

It is significant that Ignatius not only preserves the *reason* for ancient Sunday worship, but also that from the earliest of Christian times, the practice was to abandon Sabbath observance. Keep in mind that Ignatius lived in the first and second centuries AD, well before Emperor Constantine or the rise of the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, the early evidence shows that the reason Christians meet on Sunday has absolutely nothing to do with Constantine, the Catholic Church, or the Sabbath – and it has a strong Biblical basis.

But there is another very easily refutable false assumption that Sabbatarians also make regarding the issue of Saturday versus Sunday worship. This false assumption relates to the idea that Sunday

worship is pagan because the name Sunday comes from the ancient pagan worship of the sun, or the sun-god. But this objection is easily dismissed by the fact that *all* of the names of weekdays on the modern calendar find their root in the worship of pagan gods. Thus, by the “logic” of Sabbatarians, *no day of the week* – and certainly not Saturday – would be acceptable to worship God, as they are *all* named after pagan gods. For example, even Saturday itself is named after the pagan god Saturn (“Saturn’s-day”), completely undermining their argument.

As is explicitly stated in the ancient Christian quotes previously examined, the worship of the sun god has *never* had an influence in Christianity. Worshipping Jesus on Sunday has nothing to do with worshipping the sun god. While it is true that ancient pagans worshipped the sun god on Sunday, it is also equally true that completely independent of that pagan tradition, the New Testament records that Jesus arose on a Sunday, prompting the early Christians to gather on that day to worship and memorialize His resurrection. Pagan sun god worship and early Christian worship on Sunday have absolutely no causal connection.

When he came to power, the Emperor Constantine had **political** reasons that motivated him to use religion to unify his empire. In the year 321 AD, he decreed:

On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed⁴

Because pagans and Christians *both already* worshipped on Sunday, this motivated Constantine to declare Sunday as the day of worship in the empire. Therefore, Sabbatarians are incorrect when they assume that he “changed” a previous custom involving Christians allegedly worshipping on Saturday. Bear in mind, this is *not* a denial that historically, it is known that the Catholic Church incorporated paganism over time. Rather, it is a separate claim completely, and one that has nothing to do with the pre-Catholic origin of Christian worship on Sunday.

Let’s now address one final aspect of the Sabbatarians’ false

assumptions. It relates to the first assumption that was mentioned earlier, which has not yet been specifically addressed – the idea that Christians who meet on Sunday are doing so out of a belief that Sunday is the “new Sabbath day” for Christians. This incorrect assumption by many Sabbatarians is built on the false premise that Christians are obligated to keep the Sabbath and that by worshipping on Sunday, Christians are considering Sunday to be a “new Christian Sabbath.” This could not be more wrong. Christians do not believe that Sunday is a Sabbath at all. The Sabbath of Biblical tradition is always Saturday – the seventh day of the week, which God commanded the Israelites under the Mosaic Law to observe. Christ then *fulfilled* the Mosaic Law, bringing it to a completed end. And although it goes without saying that basic morality transcends the Mosaic Law and carries over to New Covenant times by the explicit mention of New Testament writers, the elements *specific* to the Mosaic Law – the feasts, new moons, sabbaths, and ceremonial and priestly aspects of the law, etc., *do not* carry over (Colossians 2:16). Once again, this was the belief of the early Church, as the aforementioned quote from Ignatius demonstrated.

The belief that Christians are under the Mosaic Law today stems from a complete misunderstanding of that Law and the purposes for its institution. The Law was given to Israel to govern themselves while they were living in the Promised Land at that specific time in history, in order to teach a group of former slaves in a pagan nation how to now govern themselves in a Godly society, and thus to prepare their hearts to receive their Messiah Jesus Christ, who would later *fulfill* the letter of the Law (Galatians 3:24; Matthew 5:17). In other words, Christ brought the Law (which was always intended to be *temporary*) to its intended completion, and through His death, instituted the New Covenant – which was to be the ultimate and *final* covenant, based on the Spirit outpouring. The Old Covenant was instituted to look forward in time to this ultimate and better covenant.

Note: For a deeper exploration of this subject, please consult the

companion study entitled, “Understanding The Distinction Between Israel And The Church”.

One of the primary purposes for the institution of the Sabbath observance of rest under the Mosaic Covenant was to teach the people of Israel of a coming time under a then-future New Covenant, where by receiving and living in the Holy Spirit, you “rest” in Christ on a daily basis. The writer of Hebrews begins to speak of this in Chapter 4.

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 or anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

-Hebrews 4:4, 8-10 (NIV)

Thus, the fulfillment of this rest is *not* found within the context of the Old Covenant – the covenant that was in operation when Joshua lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land. Instead, there was a then-*future* fulfillment to this rest. It pointed forward towards “another day,” in which believers in Christ can truly enter into His rest by ceasing from our own works (a reference to the Mosaic Law), and only then be truly at rest. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah also speaks of this future rest.

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

Paul then quotes this prophecy of Isaiah in 1 Corinthians 14:21, clearly applying it to the Church, allowing the recognition that the fulfillment of this concept of “rest” is found only through the New

Covenant established by Jesus Christ. Notice the unmistakable linkage with speaking in other tongues and the basis of the New Covenant – the outpouring of the Spirit, as described in Acts 2 on Pentecost, the birth of the Church.

So, a Spirit-filled Christian is to live out the fulfillment of the Sabbath through the Spirit. The Spirit is the reality or fulfillment, while the physical observance of Sabbath was the type or shadow. We have been brought to a better and eternal covenant that is based on the fulfillment. Why would a Christian move *backwards* to the inferior covenant and be preoccupied with observing the types and shadows instead of the *fulfillment* we can instead experience? This is why New Testament Christians are *never* told to observe Old Covenant rituals such as the Sabbath. Consequently, the Sabbatarian view is faulty as it misunderstands some of the most basic aspects of New Testament teaching.

Note: For a further look into this topic of the Sabbath being fulfilled in Christ, Dale Ratzlaff gives an excellent breakdown in his book *Sabbath in Christ*.⁵

In the early chapters of the book of Acts, the first Christians were predominantly Jews. When Gentiles (or non-Jews) began to receive the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Jewish Christians had a dilemma. What aspects of the Mosaic Law and Jewish tradition should Gentile Christians be instructed to obey? The apostles met and discussed the issue in the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). The council was lead by James, the brother of the Lord and bishop of the church at Jerusalem, and his final statement on this dilemma was:

¹⁹ It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

-Acts 15:19-20 (NIV)

Sabbath-keeping was *not* one of the commands the apostles felt was necessary to force on Gentile believers. It is inconceivable that the apostles would neglect to include Sabbath-keeping if it was truly God's command for Christians to observe the Sabbath day.

Some Sabbatarians also notice that the New Testament book of Acts records Christians sometimes attending synagogue services on the Sabbath. They think this teaches that they were doing this out of obedience to the Mosaic Law, and that it shows Christians are still obligated to observe the Sabbath today. But in Acts, whenever a meeting is said to be on the Sabbath, it is always a meeting of Jews and/or Gentile converts to Judaism, *not* Christians. If a Christian is in attendance, it is for the purposes of evangelism, not Sabbath observance. This is clear in all instances recorded.

In the end, Christians do not worship on Sunday because they are "trying to keep a Sabbath." Christians worship on Sunday because the New Testament, as well as Christian tradition going all the way back to the first century, all declare that Christ arose from the dead on Sunday. Therefore, Sunday, the first day of the week, (also called the "eighth day," or the "Lord's Day"), became the day of worship for New Testament Christians. Sunday worship has nothing at all to do with a Sabbath, as Christians are not under the Law of Moses and have no obligation toward Sabbath-keeping. Sunday worship within Christianity has absolutely no connection whatsoever to Sabbath-keeping of any kind.

Let's also recognize that just as Sabbath-worship is not a command for Christians, Sunday worship is also not compulsory for a Christian, as the New Testament does not give mandate worship on any specific days. While believers are certainly told to gather together, the Bible never commands it be done on any specific day of the week. Rather, the Christian's entire life is designed to embody a state of continuous worship and rest – the fulfillment of the Sabbath typology through the New Covenant Spirit baptism. Every day of the week is equally acceptable for worship. Paul teaches this 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)

Thus, it is clear that Christians have no command to venerate any certain days.

Let's now continue on to examine the development of the alternative Passion Week chronologies, understanding that their growth is largely motivated by these flawed Sabbatarian beliefs, and not by sound Biblical exposition.

The first definite appearance of the Wednesday-Saturday belief seems to have occurred in 1724. In that year, George Carlow, a British Seventh Day Baptist, published a book ironically entitled *Truth Defended*, in which he taught a Saturday resurrection.⁶ The Saturday resurrection continued to appear among early Seventh Day Baptist leaders into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the 1930s, there came on the scene a newly-ordained minister, former businessman Herbert W. Armstrong. Ordained within the Church of God, Seventh Day organization by the Oregon Conference of the Church of God in 1932, Herbert Armstrong would become a strong promoter of the Saturday resurrection doctrine, and his influence would help to spread this belief far and wide.⁷ Armstrong and his teachings will be examined deeper in the following chapter.

The takeaway for now, is that promoters of alternative chronologies generally have underlying doctrinal deviancies that serve as the true motivators for their beliefs. They are not people who are just sitting around studying the Passion Week chronology hoping to understand what scripture says. Instead, they are trying hard to make the scriptural narrative harmonize with their false doctrinal teachings – primarily, Sabbath-keeping.

Throughout most of the remainder of our study, their main objections and arguments will be examined and subjected to scrutiny. Each

of these objections will be studied individually in great detail. The following are their four main arguments:

1. The claim that scripture indicates there were two separate Sabbaths in between the time Jesus died and resurrected, making the crucifixion Wednesday or Thursday rather than Friday
2. The claim that certain passages of scripture indicate that the resurrection took place on a Saturday rather than a Sunday
3. The claim that the timing of the women's purchase and preparation of spices for anointing the body of Jesus creates a problem for a Friday crucifixion
4. The claim that a Friday crucifixion with a Sunday resurrection would violate the "three days, three nights 'sign of Jonah' prophecy" in Matthew 12:40

As each of these objections are investigated individually, it will be demonstrated that ultimately, they will each succumb to the pressure of scrutiny. In fact, the rebuttals from scripture so unequivocally expose these arguments, that by the end of this study, it will be obvious that maintaining a belief in these alternative chronologies is doing so in spite of the clear evidence.

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CHAPTER 4

OBJECTION #1: “SCRIPTURE INDICATES THERE WERE TWO SEPARATE SABBATHS IN BETWEEN THE TIME JESUS DIED AND RESURRECTED, MAKING THE CRUCIFIXION WEDNESDAY OR THURSDAY RATHER THAN FRIDAY.”

Introduction

The foundational passage used to advocate for this objection of there being “two Sabbaths” is Matthew 28:1, which was popularized by the aforementioned Herbert W. Armstrong, a teacher of beliefs such as British Israelism, and the necessary observance of parts of the Mosaic Law including Sabbath keeping, dietary prohibitions, and the Levitical Holy Days.¹ His booklet *The Resurrection Was Not On Sunday* focused heavily on the Greek word *sabbaton* (Strong’s #G4521), which he believed was improperly translated as “Sabbath” (singular) instead of “Sabbaths” (plural) in the first of this word’s two occurrences in Matthew 28:1.

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 here in Matthew 28:1 in the original Greek language. **It is the first occurrence that**

was especially bothersome for Armstrong. The point he tried to make is that the first instance of the word sabbath in this passage should be correctly translated as “sabbaths” (plural). He believed this would point to the notion that there were *several* Sabbaths that week, with one of them being the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which he claimed to be on Thursday) and the regular weekly Sabbath on Saturday. Armstrong used this claim to sustain his idea of a Wednesday crucifixion in order to then support his claim of a resurrection that took place on Saturday instead of a Sunday.² By creating this alternative chronology, he was able to then easily dismiss the biblical, historical, and traditional Christian significance of Sunday.

The traditional chronology places the Feast of Unleavened Bread on Saturday, the day Jesus spent buried in the tomb. But by claiming it instead took place on a Thursday, Armstrong created the notion that this feast, followed by a normal Friday, and then the weekly sabbath on Saturday, would be what Matthew 28:1 meant when it said “in the end of the *sabbaton*” – or sabbaths plural, as he supposed it meant. Thus, by simply suggesting that *sabbaton* meant multiple sabbaths, he created an alternative chronology, proposing that Jesus then rose after these “two sabbaths” at the end of Saturday (the second of the two sabbaths), before the sun began to dawn on Sunday. However, his conclusion is invalid for a number of reasons, which will be explored here. We will focus on his misunderstanding of the Greek word *sabbaton*, and determine whether *sabbaton* should actually be translated as multiple Sabbaths.

As has already been stated, the word Sabbath is translated from the Greek word *sabbaton*. What can we learn about the meaning of this word? *Sabbaton* is defined as the following.

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**.³

So, *sabbaton* can mean either the **Sabbath day**, or it can mean a

week (because the Jews measured weeks from Sabbath to Sabbath). Knowing this, does Armstrong's claim that the first occurrence of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 should be translated as a plural have any validity? As will be shown, his claim has absolutely no validity, but even if it did, as is seen from the plain definition (with the possibility of "a week" as the meaning), it does *not* have to mean what he claims. Keep this possibility of "a week" as a possible translation in the back of your mind, as we will come back to it later in one of the following chapters.

But why is his conclusion unfounded? There are a few points we need to understand in order to invalidate his claim.

No Consistent Usage of Sabbaton in the Bible

The first thing that must be noted is that *sabbaton* in the Bible is frequently found in the *plural* form in the Greek New Testament when *only one day* is in view. In other words, the plural form of the word is sometimes used when the context clearly is singular. **This fact alone completely undermines Armstrong's assertion that *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 should definitely be translated in the plural.** Let's explore this some more.

In the New Testament passages where *sabbaton* means "Sabbath," the word in Greek occurs forty times in the singular form and nineteen times in the plural form. But in most of the occurrences where the word appears in the plural form, the context makes it clear that **a single day is intended.**

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

Furthermore, there is no consistency in usage between the singular form and the plural form when a single day is intended.⁴ A great

example of this is found in the story of Jesus and His disciples walking through fields of grain on the Sabbath (recorded in Matthew 12 and Luke 6). Matthew uses the word *sabbaton* in the plural form in Verse 1 and the singular form in Verse 2. Luke's account of the same exact story has the reverse, with the singular form in Verse 1 and the plural form in Verse 2.⁵

Another example is found in the story of the healing of the man with the withered hand. Matthew 12:10-12 and Mark 3:2-4 use the plural form, whereas Luke's account of the same exact story (Luke 6:6-9) has the singular form.⁶ Similarly, in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), the plural form is sometimes used where the corresponding passage in Hebrew has the singular form, and where it's obvious that the reference is to a single day.⁷

Examples:

Exodus 16:25, 26; 20:8, 10; 35:3

Numbers 15:32

Deuteronomy 5:12

Thus, the evidence demonstrated in the biblical text itself shows that the inspired writers did not use *sabbaton* in any strict sense so as to rigidly indicate a plural or singular meaning when there is none obvious in the context. It is important to keep in mind that the Jews often used plural and/or singular Sabbaths to refer to a single Sabbath in the same fashion that they used the word *elohim* (a plural form) to refer either to a plurality of gods as well as to the singular God of the Old Testament. This practice of using the plural for the singular in many instances is a peculiarity of the Hebrew language that is even found when Jews translated the Hebrew into Greek. We should avoid drawing the same conclusions Armstrong drew, seeing as there is no consistency of usage from which to draw any such conclusions.

Let's now examine another reason why Armstrong's claim that the first occurrence of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 should be translated as a plural has no validity at all.

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

This point, as well as the one to follow, should both be thought of as **alternatives** to Armstrong’s claim of “multiple Sabbaths.” In other words, even if he was correct in saying that the current popular translation of the first occurrence of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 is incorrect, **there are other more probable solutions to consider than the one he advocated.** One such alternative will be discussed now, and then another in the following subsection – and the key to recognize is that **neither of these options necessitate any change to the well-established traditional chronology of the Passion Week.** Again, just so this is clear: even *if* Armstrong’s claim about *sabbaton* was correct, it doesn’t mean we need to adopt an alternative Passion Week chronology.

The first alternative possibility is that *sabbaton* should be translated as “week” in *both* of its occurrences in Matthew 28:1, rather than only in the second occurrence. As mentioned earlier, the definition of *sabbaton* can either refer to the Sabbath day itself, or it can also refer to a week. And why did *sabbaton* become a word used to describe a week? It is not difficult to envision this happening in a culture that was built upon sequences of seven days that are punctuated by Sabbaths. It appears that *is* exactly what happened historically. Consider the following quote from an article on the Sabbath.

By synecdoche [naming a part for the whole], the term “Sabbath” also came to mean simply a seven-day week in Jewish sources by the time of the Septuagint, namely, the interval between two Sabbaths. Jesus’s parable of the Pharisee and the Publican describes the Pharisee as fasting “twice a week” (Greek “*dis tou sabbatou*,” literally, “twice of the Sabbath”).⁸

It is important to recognize the way the Jews reckoned days of the week. According to R.C.H. Lenski, since “the Jews had no names for the weekdays,” they “designated them with reference to their Sabbath.”⁹ After spending years examining Jewish writings in the

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Babylonian Talmud, Hebraist John Lightfoot wrote, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, in which he expounded upon the Hebrew method of counting the days of the week. He noted:

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.]¹⁰

Lightfoot then quoted from two different Talmud tractates. The first – Maccoth, alludes to those who testified on “the first of the sabbath” about an individual who stole an ox. Judgment was then passed the following day, “on the second day of the sabbath.”¹¹ The second – Bava Kama, describes ten enactments ordained by a man named Ezra, including 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.”¹² In Michael Rodkinson’s 1918 translation of Maccoth and Bava Kama, he accurately translated “the second day of the sabbath” as Monday, “the fifth day of the sabbath” as Thursday, and “the first of the sabbath” as Sunday.¹³ Thus, it can be easily understood why *sabbaton* is often translated as “week” in English. The Jews reckoned their days of the week by where they fell in relation to the Sabbath, and therefore, *sabbaton* became a term used to describe the week-long period between one Sabbath and another. With this understanding, let’s now take another look at Matthew 28:1, our passage in question.

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

Matthew easily could’ve been intending this in the same way that was just discussed, which is common to Hebrew terminology and literature. Remember, Armstrong’s big problem was with the first occurrence of *sabbaton*, where it is translated “Sabbath.” If we look at the second occurrence in the above passage, we see *sabbaton* is trans-

lated “week.” Therefore, if the *second* occurrence of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 is translated as “week,” why can’t the *first* occurrence also be? The second occurrence is explicitly saying “the first of the sabbath,” which, as was shown, means the first of the week in Hebrew expression – hence the translation “the first day of the week” in our Bibles. The Greek word is the same in both the first and second occurrences, and the context is identical. So, why shouldn’t they *both* be translated as “week”? The end of the Sabbath is the end of the week, so the timing being conveyed wouldn’t even change.

Think about it this way. The *second* appearance of *sabbaton* means, “(at the *beginning* of the) *week*,” or “Sunday.” This is in all ways similar to the *first* appearance of *sabbaton*, which could easily mean, “(at the *end* of the) *week*,” or “Saturday.” In other words, the timing the verse may be trying to convey is that the first phrase means “Saturday” and the second phrase means “Sunday.” It may actually be that simple, and it would require no change of understanding from what the current English translations read. If we input that translation into the verse, it would read as follows.

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

It may come across slightly redundant in English, but this is nothing new for anyone familiar with Biblical text. If anything, it conveys precision.

So, let’s recap. If we pay incredibly close attention to the Greek, the Hebrew use, the context, and the related Biblical evidence, we can much more readily come to the conclusion that *sabbaton* should be translated as “week” rather than “multiple Sabbaths,” – and we have precedent and context right in the very same verse! So, the point here is that Armstrong was trying to make an issue out of a non-issue – and then to “add insult to injury,” suggests a fix that is the least likely and most awkward of all the alternative options!

Let's now draw our attention to another reason why Armstrong's complaint about the word *sabbaton* doesn't require – or even suggest – the alternative chronology interpretation he puts forward.

Multiple Sabbaths Don't Require Multiple Days

Once again, this second potential alternative assumes that Armstrong is correct in his theory that the first occurrence of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 should be "Sabbaths" plural, instead of "Sabbath" singular. Let's even assume he is correct about one of the Sabbaths being the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the other Sabbath being Saturday, the weekly Sabbath. **Even if he is completely correct about this, there is no reason to have to accept his conclusion of multiple Sabbath days during the Passion Week.**

The reason for this is simple. According to the traditional chronology, **we *already* believe that in the year of Jesus's death, Unleavened Bread fell on the weekly Saturday Sabbath.** So, we already believe there were two Sabbaths (if a festival day can truly be called a sabbath), but the key is they both fell **on the same day** – not as multiple days with a day in between, as Armstrong contends. How do we come up with the belief that Unleavened Bread coincided with the Saturday Sabbath on the year Jesus died? Aside from simply reading the gospel accounts and seeing the clear chronology expressed, there are a few select verses that make this quite obvious. However, we first need to understand the term "the preparation," or "preparation day" – as this term will factor into our understanding of the chronology.

All four gospels agree that Jesus was crucified on a "preparation day" (Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42). What is a preparation day? Since Sabbath is Saturday and no work could be done (Exodus 16:23; 35:3), the day before (Friday) was known to the Jews as preparation day – a fact even recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus who lived close to the time of Christ.¹⁴ On this day, they cooked food in advance and made other necessary preparations. Scripture clearly identifies the day that Jesus died as being a

preparation day (in other words, a Friday) and the next day (a Sabbath, or Saturday) as also being a “high day.”

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

In this passage, notice the phrases “it was the preparation” and then “that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, for that sabbath day was an high day.” In other words, Jesus was crucified on a Friday (preparation day), and as we know, the next day was a Sabbath and the Jews didn’t want dead bodies lying uncovered. But yet, we’re also told that *this* Sabbath was also a “high day,” or a “high Sabbath.” What was a “high Sabbath?” A high Sabbath refers to one of the seven Levitical feasts.¹⁵

So then, which Levitical feast day fell on the Sabbath during Passover week, as described in the verse we just read? By examining the timeline of the story, we can recognize that the only candidate among the seven Levitical feasts is clearly the Feast of Unleavened Bread. So, John 19:31 is saying that the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the day the Passover meal was eaten) fell on the Sabbath of that week, making it even more significant. Jewish Christian scholar Alfred Edersheim writes:

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]...¹⁶

Thus, scripture is conveying a timeline that shows Jesus dying on Friday (the preparation day, the first day of Passover when the lambs are killed), and the following day (Saturday) is the *High Sabbath* of Unleavened Bread that coincides with the normal weekly Sabbath. A

further exploration of relevant scripture makes these points even clearer.

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

-Mark 15:42

Again, the plain reading of this passage clearly indicates that “the preparation” is a term for “the day before the weekly Sabbath.” The following passage gets even more explicit, stating that it was the Day of Preparation *of the Passover week*.

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

In this passage, we read the phrase “it was the preparation of the Passover.” In other words, this means it was the Friday of Passover week. Some incorrectly interpret this to mean the term “the preparation” can refer not only to the day before a weekly Sabbath, but also the day before any yearly Levitical festival day. There is no evidence for this, but there is clear evidence from Josephus for example that “the preparation” was a reference to Friday.

However, even *if* “the preparation” could refer to the day before a festival, the verses we’ve examined clearly place the festival of Unleavened Bread as falling on the Sabbath of the Passover week in the year Jesus died. John 19:31 is extremely clear about this when it states, “on the sabbath day, for that sabbath day was an high day.” The plain reading of this clearly indicates the subject as being a weekly Sabbath, which that year also happened to be a high day – a perfect description of Unleavened Bread falling on a weekly Sabbath. It would be difficult to envision a clearer way for scripture to convey this.

Further, it would be unusual for the gospels to refer to Unleavened Bread as “the Sabbath,” as they instead seem to always use the actual

name “Unleavened Bread” or “Passover.” The understanding advocated here follows the consistent usage and plain reading of the text. It also follows the clear chronology described in all four gospel accounts.

But the Bible also provides us a clear self-check to ensure we are on the right track – a self-check that absolutely rules out any possibility of a Wednesday crucifixion. It is found in Luke 24, in the story of Jesus’s appearance to two disciples on the Emmaus road on the Sunday of his crucifixion.

Now upon **the first day of the week**, very early in the morning...

-Luke 24:1a

So, the first verse says explicitly that the context is Sunday – the first day of the week. Let’s look down to Verse 7 and notice what the angels said about Jesus’s resurrection.

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

Here in Verse 7, the angels state that Jesus claimed He would rise the third day. Keep that in the back of your mind. Let’s continue now to Verses 13-15.

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

This is crucial to understand. Verse 13 clearly notes that the ongoing context *is still the same day* – the first day of the week, or Sunday. Let’s now drop down to Verses 17-21 and see if we can pick up on any further timeline clues.

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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 the icing on the cake that conclusively eliminates any possibility of a Wednesday crucifixion. The “incognito Jesus” asks “what things?” Cleopas answers by referring to Jesus’s condemnation by the chief priests and crucifixion, which we know all happened on one single Jewish day – the 14th of Nisan. Cleopas then puts the nail in the coffin for the alternative chronology advocates when he says “to day (Sunday) is the third day since these things were done.” In other words, “today is the third day since the crucifixion.”

Consequently, it is explicitly stated in scripture that Sunday was the third day since the crucifixion. However, Sunday would be five days from Wednesday – using inclusive reckoning, as the Jews would have counted it.¹⁷ But even as we would count it today – as four days – it would still make a Wednesday crucifixion impossible.

Note: Inclusive reckoning is a system of reckoning time in which a part of a day is counted as a full day. We will discuss inclusive reckoning in greater detail – providing many scriptural examples - further ahead in our study.

So, the only biblical conclusion that can be reasonably arrived at is that “the preparation” is a clear reference to Friday (the day before a weekly Sabbath), and that Unleavened Bread coincided with the

weekly Sabbath on that particular year. Because they coincided, we propose that the first occurrence of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 could refer to these coinciding “Sabbaths” – and not Sabbaths on different days as Armstrong suggests. Again, we are *not* advocating that this is *definitely* what Matthew meant, we are simply pointing out that even if you believe *sabbaton* has to mean “multiple Sabbaths,” there are more plausible understandings than the one Armstrong promoted of multiple Sabbaths on different days. And as you can see, this alternative to Armstrong’s theory requires absolutely *no changes* to the well-established traditional chronology.

Before moving on, let’s again quickly address the question of whether or not the Feast of Unleavened Bread was even referred to as a Sabbath by the Jews. The answer is plain. There is no place in the Bible where *sabbaton* is ever used to refer to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, in the Old Testament, the equivalent Hebrew term *shabbaton* (Strong’s #H7677) is possibly used to refer to several of the other seven yearly festivals – the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Trumpets, and the Feast of Tabernacles.¹⁸ Thus, if *sabbaton* could refer to some of these other seven feasts, then it is at least *possible* it can refer to Unleavened Bread. That being said, there is no explicit Biblical statement indicating this, therefore it is unwise to build a theory on it the way Armstrong does.

But why does this matter? It matters because of the following reason: if *sabbaton* **cannot** refer to Unleavened Bread, then both the contention of this subsection, as well as Armstrong’s entire theory would both be undermined. This would be devastating to Armstrong, as his theory absolutely depends on multiple Sabbaths separated by a day. However, to us, it means nothing. Suggesting that *sabbaton* could mean a “double Sabbath” of Unleavened Bread falling on a weekly Sabbath is merely an alternative we suggest as a possibility; one that doesn’t at all change the timing or chronology of the events from the popular translation. In fact, as was mentioned, it doesn’t even change the meaning of Matthew 28:1.

In other words, we know Unleavened Bread did fall on a weekly Sabbath during the year Jesus was crucified, but whether or not

Unleavened Bread as a Levitical feast can be referred to as a Sabbath is questionable. If it can, then fine; that fits perfectly with the traditional chronology. If it cannot, then also fine; the traditional chronology doesn't depend on it. But for Armstrong, if it cannot, his entire theory immediately sinks.

Let's now move on to our final point in our rebuttal of Objection #1 – the “multiple Sabbaths” view of Matthew 28:1. In this next subsection, we will simply take a look at the four gospel accounts to see whether or not they allow for Armstrong's view of “multiple Sabbaths” with a day in between – which he advocates in order to try to prove a Wednesday crucifixion and challenge the legitimacy of a Sunday resurrection.

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

When you study the passages of scripture in the four gospels that deal with the timeframe between Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, it becomes very clear that this period covers only **one full day** and **two partial days**. This would be considered **three days** by the ancient Jews, who used inclusive reckoning. If this idea of one full day along with two partial days can be demonstrated in the scriptural accounts, then Armstrong's idea of multiple Sabbaths with a day in between would become indefensible. We will examine each of these gospel accounts and determine whether they allow for multiple Sabbaths with an extra “in between” day.

The Gospel of Mark

As we read through the following several key chronological passages, take note of the clear chronology presented.

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

So, we see here that the day before the Sabbath (the preparation) was the day of Jesus's death. This passage is clear that it was the *same day*, as Pilate was surprised Jesus was already dead so soon. Later that day, Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus's body and buried Him before the Sabbath. This ends Chapter 15. Now look how Chapter 16 immediately 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

So, from Mark's chronology, we have:

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

Thus, it appears to be very straightforward. From the chronology of this story in Mark, there does not seem to be any space for “multiple sabbaths” with an extra day in between. Instead, we see that the weekly Sabbath immediately followed Jesus's death, prompting Joseph

of Arimathea's request to Pilate to bury His body, as the Sabbath drew on. Then, the next day, which was the first day of the week (Sunday), Jesus's tomb was found empty by the women, meaning He had already risen.

Consequently, from the plain reading of scripture, we see a clear chronology of three days – Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Jesus died on Friday, was in the tomb all of Saturday, and arose sometime before the sunrise on Sunday. It really is this clear and easy. But this was only one gospel account. Let's see if this same pattern of three back-to-back days continues in Matthew's account.

The Gospel of Matthew

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 Arimathea, 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

We see that on the evening of the day of preparation (Friday),

Joseph of Arimathea prepared and buried the body of Jesus. On the next day (the Sabbath) the Pharisees petitioned Pilate to seal the tomb. This ends Chapter 27. Now look how Chapter 28 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

So, from Matthew's chronology, we have:

1. "When even had come" (of the Preparation Day – Nisan 14)
2. "Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation" (the Sabbath - Nisan 15)
3. "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week" (Sunday, Nisan 16)

Thus, the from the plain reading of the text, the chronology is again very straightforward. Where are these alleged "extra Sabbaths" with another day in between? As is shown in both Mark and Matthew's accounts, this is a simple three-day sequence with no time for additional days in between. Let's now examine Luke's account.

The Gospel of Luke

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,

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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

Like the other two accounts, we again see that Joseph of Arimathaea prepared and buried the body of Jesus on the preparation day before the Sabbath. Then, the same day, the women watched where He was buried, returned to the city, and prepared spices. They then rested on the next day (the Sabbath). This ends Chapter 23. Now look how Chapter 24 immediately 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

So, once again, we find exactly the same sequence of events:

1. “that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on” (Nisan 14)
2. “and they ... rested on the sabbath day” (Nisan 15), and then
3. “Now upon the first day of the week” (Nisan 16)

Again, we find that just like Mark and Matthew’s accounts, Luke’s account leaves no room for additional days in between. Lastly, let’s now take a look at John’s account.

The Gospel of John

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

Once again, we see that on the preparation day, Joseph of Arimathaea quickly took the body of Jesus and buried Him in a nearby tomb, since the Sabbath was approaching. This ends Chapter 19. Now look how Chapter 20 immediately 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

No surprise here. Again, we find the exact same time sequence:

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1. “it was the preparation” (Nisan 14)
2. “the sabbath drew on” (Nisan 15), and
3. “The first day of the week” (Nisan 16)

The days of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection are given in clear sequence and with considerable clarity in all four gospels. They all agree on a three-day sequence with no time in between: (1) Preparation Day, (2) Sabbath, and (3) the first day of the week.

Let’s briefly recap Mark and Luke’s accounts, as they are especially resistant against any additional “in-between” days. Mark, who wrote for a Gentile audience generally unfamiliar with Jewish terminology, explained with the utmost clarity that the Messiah was crucified on “the Day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath” (Mark 15:42). The terms “preparation” (*paraskeue* – Strong’s #G3904) and “Sabbath-eve” (*pro-sabbaton* – Strong’s #G4315) used in that passage, are two technical terms being used unmistakably to designate the day before the weekly Sabbath. Mark then is most precise in explaining that the death of the Messiah took place on what the Jews call the Preparation Day. Mark then designates the next day as “sabbath” (Mark 16:1), which in turn is followed by the “first day of the week” (Mark 16:2). His chronological sequence leaves absolutely no room for a two-day interval between the day of the crucifixion and the day of the resurrection. It can only be a total three-day sequence of Friday the 14th, Saturday the 15th, and Sunday the 16th.

In a similar way, Luke makes it very clear that the day of the Messiah’s death was immediately followed, not by an in-between day or two, but by a weekly Sabbath. He writes: “It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning” (Luke 23:54). By linking the beginning of the Sabbath to the end of the Day of Preparation, and the beginning of the “first day of the week” (Luke 24:1) to the termination of the Sabbath (Luke 23:56), Luke leaves absolutely no room for any chronology other than Friday the 14th, Saturday the 15th, and Sunday the 16th.

Therefore, from all of this evidence, we are able to conclude that the four gospel accounts give every reason to believe in a Friday cruci-

fixion with a Sunday resurrection; yet, they provide no evidence at all for any longer timeline with multiple days in between (as the alternative chronologies would require). In fact, in light of the manner in which some of the gospel accounts link the days with each other, they actually rule out any possibility that there could be any such silent days in between.

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CHAPTER 5

OBJECTION #2: “CERTAIN PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE INDICATE THAT THE RESURRECTION TOOK PLACE ON A SATURDAY RATHER THAN A SUNDAY.”

Many who follow Armstrong’s beliefs regarding a Saturday resurrection point to certain cherry-picked scripture passages that they feel prove their point. Of course, if these passages were to be understood according to the way these advocates contend, they would contradict the clear gospel accounts we have already examined.

In this chapter, we will examine the main verse the Sabbatarians often use to demonstrate this “Objection #2.” Of course, this verse is the same one we’ve already been dealing with throughout this study – Matthew 28:1. Sabbatarians often contend that this verse indicates that the resurrection took place on a Saturday rather than a Sunday. They claim this because of the way the King James Version renders the wording of this verse; particularly, the phrase “in the end of the Sabbath.” So, let’s see how their “flagship verse” fares when held up to scrutiny.

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

Sabbatarians believe that the context of this verse was still during the Sabbath (as the passage says “in the end of the sabbath”). In other words, they believe this wording means that the Sabbath had not yet ended when the two women found the tomb empty. They propose that if it was still the Sabbath (or Saturday) and Jesus had already risen, then He must have risen on the Saturday Sabbath instead of Sunday.

Put another way, if the passage is saying that the women were approaching the tomb while it was still “in the end of the Sabbath”, then this means Jesus must have resurrected earlier on that Sabbath. However, this is a faulty understanding and is one that needs to be examined more closely. Let’s look at some of the reasons why this cannot be so.

First and foremost, the Sabbatarian interpretation of this passage is in error because their foundational assumption is incorrect. The phrase “in the end of” means “after” not “during” in the Greek. In other words, Matthew 28:1 is saying that the women arriving to discover the empty tomb took place **after the Sabbath had ended**, and not while it was still ongoing. This means they discovered the empty tomb on Sunday. In his Bible commentary, scholar Adam Clarke states the following.

“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.¹

Clark then lists this same word usage as found in the writings of prominent Greek writers such as Thucydides, Plutarch and Philostratus, all used to convey a meaning of “after” something, rather than “during” something.²

But one of the greatest reasons showing why this objection is unfounded goes back to the simple principles of Biblical hermeneutics (the study of accurate Biblical interpretation). You do not find the *least* clear account (such as the English rendering of the KJV in this passage) and use that to guide your interpretation, in spite of an abundance of other *clear* accounts available in scripture. Instead, you find

parallel accounts and determine if any are clearer. You determine the meaning by relying on the *clear* accounts that all agree, rather than the one unclear account.

Furthermore, an informed and scholarly interpretation must also look back to the original language in which the passage was written – in this case, Greek. The intention and meaning of the original writers in the original language must be understood as well as possible in spite of a potentially unclear translation; or one that at times uses outdated and confusing English.

Can these principles help us here? It turns out the answer is a resounding yes! It so happens that there is not only one, but **three other extremely clear gospel accounts** that should guide our interpretation – John 20:1, Luke 24:1, and Mark 16:1-2. All three of these are parallel accounts of Matthew 28:1, the passage in question. Let's take a look at these three parallel accounts.

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

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.

-Luke 24:1

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

In each account, it is clear that the women approached on the **first day of the week** (Sunday), at or slightly before sunrise. Keep in mind

that according to the Jewish reckoning, it was already Sunday since sundown the night before, not from midnight (as we would reckon time today). There is no way to get around the clear accounts that link the women's arrival at the tomb with the dawning of Sunday morning, meaning Jesus had arisen sometime before sunrise that same Jewish day (Sunday). We know that He rose sometime before sunrise on Sunday from several other passages, such as Mark 16:9.

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

-Mark 16:9

Young's Literal Translation puts it as follows:

And he, **having risen in the morning of the first of the sabbaths**, did appear first to Mary the Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven demons;

-Mark 16:9 (YLT)

The literal translation (a word for word translation from the Greek) clearly says Jesus rose in the morning on the first day of the week. As discussed earlier, "first of the Sabbaths" is a Hebraic way of saying the "first day of the week," or Sunday.

Another clear passage indicating that Jesus rose Sunday is found in a chapter we discussed at length earlier – Luke 24, which records the account of Jesus appearing "incognito" to two disciples who were traveling on the road to Emmaus. For brevity, we will just review the main points.

Verse 21 tells us that the day on which this story took place was the "third day since these things were done."

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 24:21

What day is the “today” that the disciple is talking about? The answer is clear: Sunday, as is seen in Verse 1 (“Now upon the first day of the week”). What “things” was he talking about when he said “since these ‘things’ were done”? This answer is also clear: the trials and crucifixion of Jesus, as is seen in Verse 20 (“And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him”). Thus, the resurrected Jesus was walking with them and speaking with them on Sunday, which the chapter itself declares as being the “third day” since the crucifixion, fulfilling the multitude of passages in which Jesus prophesied that He would rise on the third day. How can it be any clearer?

In the final analysis, there is an abundance of scriptural evidence for the traditional Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection, and none for the “new” Wednesday-Saturday theories. In fact, the positive evidence for the traditional view absolutely precludes any possibility of alternatives.

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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).”

We will now discuss yet another objection raised by those who adopt Armstrong’s beliefs. These Sabbatarians are troubled by the fact that in one passage, the women are said to be buying spices *before* the Sabbath, while in another, *after* the Sabbath. They feel that if the crucifixion was on Friday, they could not have purchased spices during the period of time in between the end of the Sabbath (around 7:00 PM on what we would consider Saturday evening) and when they reached the tomb on Sunday morning (around 6:00 AM).

Because they feel this is impossible, essentially because they think no merchants would be open during that timeframe, they push the crucifixion back to Wednesday or Thursday. In doing this, they theorize that Friday was the day the women bought and prepared spices after the Sabbath, which they infer to be Thursday, the day on which they claim the Feast of Unleavened Bread fell. This way, they feel they can neatly accommodate both the “after the Sabbath” (inferred to be Unleavened Bread) and “before the Sabbath” (inferred to be the Saturday Sabbath).

However, this objection is not a problem at all, for a number of reasons we will discuss. But as we begin, it is important to remember that since we were not there to observe exactly how this

took place (and scripture is not explicit in explaining it), we must be careful not to jump to conclusions and rigidly infer a chronology that the Bible does not claim (as Armstrongists do). Further, to go as far as to reject a Friday crucifixion largely on this fragile basis – despite the overwhelming evidence for Friday – is beyond reckless. Before examining the reasons why this objection should not be taken seriously, let's review the two verses in question – Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:55-56.

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

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

Proponents of the Wednesday-Saturday view see a contradiction between the women buying spices *after* the Sabbath (as we see in Mark 16:1) and yet also preparing spices and ointments *before* resting on the Sabbath (as we see in Luke 23:55-56). There are numerous reasons why the vast majority of scholars do not take this objection seriously.

First, the wording in the KJV, which may actually be the most precise rendering, reveals that Mark 16:1 does *not* say they purchased spices “after the Sabbath”. It actually indicates that they “*had* bought” them (meaning “some time ago”), as it literally reads “had bought” instead of just “bought.” This means the phrase “when the sabbath was past” may have nothing to do with the timing of the spice purchase. Though the grammar may seem a bit unusual in English, it could simply be saying that they were bringing spices that they “had bought” at some previous time.

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

In other words, the focus of “when the sabbath was past” may have nothing to do with the timing of the purchase of the spices (they already “had bought” them ahead of time). The focus may instead be on the timing of their intention to come and anoint him. So, to formulate an alternative chronology based on essentially one unclear and obscure passage, (one whose wording is outright contradicted in the KJV), is irresponsible.

Second, even if you were to assume the accuracy of the wording of the non-KJV versions (they do not include the word “had” before “bought” and instead just say “bought”), there is still nothing problematic about the passage as far as the timeline of events is concerned. There is no contradiction either way. This is because there’s no reason that the same or some of the same women who could have purchased and prepared spices *before* the Sabbath could not have also purchased additional spices *after* the Sabbath or the following morning while traveling to the tomb. In other words, there is no reason there could not have been **multiple events involving the purchase/preparation of spices and ointments**. For example, perhaps they realized they didn’t have enough. Maybe they couldn’t buy enough before the Sabbath and needed more. Maybe there was a certain type of spice unattainable at the earlier time, but became attainable Sunday morning or after the Sabbath ended Saturday evening. There would seem to be numerous possibilities for how and why this transpired the way it did, and none preclude the possibility that two separate events of purchase or preparation could have taken place at two different times, with one being before the Sabbath and one being after.

The women could have purchased and/or prepared spices on the day Jesus was crucified (Friday). He was on the cross for six hours, and after He was dead, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus still had

up to three hours to prepare His body for burial before the beginning of the Sabbath at nightfall. There is a span of about nine hours on Friday where the women could have bought and prepared the spices; or, they may have had them already. So, the idea that there was no time to buy and prepare spices before the Sabbath is ridiculous.

Additionally, they could have also procured more spices following the end of the Sabbath. The idea that all the shops were closed after the Sabbath between nightfall and morning on Sunday cannot be substantiated. This is a pure assumption made by those who wish to criticize a Sunday resurrection. We do not know this for sure, and we cannot take it upon ourselves to dogmatically claim to know that this was impossible. However, on the contrary, there are practical reasons to believe the shops could certainly have been open!

Especially after a Sabbath on Passover week, you actually would expect the shopkeepers to open immediately following the Sabbath, or early that morning, particularly when there had been recent crucifixions (meaning there would be customers looking for necessary spices to bury their dead in accordance with Jewish tradition). It is not so impossible to imagine something similar even in our modern culture, with stores having unusually early or late hours during holidays (Christmas Eve, Black Friday, etc.). This assumption that goods could not be purchased because of the time of day cannot be the basis to dismiss a Friday crucifixion, especially in the face of enormous evidence to the contrary. It is inference by modern readers who are desperately grasping at straws to support their alternative chronology.

And so, after a deeper look into these passages, we can conclude that the simplest reading of the gospel accounts gives us the impression that to avoid working on the Sabbath, the Galilean women hastily made preliminary arrangements to preserve the decomposing body on Friday night (Luke 23:55-56), until they could return on Sunday to complete the process (Luke 24:1; Mark 16:1). It really appears to be that simple. There is no need to construct grandiose alternative chronologies that contradict all of the available evidence.

CHAPTER 7

OBJECTION #4: “A FRIDAY CRUCIFIXION WITH A SUNDAY RESURRECTION WOULD VIOLATE THE “THREE DAYS, THREE NIGHTS ‘SIGN OF JONAH’ PROPHECY” IN MATTHEW 12:40.”

Introduction

Another major objection some make to the traditional chronology of the Passion Week involves the idea that a timespan of Friday night to Sunday morning cannot be considered “three days and three nights” in death. The primary rationale for this belief is a misapplication of Jesus’s statement in Matthew 12:40.

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.

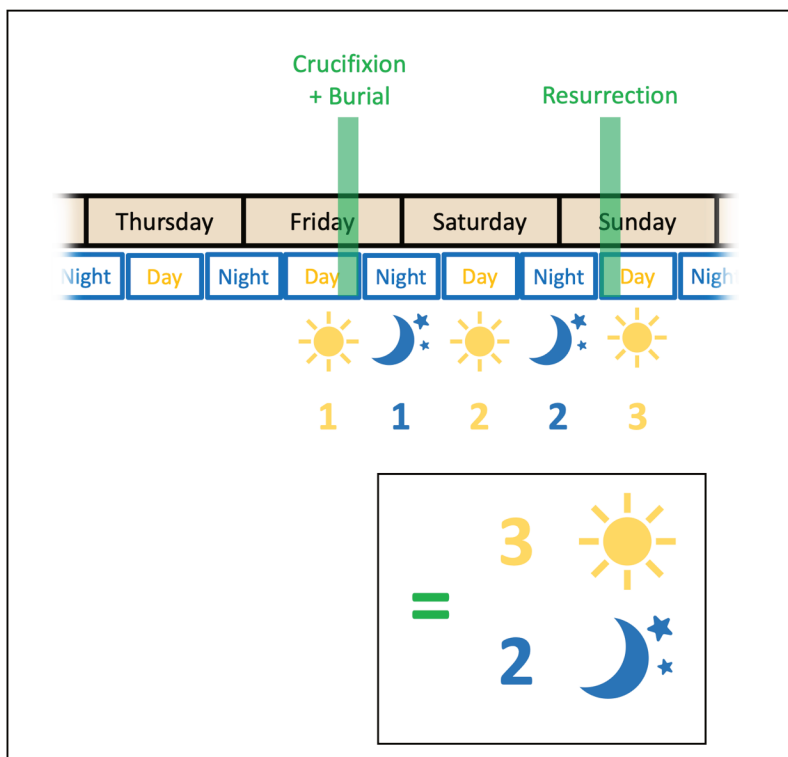
-Matthew 12:40

Proponents of a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion often feel that this statement by Jesus rules out a Friday crucifixion because mid-day Friday through before-sunrise Sunday is not three full twenty-four-hour days. If Jesus died around 3:00 PM on Friday, as the gospels record, then from that time until around sunrise on Sunday would only total about thirty-nine hours – well short of the seventy-two-hours needed for this “down to the nanosecond” interpretation of

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Matthew 12:40 to be accurate. Is this a worthwhile objection? Absolutely not, for this very simple reason: it is commonly recognized that the Jews reckoned any part of a day as a whole day (called inclusive reckoning).¹ The Jews would have considered the traditional Friday to Sunday timeline as three days. In fact, any proposed chronology that includes parts of more than three days *cannot* be considered viable in light of this cultural understanding. That would absolutely rule out a Wednesday crucifixion even if it could be proven that the resurrection happened on Saturday (Wed. to Thurs. to Fri. to Sat. would still be considered *four days* by Jewish reckoning).

However, Sabbatarians often push the argument even further, pointing out that even if you allow that *full* twenty-four-hour days are not required, and just *parts* of three days and three nights are, the traditional chronology still cannot fit.



In other words, the traditional chronology says Jesus was buried before nightfall on Friday. Even if it was just for a few hours before nightfall began, that could be considered “Day 1.” Then, Jesus’s body would have remained in the tomb for that night (“Night 1”), Saturday during the day (“Day 2”), Saturday night (“Night 2”), and then if we allow that Jesus rose as morning was dawning on Sunday, that could be “Day 3”. So, even the most generous timespan according to the traditional chronology will at most, only yield a total of three days and two nights – not the three days and three nights that Matthew 12:40 supposedly requires.

Sabbatarian critics also often claim that because both days and nights are specifically mentioned in Jesus’s quote, then this phrase “three days and three nights” ceases to be a Hebrew idiom and must instead be taken literally. Thus, they conclude that it must at least include *parts* of three days and *parts* of three nights.

You likely can already begin to see part of the problem with this. These advocates are guilty of filtering ancient Hebrew expression through their modern perception and bias. They aim to dictate to all others how the Jews of Jesus’s day and age would have perceived this quote by Jesus. And they cling to this modern-day perception in spite of vast Biblical evidence that proves the contrary. Let’s examine this closer and understand why, from the Bible’s own witness, this hyper-literal “three days and three nights” interpretation must be incorrect.

As we begin, it should first be pointed out that this “three days three nights” view is based on only one passage (Matthew 12:40). It should immediately be seen as a hermeneutical red flag whenever one attempts to establish a doctrine or a belief on the basis of one verse – especially if that belief contradicts the rest of the scriptural commentary on that issue. It is even worse when a single passage is over-emphasized to the exclusion of numerous other passages that provide ample clarity. Instead, one must examine *all* of the evidence at hand in order to ensure he is not using one single difficult passage to try to disprove a multitude of other clear passages. **The Bible is the best interpreter of itself.**

With that in mind, let’s begin to look more closely at this issue

and understand why this objection is contradictory to the way the rest of scripture deals with reckoning lengths of time. First to be discussed is the New Testament evidence.

New Testament Evidence

We will examine several points of evidence taken from the New Testament. The New Testament describes the length and timing of Jesus's death and resurrection by using several *different but equivalent* phrases.

“On the third day”

The most frequent descriptive Biblical phrase referring to Jesus's resurrection is that it occurred **“on the third day”** – or in other words, not on the fourth day (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 10:40; 1 Corinthians 15:4).

But if you take Jesus's “three days and three nights” quote in Matthew as a literal seventy-two hours, then that would mean He would had to have risen *after* a full three days and three nights had passed. In other words, He would have had to rise on the *fourth* day instead of “on the third day.”

“In three days”

The second phrase we see used in the New Testament to describe the resurrection is found in John 2:19-22. In this passage, Jesus spoke of His resurrection, stating that He would be raised up **“in three days.”**

“After three days”

The third phrase used in the New Testament to describe the resurrection is found in four passages (Matthew 27:63; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34). These verses speak of Jesus's resurrection as occurring **“after three days.”** Advocates for the “three days and three nights” view

love this specific phrase because they feel it supports their belief that Jesus had to have been in the grave for a full three days and three nights. They eagerly point out that this phrase specifically says “after” three days.

However, by saying that, they actually undermine their own position, because as was noted while discussing the first phrase, scripture claims Jesus would rise “*on* the third day,” which would contradict this phrase of “*after* three days” if taken hyper-literally. In other words, if you interpret these phrases from a technical modern-day perspective (as Sabbatarians often do), an event cannot logically occur both “*on* the third day” and “*after* three days.” Sabbatarians apparently completely miss the fact that the Bible contradicts itself and them, if a technical modern-day viewpoint is assumed. Consequently, this should be an obvious warning sign, informing us that the “three days and three nights/sign of Jonah” passage is *not* intended to be understood as a literal seventy-two-hour period. But this can be demonstrated even more conclusively from scripture.

The phrase “after three days” is clearly speaking of the same time period as “on the third day” for the following two reasons:

#1 – The three passages in Mark that use the phrase “after three days” have parallel accounts in one or two of the other Synoptic gospels, and in each case the other Synoptic does not use “after three days” as Mark does, but rather uses “on the third day.”

-Mark 8:31 = Matthew 16:21/Luke 9:22

-Mark 9:31 = Matthew 17:23

-Mark 10:34 = Matthew 20:19/Luke 18:33

Thus, the two phrases “after three days” and “on the third day” both mean the same thing – a **period extending to the third day**. This is clearly how it would have been understood by the Jews of that time, and it is clearly the only message conveyed to us by scripture.

#2 – In Matthew 27:63, the Pharisees standing before Pilate state that

Jesus had predicted, “*after* three days I will rise again.” Taken literally, this would mean Jesus was planning to rise on the fourth day. However, the Pharisees (in Verse 64) then asked Pilate if they could have a guard of soldiers to secure the sepulcher “*until* the third day.” The phrase “after three days” must have then been equivalent to “the third day,” otherwise the Pharisees would have asked for a guard of soldiers until the fourth day.

Thus, we can see from scripture itself that a cross-reference of the gospel accounts necessitates that the three phrases used, (“in three days,” “on the third day,” and “after three days”) are all synonymous expressions meant to convey the same message – that Jesus’s time in death would *extend* to the third day.

In the Jewish reckoning of time, it is clear that this would mean that Jesus would be buried on a given day, He would remain in the grave the following day, and then rise on the day after that. This is the clear and simple meaning, and it perfectly aligns with the traditional Friday to Sunday view, while at the same time, making the new alternative views impossible. Let’s now begin to examine the Old Testament evidence.

Old Testament Evidence

We have seen the perfectly harmonious nature of the New Testament gospel accounts which use three different but equivalent phrases to describe the length of time between the crucifixion and the resurrection. We will now look into the Old Testament in order to determine if there is scriptural precedent for the interpretation advocated for in this study – the view that the Jews used inclusive reckoning to express lengths of time, and that the various phrases we just discussed all convey the same meaning of “a time period extending to three days,” as reckoned inclusively.

In other words, do we see this type of language being used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible? The answer is, yes – and we see it used in stunningly similar ways! There are a number of Old Testament

instances that demonstrate inclusive reckoning being used. The following three examples clearly show that a part of a day is equivalent to the whole day in Jewish reckoning:

#1 – In Genesis 42:17, Joseph incarcerated his brothers **for three days**, and then in Verse 18, he spoke to them **on the third day**, and (from the context) released them **on that day**. To a hyper-literalist, this would be self-contradictory. To them, “for three days” should mean a full seventy-two hours, yet we see the brothers were released at some point on the third day – meaning that it had to be *less* than seventy-two hours. However, from the view we advocate for in this study, there is no contradiction. It is reckoning days inclusively, as was the custom of the Jews.

#2 – In 1 Kings 20:29, Israel and Syria camped opposite each other **for seven days**, and **on the seventh day** they began to battle each other. The same concept we just discussed with the last passage is also demonstrated here. The hyper-literalist would have to see this as self-contradictory, as the battle should have begun on the eighth day in order for a full seven days to pass. Again, we see this is not the case.

Note: Keep in mind, we certainly are literal Bible interpreters – but part of literal interpretation requires us to understand the meanings in the way the original writers and audience would have understood them.

#3 – In 2 Chronicles 10:5, Rehoboam stated that the people of Israel were to return to him **in/after** (cf. LXX) **three days**, and in Verse 12, Jeroboam and the people came to Rehoboam **on the third day**.

So, we can see that in the Old Testament, these same kinds of expressions were used to convey the same meaning that we find in the New Testament concerning the resurrection. This should be overwhelming evidence by itself. But the next two examples absolutely seal the deal. These examples clearly invoke a “three days and three

nights” wording that is then subsequently referred to as “three days ago” and “on the third day” – *exactly* the same verbiage initially used by Jesus in Matthew 12:40, and then subsequently referred to by the equivalent phrases throughout the gospels.

#4 – In 1 Samuel 30:12, an abandoned Egyptian servant had not eaten bread or drunk water for **“three days and three nights,”** yet in Verse 13 he states that his master left him behind **three days ago**. This wording aligns exactly with Matthew 12:40 and Luke 24:21.

#5 – In Esther 4:16, Esther asks the Jews, “Do not eat or drink **for three days, night or day,** I also and my maidens will fast **likewise,**” and then she would go in to the king. The hyper-literalist must expect her to then go in to the king on the fourth day after the full three days and three nights were completed. However, in Esther 5:1, the passage tells us that she went in to the king **“on the third day.”** Again, this exact wording is also seen in the various New Testament accounts of the resurrection – proving that the phrase “three days and three nights” is not meant to be understood as a period of exactly seventy-two hours.

Therefore, we clearly find that the Old Testament also demonstrates that the expressions “three days,” “on the third day,” and “three days and three nights” are equivalent phrases all used to express the same period of time – three days as reckoned inclusively, and *not* a literal seventy-two hours.

Note: Again, we hope nobody takes this to mean that we don’t believe in interpreting the Bible literally. We are not attacking literal Bible interpretation; that is our foundational hermeneutic. However, it is important to understand when figures of speech are being used. It is also important to understand how certain phrases in language were interpreted by the audience of the period. As we have seen, the Bible generally gives us plenty of material we can use to help us interpret

accurately. **The Bible is the best interpreter of itself. And when it does, we must accept it.**

Earlier, we examined the Luke 24 account as one of our points of evidence in determining that Sunday was three days from the crucifixion. While we're discussing the topic of inclusive reckoning, let's once again revisit this key chapter. As we read through it, the key takeaway is that the gospels are absolutely clear that **Sunday was the third day from the crucifixion**. We will specifically examine the verses that are relevant to the timeline being expressed in this chapter – Verses 1, 13, 20, and 21.

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** [the first day of the week, Sunday] to a village called Emmaus ... 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

So, as was discussed earlier in this study, this passage provides us with rock-solid anchoring points. The chapter begins with the women at the tomb on Sunday, is clear in Verse 1. Verse 13 continues the narrative, switching the focus from the women at the tomb to the sorrowful disciples on the road to Emmaus, but making clear that this was taking place “that same day.” Verse 20 designates Jesus’s crucifixion as being the subject of these disciples’s sorrow; and then Verse 21 clearly states that “to day” (Sunday), was the “third day since these things (meaning the crucifixion) were done.” This chapter clearly communicates that Sunday is “the third day” from the crucifixion. The crucifixion therefore cannot include any part of Wednesday or Thursday. If the crucifixion took place any time on a Wednesday or a Thursday, inclusive reckoning would be violated. Either of those scenarios

(Wednesday to Sunday or Thursday to Sunday) would be a solid four or five days.

Based upon how “three days” has been understood throughout scripture (as has been conclusively shown), there should be no difficulty or controversy in accepting this to mean a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection. From the internal testimony of both the Old and New Testaments, scripture absolutely *demands* that we accept Friday to Sunday as being three days, according to Jewish inclusive reckoning. Thus, the comprehensive evidence from scripture indicates that the only justifiable interpretation of the three phrases we discussed (“in three days,” “after three days,” and “on the third day”) is one that is consistent with a Friday to Sunday timeline. And as we’ve also shown, the alternative views are so fundamentally flawed that if not for the Sabbatarians’s disdain for Sunday, it’s unlikely that they ever would have been suggested.

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1. Emil G. Hirsch and Michael Friedländer, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, entry “Day (Hebrew, ‘yom’),” *JewishEncyclopedia.com*. (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5007-day> - Retrieved 6/18/18)

CHAPTER 8

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

If you are a believer in a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion, you must recognize that it is not as simple as just picking one of those days. Your choice of a crucifixion day will need to satisfy a number of very limiting criteria points, with each major point having its own list of numerous sub-criteria. Let's examine some examples of these major criteria points that eliminate the alternative chronologies as being legitimate options for dating the Passion Week.

#1 – Astronomical Evidence

Astronomy can be used to reconstruct the Jewish calendar in the first century AD, and hence, rule out many impossible dates, while identifying the most *probable* date of the crucifixion.

The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar, which, in the first century AD, was determined by observing the new lunar crescent. Each Jewish month began with the evening when the new crescent was for the first time visible, shortly after sunset. Hence the Jewish day began in the evening, and the first day of each month was the day of first visibility.¹

Astronomical calculations have been used to reconstruct the Jewish calendar in the first century AD. Colin J. Humphreys and W.G.

Waddington computed the visibility of the lunar crescent seen from Jerusalem using the most current astronomical theory, in which we can have considerable confidence.² From the evidence we have, the years of 30-36 AD comprise the possible window in which the crucifixion could have occurred. The dates of Nisan 14 (Passover) for each of these years are given in the below table.

| 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 |
| <p>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.</p> <p>* 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.</p> <p>† In each of these cases it is not impossible, but highly improbable, that Nisan 14 would have occurred on the preceding day.</p> | | | | |
| <p>-Colin J. Humphreys and W.G. Waddington, "The Jewish Calendar, A Lunar Eclipse And The Date Of Christ's Crucifixion," in <i>Tyndale Bulletin</i> 43.2, 1992, pp. 331-351, and Table 1, p. 335.</p> | | | | |

Proponents of the “Wednesday Passover” theory would have to identify a year within that timeframe in which Passover (Nisan 14) fell on a Wednesday, and Unleavened Bread (Nisan 15) fell on a Thursday. It turns out there is only one year during that timeframe in which this happens – the year 34 AD – a year next-to-nobody seriously suggests as being the year of the crucifixion, for a number of reasons. Put

simply, 34 AD would have to satisfy a number of other criteria points (which it clearly doesn't). For further investigation of this, please refer to our companion study entitled, *The Daniel 9:25 Prophecy – An Exact Timeline For The Arrival Of The Messiah* in the chapters entitled, "The Dating of the Ending Point (Parts 1+2)."

As evidenced by the eight Biblical clues examined in that study, which narrow down the date of the crucifixion, there is absolutely *no* reason to consider 34 AD as a candidate year. Instead, the evidence consulted showed that the year of Jesus's crucifixion was 33 AD – a year in which Passover fell on a Friday and Unleavened Bread fell on a Saturday.

The reality is that the overwhelming majority of the time, those who advocate for alternative chronologies don't take any of these criteria points into account when nominating a certain day of the week. They usually don't even recognize that these criteria points exist. As we've shown earlier in this study, these people are almost always motivated by a deviant doctrinal belief that they hope to find support for in an alternative the Passion week chronology.

#2 – The Daniel 9:25 "Countdown To The Messiah"

An often-overlooked criteria point for proposing a legitimate crucifixion year concerns its alignment with the Daniel 9:25 prophecy. This passage is home to what many have called the most incredible prophecy in the Bible, where the angel Gabriel gives Daniel a prophetic countdown to the First Coming of the Messiah.

In the previous verse (verse 24), the angel tells Daniel that there would be a total of seventy "weeks" (or heptads, meaning groupings of seven) concerning the future of the Jews and Jerusalem. We know this refers to seventy heptads of *years* (or 490 years total). Through these seventy "weeks of years," God would bring about the conclusion of His prophetic program for Israel and for the world. This passage reads as follows.

A Refutation Of Alternative Chronologies Of The Passion Week

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

In the verses that follow, Gabriel then begins to further explain how these seventy weeks would break down. For example, in verse 25, he focuses on the first sixty-nine weeks, providing both a beginning point and an ending point for this prophetic timeline.

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 angel declares that the event that initiates the countdown is a decree or commandment that Jerusalem (which at that time had been destroyed by the Babylonians) would be rebuilt. In our companion study on this topic, we demonstrate that this took place when the Persian king Artaxerxes Longimanus issued this command in the Jewish month Nisan (our March/April) of the year 444 BC.

The angel also declares the ending point – the coming of the Messiah, the anointed Prince or King (*Meschiach Nagid*). In our companion study, we carefully and conclusively show that this ending point could only be identified as one very conspicuous event – the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, an event thoroughly documented in the gospels. We then demonstrate that this event can be dated to Monday, Nisan 10 (March 30) of the year 33 AD, four days (as we count) before His crucifixion on Friday of that same week.

We then show that this time duration (from the beginning point to the ending point) precisely fits the sixty-nine weeks, as the book of Daniel predicted over five hundred years ahead of time! And so, with

this understanding cemented in place, one cannot simply pick a crucifixion year of their own choosing. All of these dates are interconnected, and therefore, any crucifixion date must be in alignment with this countdown. If the Daniel 9:25 prophecy is new to you, it is recommended to refer to the companion study mentioned in order to appreciate how much rigorous effort goes into arriving at accurate dates.

Of course, when all of the evidence is accurately understood, there can be only one year that works, and that is 33 AD. This eliminates any possibility of alternative Passion Week chronologies, as it is well established that Passover took place on Friday of that year (not Wednesday or Thursday). As you can see, all of our criteria points are in alignment with each other – all supporting the traditional chronology, while destroying any possibility of the alternatives.

In conclusion, it should be recognized that these (astronomical evidence and Daniel's messianic countdown) are just two of the primary criterial points with which any proposed crucifixion date must align. In the end, this exercise is similar to solving a jigsaw puzzle. Each square must be aligned perfectly. If any one square is incorrect, not only does the puzzle remain unsolved, but it throws off the accurate placement of the other squares. In order to solve the puzzle, it must be understood that all of the pieces are interconnected and must remain in harmony.

This also applies to the situation we are examining regarding an accurate understanding of the Passion Week chronology. Because there is so much evidence that all needs to fit together, one would be faced with a daunting task in order to construct an alternative chronology (such as a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion). Everything has to mesh perfectly, and if you're wrong on one point, it throws everything else off as well, showing your hypothesis to be errant.

Consideration of these points allows us to not only have confidence but certainty in our conclusion, since only one set of dates between 30 and 36 AD satisfies all of the necessary conditions for the crucifixion and resurrection – that being Friday, April 3rd to Sunday, April 5th of 33 AD. This is the only time that accurately aligns with all

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criteria points, and is realistically the *only* option for the accurate dating of the Passion Week of Jesus Christ.

The Bible, as well as accompanying sources in history and archeology, and supported by modern scientific discoveries, accurately nail down the dates of Jesus's crucifixion and the events that took place surrounding it. And because of all of this evidence, our confidence that we can know the exact dates concerning these events should be as high as it has ever been in history.

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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* 43.2, 1992, pp. 331-351, and Table 1, p. 335.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

As we bring our study to a close, we can rest in the assurance that the Friday crucifixion and the Sunday resurrection are not later developments of the Catholic Church, as some opponents suggest. And as plain as the Bible is in its inference of a Friday crucifixion, *it is even more adamant regarding the Sunday resurrection*. Consider the following points of summary:

- All four gospel accounts reveal how Jesus rose (and His tomb was found empty) on the first day of the week, or Sunday (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1; cf. 20:19).
- The phrase “the first day of the week” appears eight times in the most widely used English translations of the New Testament. Based on this understanding of the text, Christians have always assembled to worship God on Sunday in celebration of His resurrection; a fact clearly attested to in the quotes of the early Church fathers.

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- The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, commanding them to make regular contributions “on the first day of the week” (1 Corinthians 16:2), or “on the first day of every week” as rendered in the NASB, NIV, and RSV.
- In the book of Acts, Luke recorded how Paul, while on his third missionary journey, assembled with the Christians in Troas “on the first day of the week” (Acts 20:7).

The idea that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, and that Christians from primitive times have always gathered to worship on this day are plain facts. We therefore have no scriptural or historical reason to believe the resurrection happened on a Saturday, but ample evidence that Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, as the gospels all tell us. Thus, after examining all of the relevant data, and after putting the alternative claims to the test, we can clearly conclude that the traditional Christian view of the timeline of the Passion Week of Christ is firmly established, while the alternative chronologies are thoroughly refuted.

APPENDIX

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

While on the subject of the chronology of the Passion Week, we thought it appropriate to give some needed attention to a long-standing point of confusion regarding its chronology. While not especially relevant to the debate this study has undertaken between the traditional view and the Armstrongist view of the crucifixion and resurrection, we thought it appropriate to include this appended section.

The apparent incongruences we will examine appear to be between the chronology given by John and the chronologies given by the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke). This “problem” has been used by critics to question the inerrancy of the Bible. In other words, if the gospel accounts themselves appear contradictory, how can the Bible truly be free of error? And how can a book containing errors be divinely inspired? With the inerrancy of the Bible supposedly being at stake, we consider it worthwhile to undertake an examination of these apparent discrepancies.

There often exists confusion in determining whether Jesus was crucified on the day the Passover lambs were killed (the 14th) or on Unleavened Bread (the 15th). A careful study of all relevant passages in the gospels would at first seem to reveal that John’s chronology of

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the final night of Jesus's life is contradictory to that which is found in the Synoptics.

As we begin to unpack this issue, it is important to remember that "the Passover" in the connotative sense was a seven to eight-day holiday (depending on how the days are counted) that began with preparations on the 14th (the day when all leaven was purged from the home and the lamb was killed and roasted), continued into the 15th (being "Unleavened Bread," technically the "first day of Passover," when the 14th turned into the 15th at nightfall and the prepared lamb was consumed at the Seder meal), continued into the following Sunday ("First-Fruits") and ended on the 21st (the last day unleavened bread would be eaten).

Thus, unleavened bread was eaten throughout this feast, and for this reason, it is also sometimes connotatively called "the days of unleavened bread" (Exodus 23; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28; Deuteronomy 16). It is important for us to resist the urge to strictly apply the labels of "Passover" and Unleavened Bread" in a way foreign to how they are used in the Bible. In fact, these labels, if held strictly, will only confuse us and guarantee an incorrect conclusion. For instance, consider Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:2, which are two parallel passages communicating the same thing.

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

In these passages, it is clear that the Bible at times refers to even the eve of Passover when the lambs are killed (the 14th) as the first day of unleavened bread. Without considering these verses, one might

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initially be tempted to think the “first day of unleavened bread” had to begin on the 15th, as the seven-day festival began at nightfall with the Passover Seder. However, these two passages prove to us that the label “first day of unleavened bread” is also used to mean “the day when the lambs were killed,” which we know from the Old Testament is the 14th – the day known as *Erev Pesach*, or the Eve of Passover. So, with that said, let’s continue and point out the apparent discrepancies.

The Synoptics (including the two passages we just read), tell us that sometime during the day, the disciples prepared the Passover meal on the “first day of unleavened bread” when the lambs were killed (Mark 14:12; c.f. Matthew 26:17; Luke 22:7-8). If we continue reading, we see that Jesus and His disciples apparently took part in a Passover/Last Supper meal *that evening*, and then *the next day* Jesus was crucified.

But the gospel of John states that Jesus was crucified *before* the Jews ate their Passover meals. We read this in John’s account of the trials of Jesus early the following morning (the morning *after* Jesus and the disciples had already eaten their Passover meal).

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 Jews at Jesus’s overnight/early morning trial refused to enter the Praetorium “so that they would not be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover,” implying that the Jews’s Passover in Jerusalem was *still yet to be held after nightfall that same day* (nightfall would begin the next day according to how the Jews reckoned time). If you keep reading, John’s account tells us that Jesus was crucified later that same day (John 19:14) before nightfall.

Do you see the apparent discrepancies? Why did Jesus and His disciples eat what clearly appeared to be a Passover meal a full day *before* the Pharisees and Jews in Jerusalem apparently ate theirs? How is it possible that during the daylight hours prior to Jesus and the

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disciples's Passover meal, it is already referred to as the "first day of unleavened bread when they killed the Passover lambs" (Mark 14:12; et al.)? And yet, John's account would clearly identify the day Jesus was crucified as being "the day the lambs are killed" since the Jews still wouldn't be eating their Passover meals until after nightfall later that day.

Let's put this another way, this time focusing on the day of the month. We see from the passages mentioned (Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12) that during the day on the first day of the feast, the disciples were preparing the Passover meal that Jesus would conduct. However, if placed into John's chronology, this would appear to be the 13th of Nisan, not the 14th. Remember, John says that the Jews in Jerusalem were preparing to eat their Passover meals as evening fell on the day Jesus was crucified. The meal takes place on the 15th, which means Jesus was crucified on the 14th (the day the lambs are killed, or *Erev Pesach*), and therefore the disciples's Passover preparations the day prior had to be the 13th. (Once again, keep in mind that Jewish days go from sundown to sundown.)

Are you seeing the problem? Jesus celebrated a Passover meal in an evening, but earlier that day (which would have been the previous Jewish day – the 13th), these passages in Matthew and Mark designate as being the first day of the feast when the lambs are killed, which we know from the Old Testament is actually the 14th. If you assume that day (when the disciples were preparing) was in fact the 14th, then the Jews in Jerusalem (John 18:28) were celebrating their Passover a day late (it would have been the 16th by then). If you assume the Jews in Jerusalem were celebrating their Passover on the 15th (which should be the correct day), then the statement in Mark 14:12 about the day the disciples began to prepare is actually a day too early. The lambs are killed on the 14th, not the 13th.

Further, we have seen that John 19:31 calls the Saturday after Jesus was crucified a "high" Sabbath, meaning one of the seven Levitical feast days also fell on that particular day.¹ In the Passover context of John 18:28, this could only mean one thing – that the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which took place on the 15th of Nisan, coincided with a

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normal Saturday Sabbath, making it a High Sabbath. This is significant, as it would then mean that the day Jesus was crucified (the day before) was the 14th. This would then mean that the day before that (the day Jesus and the disciples prepared their Passover meal, which the Matthew and Mark passages call the “first day of the feast” was actually the 13th. However, from the Old Testament, we know that the 13th of course is not biblically the first day of Unleavened Bread.

Therefore, any way you slice it, the events recorded from the time Jesus’s disciples ask to prepare the meal until the time Jesus is crucified clearly take place during two consecutive days, and yet, according to the verbiage in the gospels, it would all seem to take place on the first day of the feast, which is obviously impossible. It would seem as if there were two “first days of the feast” – the first on which Jesus and His disciples prepared their Passover meal and ate it after nightfall, and the second on which Jesus was crucified and the Judeans and Temple elders were preparing to eat their Passover meal that evening after nightfall. Clearly, there is an inconsistency somewhere. Did the Bible make a mistake, or did Jesus’s Passover meal actually take place the day before, as the 13th turned into the 14th at evening? If so, how could it be called a Passover meal?

We believe the answer to this apparent dilemma is that there were two calendars that were in use in Israel – the Galilean and the Judean. The Jews celebrated the first day of Passover on two consecutive days. Bible scholar and professor Dr. 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 celebrated the Passover on Thursday night (as the 13th turned into the 14th) according to the Pharisaic or Galilean calendar, which is exactly how the timeline is presented in the Synoptics. But John was going off of the Judean or Sadducean calendar when he wrote his gospel, which used the appropriate verbiage for their reckoning of the first day of the feast on the

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14th. They ate their Passover meal on the night following the crucifixion as the 14th turned into the 15th.

This notion of there essentially being a two-day start to the Passover feast is not only an idea, but actually would appear to be necessary from a logistical standpoint. Since there were so many people in Jerusalem needing to sacrifice a lamb for their families, it would seem virtually impossible to sacrifice enough lambs, even in a full twenty-four-hour period. The ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus estimates that about a quarter-million lambs were slaughtered during the Passover.³

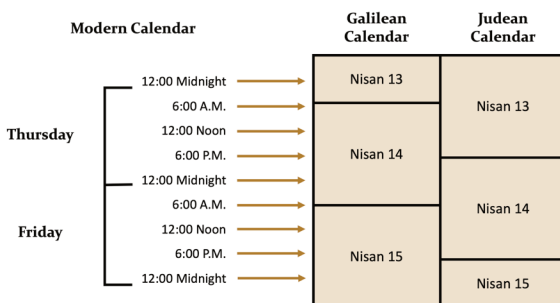
Modern historians have a difficult time understanding how that many lambs could be killed on one day, especially only during the span of several hours in which the sacrifices were to be performed.⁴ Even if Josephus's numbers were exaggerated, an incredible number of lambs still needed to be sacrificed for the Passover ritual. By spreading this out over two days, it would better allow for the needed number of sacrifices to be performed. Thus, 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/Pharisees could have used a different way of reckoning the day from the Judeans/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

Thursday – Friday of the Passion Week



This would make sense in light of the apparent discrepancy found in the Mark 14:12 passage, where instead of the first day of the feast beginning at nightfall on the 14th, instead the entire daylight period before (on the 13th) was considered the first day. They would have considered that to be the 14th, as their day began at sunrise, making their Passover a full day earlier. Therefore, Jesus’s disciples could have come to Him that morning (the 13th according to Judean reckoning), asking to prepare the Passover, which He would have eaten at nightfall as the 13th turned into the 14th. And all day on the 13th (according to Judean reckoning) would be correctly called the first day of the feast, which according to the Galilean/Pharisaic reckoning, was the 14th.

We can summarize these two groups as follows:

- **The Galilean Jews reckoned the day from sunrise-to-sunrise.** This made the Last Supper a Passover meal according to their reckoning. Provided the two-day period of sacrificing the Passover lambs, the disciples would have been able to have the Passover lamb slaughtered in the afternoon on Thursday in preparation for the “last supper” Seder meal that took place as Thursday turned into Friday at nightfall.

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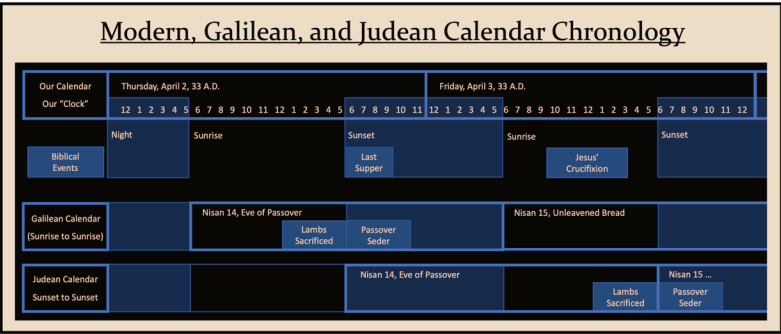
- **The Judean Jews reckoned the day from sunset-to-sunset.** They would not have considered the “last supper” a Passover meal. They had their Passover lamb slaughtered on Friday afternoon, and ate their Seder as Friday turned into Saturday – the “High Sabbath” of Unleavened Bread.

From a practical perspective, it is interesting to ponder the reasons why this practice may have begun. We know that God established the Levitical Feasts as divine appointments that He would one day fulfill. If His appointment was to be the ultimate Passover Lamb, then He had to die on the actual Passover day in which the lambs were being killed. Could He have deliberately arranged for this two-day practice, which would allow Him to conduct a sort of “pre-Passover” last supper ritual with His disciples, while still being able to act out His part as the sacrificed Passover Lamb the following day? It would seem that as usual, there are no coincidences and everything in the Bible has a divine purpose!

Thus, when incorporating this calendrical understanding, we can readily grasp that what seemed to be an irreconcilable contradiction actually fits together neatly, ensuring the timeline is exactly as we thought. Jesus ate the last supper Passover meal in the evening after Thursday (the 13th) turned into Friday (the 14th). He was then arrested later that night and was crucified during the day on Friday (which was still the 14th). He was then buried in time for the Unleavened Bread Passover Seder that the Judeans and Temple elders were eating as the 15th began.

Because it is difficult to envision three different calendar reckonings (Galilean, Judean, and our modern Gregorian), the following chart may be a helpful visual aid to understanding the above reconciliation.

Thursday – Friday of the Passion Week



We hope this appended chapter did not confuse you more than you already may have been, but we consider any exploration of apparent Biblical contradictions worthwhile for an apologetics standpoint!

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2. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977, p. 82.
3. Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, in *Josephus, The Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998, VI, 9.3, p. 898.
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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