

Crucifixion Wednesday

Tradition VS Scripture

Crucifixion Wednesday

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The events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ have puzzled people in more ways than one. The puzzle being considered here is how Jesus was buried for three days and three nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. A quick count of days reveals that there are only two nights and one day between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. This is puzzling because Jesus said 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.” You see, Jesus specified three days and three nights rather than generalize the time by saying, “about three days.”

In order to get an accurate counting of days and nights, consider the time of Christ’s burial. Matthew 27:57&58 reveals the time of Jesus’ burial saying “When the even was come, ... Joseph ... begged the body of Jesus....” In other words, Jesus was buried at the end of the day, in the evening. So our count of days and nights must begin with the first night not the first day.

Additionally, we must consider when Jesus was resurrected and left the tomb. Mark 16:2 says, “And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.” When the women came to the tomb, the stone was already rolled away, and an angel in the tomb told them, “Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.” So, Jesus was already gone before the women came to the tomb very early Sunday morning. This means that Jesus was out of the tomb before dawn.

Are you counting? How many nights are there between Friday evening and Sunday morning? Two nights and one day is all one can squeeze in between Good Friday and resurrection Sunday. Do we resort to Scriptural gymnastics and twist the meaning of Jesus’ statements saying that He said this but really meant something else? Of course not. There is a solution to the apparent problem.

Table 1

Nights	Days
Friday night	
Saturday night	Saturday
2 nights	1 day

First, because Jesus was raised before Sunday morning, three days and three nights after being buried, it is obvious that Jesus was not crucified and buried on Friday. “Good Friday” is a day designated by tradition of men not by Scripture. Romans 3:4 reminds us that when traditions are contrary to Scripture, “let God be true, but every man a liar.”

To figure out which day Jesus died, we count backwards from Sunday. Counting three days and three nights prior to Sunday morning, brings us to Thursday morning.

Table 2

Nights	Days
Saturday night	Saturday
Friday night	Friday
Thursday night	Thursday
3 nights	3 days

But, according to Matthew 27:57-60, Jesus was buried in the evening not in the morning. So then, we have to consider that Jesus was not raised Sunday morning but Saturday evening.

Counting backwards three days and three nights prior to Saturday evening, brings us to Wednesday evening.

Table 3

Nights	Days
Friday night	Saturday
Thursday night	Friday
Wednesday night	Thursday
3 nights	3 days

This scenario conforms to the three days and three nights that Jesus spent in the grave, and places the burial of Jesus in the evening. However, there are a couple of other questions that must be answered.

Was Jesus resurrected on Saturday or Sunday?

Jesus was resurrected on Sunday the first day of the week. However, He was already gone before the dawning of Sunday morning when the women arrived. As we already noticed, Jesus could not have spent Saturday night in the grave prior to Sunday morning, so when on Sunday was He resurrected?

It may surprise you to learn that Jesus arose from the grave after 6:00pm Saturday evening. For the twentieth century, this is the beginning of Saturday evening. But for the Jews, two thousand years ago, this was the beginning of Sunday. Even now, the weekly Jewish Sabbath, which is Saturday, begins at 6:00 p.m. Friday evening and ends Saturday evening at 6:00pm. According to Jewish time, by leaving the grave after 6:00pm Saturday evening, Jesus arose on Sunday.

Let's consider this point more. For Jews, each day began in the evening at 6:00pm. Thus, a twenty-four hour day is described as the "evening and the morning" not the "morning and the evening."

Have you ever noticed the description of the six days of creation in the book of Genesis? Genesis 1:5 says, "And the evening and the morning were the first day." The days were described as the evening and the morning, not the morning and the evening. For Jews, six o'clock in the evening was the beginning of a new day. By Biblical reckoning, Jesus was crucified Wednesday and was in the grave that same night, which would be Thursday night for the Jews. Counting the nights and days Biblically, of Jesus' time spent in the grave, after His crucifixion on Wednesday, would look like the following.

Table 4

Nights	Days
Thursday night	Thursday
Friday night	Friday
Saturday night	Saturday
3 nights	3 days

Notice that Tables 3 and 4 are the same except for the naming of the days and nights. Table three is how we name the days and nights today. Table 4 shows how the days and nights are named in the Bible.

The first day of the week for the Jew began Saturday evening at 6:00pm. This was the beginning of Sunday. Biblically, Sunday begins in the evening. So if Jesus rose at the beginning of the first day of the week, it would have been in the evening not in the morning. When the women came to His tomb early Sunday morning, He was already gone. In fact, His tomb had been empty all night!

What about the Sabbath day?

Luke 23:53-54 says that the burial of Jesus was the day **before** the Sabbath. Because Saturday is the **regular** Sabbath of the week, many assume that Christ had to be crucified on Friday.

However, John 19:31 explains that this was not the regular, weekly Sabbath on Saturday, saying, “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,)....” In other words, Jesus was crucified and buried the day before a **High** Sabbath not a regular Saturday Sabbath.

What is a high Sabbath?

A *Sabbath* is a day set aside for devotion to God when no work is to be done. Saturday was the regular, weekly Sabbath. Other Sabbath days that did not fall on Saturday were called **high** Sabbaths. They could occur on **any** day of the week. As John 19:31 indicates, Jesus was crucified on the day of preparation before the first day of the Passover feast. According to Leviticus 23:5-7, God told Israel that, “In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.” The first day of the Passover occurred on the 15th day of the month Abib every year and was a Sabbath day. If it occurred on a day other than Saturday, it was called a high day. Thus, if Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, then Thursday was the high Sabbath. This conforms to what the Bible says in John 19:31.

Summary

The following points summarize what has been discussed.

1. Jesus was in the grave three days and three nights.
2. Jesus was buried in the late afternoon.
3. Jesus was gone before dawn Sunday morning.
4. Each new day began in the evening.
5. Jesus was buried the day before the high Sabbath.

In light of Biblical information, Jesus was crucified on Wednesday. After spending three days and three nights in the grave, He was resurrected shortly after Saturday in the evening.

Study guide

1. How many days and nights did Jesus spend in the grave?
(Matthew 12:40) _____
2. At what time of day was Jesus buried? (Matthew 27:57&58)

3. When did the women see that Jesus' grave was empty?
(Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-2, 9; Luke 24:1)

4. What is the latest time of the day that Jesus could have been resurrected? (John 20:1) _____
5. What is the earliest time of the day that Jesus could have been resurrected? (Matthew 27:63; Mark 8:31)

6. Why did the Jews not want Jesus hanging on the cross?
(John 19:31) _____
7. What is a high Sabbath? _____
8. When did each day officially begin in the Bible and for the Jews? (Genesis 1:5) _____

Key verses

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 27:57&58 “When the even was come, ... Joseph ... begged the body of Jesus....

John 19:31 “The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,)”

Leviticus 23:5-7 “In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.”

Genesis 1:5 “And the evening and the morning were the first day.”

Matthew 28:6 “He is not here: for he is risen as he said.”

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