

# ON WHAT DAY DID JESUS DIE?

The church has traditionally spoken of “Good Friday” as the day on which Jesus was crucified and buried with the resurrection then taking place on the following Sunday. Several alternate views have been voiced as to which day of the week the crucifixion took place.

Evidences for the Day of Christ’s Crucifixion		
Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Takes Matthew 12:40 referring to 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth and mandates three full 24 hour periods.</li> <li>- Claims that Jesus rose on Saturday night.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Takes Matthew 12:40 referring to 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth and mandates at least a portion of a day and a portion of a night.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scriptures state that Jesus was raised on the third day (1 Cor 15:4; Acts 10:40).</li> <li>- Jews commonly spoke of 3 days and 3 nights as any portion thereof.</li> </ul>
Both these views hinge upon a literal reading of a single verse: Matthew 12:40.		This view is supported throughout the New Testament.
Both these views reinterpret any mention of the Sabbath day to be a reference to the Passover		Jesus was taken down from the cross just prior to the Sabbath (Mt 27:62-63).
Taught by Scroggie who looks to the embalming taking place on Friday.	View held by Wescott	Traditional View held by Hoehner, MacArthur, Hendricksen, Robertson

The lines of evidence fall into three major areas: Those passages that speak of the “third day,” Matthew 12:30 that gives the prophecy of “three days and three nights,” and those passages that correlate the crucifixion event with the Sabbath.

## 1. The Third Day.

In looking back at the crucifixion and resurrection as an accomplished fact, the Scriptures are uniform in describing the resurrection as having taken place on the “third day.”

*He was buried, and that He was raised on the **third day** according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:4).*

*God raised Him up on the **third day**, and granted that He should become visible (Acts 10:40).*

*But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the **third day** since these things happened (Luke 24:21).*

Matthew records the Jewish authorities going to Pilate and speaking of the prophecy of the resurrection, saying: “*Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After **three days** I am to rise again.’* <sup>64</sup> *Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until **the third day**, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.” (Matthew 27:63-64). Notice that their concern was that the tomb be made secure until the third day.*

## 2. Three Days and Three Nights.

*For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40).*

It is claimed by some that this prophecy mandates either a Wednesday or a Thursday date for the crucifixion. However it is recognized by scholars that the expression “one day and one night” is a Hebraism used by the Jews to indicate a day, even when a full 24 hour period is not necessarily in view. There are several examples of this seen in the Old Testament. In 1 Samuel 30:12-13 we read of David’s men finding an Egyptian: *And they gave him a piece of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate; then his spirit revived. For he had not eaten bread or drunk water for **three days and three nights**.* <sup>13</sup> *And David said to him, “To whom do you belong? And where are you from?” And he said, “I am a young man of Egypt, a servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind when I fell sick **three days ago**.” (1 Samuel 30:12-13).*

Another example of this same sort of usage is seen in Acts 10 and Peter’s visit to Cornelius. In Acts 10:1-3 Cornelius has a vision and dispatches men to meet with Peter.

Day #	Event	Scripture
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0	Cornelius sees a vision	Acts 10:1-3
1	Peter sees his vision on the “next day” and entertains the servants of Cornelius	Acts 10:9
2	Peter sets out with the servants of Cornelius on the “next day”	Acts 10:23
3	“On the following day” they arrive at Caesarea	Acts 10:24
<p>Yet as Cornelius relates the series of events, he says that it was “four days ago at this very hour” (Acts 10:30). This can only mean that he counted the day on which the event took place as the first day.</p>		

If this were not enough, we also have the testimony of Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah from the first century who, while commenting upon Jonah 1:17 and its reference to three days and three nights, wrote that *a day and a night are an Onah and the portion of an Onah is as the whole part of it* (Jerusalem Talmud: Shabbath 9:3).

The same principle is revealed in the circumcision of babies. Genesis 17:12 specifies *he that is eight days old* is to be circumcised, but Luke 1:59 tells us that Jesus was circumcised *on the eighth day*. Luke 2:21 uses still another expression: *When eight days were accomplished*.

Another example of this inclusive reckoning is seen in Joseph’s dealing with his brothers. Genesis 42:17 says that *he put them all together in prison for three days*. In the next verse, we see him calling them out on the third day.

In 2 Chronicles 10:5, Rehoboam calls the people to *return to me again in three days*. Verse 12 says that they came back *on the third day*.

### 3. The Sabbath.

*And when evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the **Sabbath**,<sup>43</sup> Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus (Mark 15:42-43).*

Some have pointed out that the word Sabbath appears in the plural in the Greek

text so that there was more than one Sabbath in view. Over against this, we must point out that the word Sabbath regularly appears in the plural even though a regular Sabbath is in view:

- Acts 13:14. *But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.*
- Acts 16:13. *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside...*
- Acts 20:7. *And on the first day of the week (literally, “the Sabbaths”), when we were gathered together to break bread...*

Furthermore, the actions of Joseph are said to have taken place BECAUSE it was the day before the Sabbath and evening had already come. This would imply that the Sabbath was about to begin and that Joseph wished the burial to take place prior to that time. Since the Sabbath began at Sundown on Friday evening, this would place the crucifixion on Friday.

Luke gives us the same chronology regarding the Sabbath: *And it was the preparation day, and the **Sabbath** was about to begin. <sup>55</sup> Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed after, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. <sup>56</sup> And they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the **Sabbath** they rested according to the commandment.* (Luke 23:54-56). Notice that in Luke’s case we have a mention of the day before the Sabbath, the Sabbath itself and then the very next mention is of the first day of the week (Luke 24:1). There is no hint of any other intervening days.

John’s account confirms the chronology of Matthew and Luke and adds the note that the Sabbath was a “high day”: *The Jews therefore, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the **Sabbath** (for that **Sabbath** was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away* (John 19:31).

It is argued by those who would hold to either a Wednesday or a Thursday crucifixion that John’s reference to that Sabbath being a “high day” means that it was the Passover that was being termed a Sabbath. Over against such an argument it must be pointed out that the term “Sabbath” when used in a historical narrative invariably means exactly that -- the weekly Sabbath and not some other day of the week. The description of a “high day” does indeed seem to mean that this was more than a regular Sabbath. The same Greek term is used in the Septuagint of Isaiah 1:13 where the Lord says, “*Bring your worthless offerings no longer,*

*Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies (the LXX reads “great day”)-- I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.”*

However, when John says *that Sabbath was a great day*, he is not saying that the Sabbath was not on the Sabbath day, but rather that in view of what was going on that week, this was a very special Sabbath. This particular Sabbath was a great day because it was ALSO the Passover.

4. The 14th of Nisan.

The Passover traditionally took place upon the 14th of Nisan, the day of the Full Moon. According to the US Naval Observatory, in the years 30 and 33 A.D. the 14th of Nisan took place upon a Friday.<sup>1</sup> This coincides with John 19:14 that tells us the day of the crucifixion was *“the day of preparation for the Passover.”*

Year	Day of the week of the 14th of Nisan
28 A.D.	Tuesday
29 A.D.	Monday
30 A.D.	Friday
31 A.D.	Tuesday
32 A.D.	Sunday
33 A.D.	Friday
34 A.D.	Wednesday

Though not necessary as a point of evidence, it is of interest to note that some astronomers have noted that a partial lunar eclipse would have been visible from Jerusalem on the evening of the 14th of Nisan, A.D. 33. Depending upon the atmospheric conditions, this could have given the moon a reddish color, making it appear as though it had turned to blood. Such an observation is striking given the prophecy quoted by Peter in Acts 2 that the sun would be darkened and the moon would turn to blood.

In conclusion, I believe that the weight of Scripture agrees with the Traditional View in holding Friday to be the day of the week on which Jesus was crucified.

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1. <http://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/docs/crucifixion.html> - Problems in Dating the Crucifixion, U.S. Naval Observatory, Astronomical Applications Department.