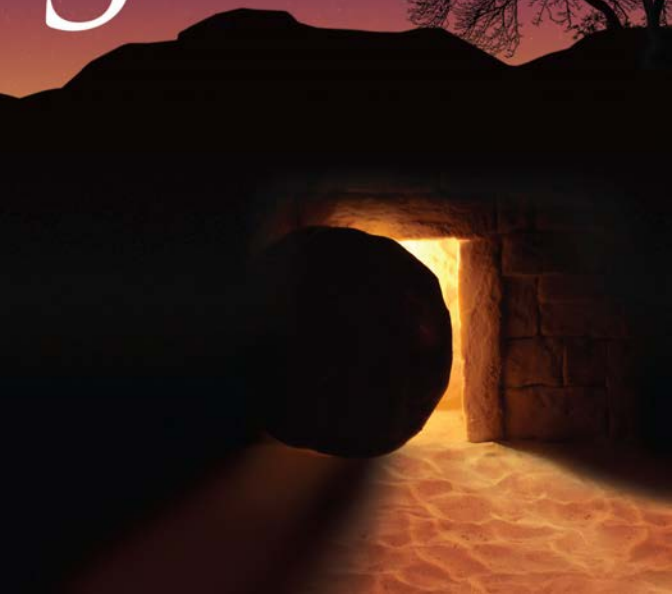


JOE CREWS

3 DAYS
AND
3 NIGHTS



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Some of the strongest and most controversial opinions have built up around the statement of Jesus concerning Jonah and the whale. Strangely enough, the chief issue has nothing at all to do with the oft-challenged fact of a man being swallowed by a sea monster. The

decisive point for many revolves around the length of time Jonah spent in the stomach of the whale. Here are the exact words Jesus used in describing the experience of the runaway prophet: “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: 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. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here” (Matthew 12:39-41).

Now this statement of Jesus is significant in more ways than one. In the first place, it positively affirms that the Old Testament story of Jonah did actually take place as the Scriptures record it. But more than that, the event constituted a sign of Christ’s own death, and burial, and resurrection. Jesus referred to the preaching of Jonah on two other occasions as a sign to the unbelieving Pharisees.

Today there is a vocal minority of Christians who have made a tremendous issue out of the phrase “three days and three nights.” They insist that Jesus used the expression because He was to be in the grave exactly seventy-two hours, not a

second more or second less. This conviction has led them to conclude that Christ was crucified on Wednesday afternoon and was resurrected at the same hour late Sabbath afternoon. In this way they account for the full seventy-two hours that they believe Christ spent in the tomb.

Does this interpretation harmonize with the full Bible record on the subject? Does it fit with the many other inspired accounts of the time element involved? Is there other information given in the Word of God that will make it clear exactly how the three days and three nights are to be understood?

Fortunately, we have an abundance of Bible evidence to answer these questions. In fact, on seventeen separate occasions Jesus or His friends spoke of the timetable involving His death and resurrection. Ten times it was specified that the resurrection would take place on the “third day.” On five occasions they said, “in” or “within three days.” Twice they used the term, “after three days,” and one time only Jesus spoke of His death as “three days and three nights.”

Without question all of these various expressions are used to describe the very same event. There seems to be no controversy regarding this point. “The third day,” “in three days,” “after three days,” and “three days and three nights” are

equivalent terms used in the Bible in reference to the resurrection of Jesus.

Expressions Cannot Be Literal

Now we ask the question: Can all of these expressions be taken in a strictly literal sense and still harmonize with each other? Absolutely not! For example, “after three days” would certainly have to be interpreted as longer than seventy-two hours. “Within three days” could mean anytime less than seventy-two hours, and “three days and three nights” could only mean exactly seventy-two hours to the second. And “the third day” presents even greater problems, as we shall notice in a moment.

Does this sound terribly confusing? If so, it is only because men have placed their own interpretation upon the meaning of God’s Word. We must let the Bible explain itself, and especially, we must let Christ provide definitions for the words which He spoke. It would be a mammoth mistake to seize upon anyone of the expressions used and force its strict compliance with our interpretation without reference to the other sixteen texts on the subject.

Is it possible for all these texts to be explained so that they will not contradict each other? If they cannot be harmonized, then Jesus

Himself was guilty of compounding the confusion, because He used all of the expressions at different times in speaking of His death and resurrection. In Matthew 12:40 He said, “three days and three nights,” but in Mark 8:31 He said, “after three days.” He referred to the same event in John 2:19 as “in three days,” and on five occasions He said, “the third day” (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 13:32; 24:46).

Inclusive Reckoning

The only way we can harmonize all of these apparently contradictory statements of Jesus is to understand them in the light of inclusive reckoning of time. This was the method used throughout the Bible in computing time, and we must apply the same method now, unless we want mass confusion. The unreasonable insistence upon the use of twentieth century English idioms of speech to interpret first century Greek or Hebrew has led to some extreme views indeed. Jesus and His friends spoke and wrote in harmony with the common literacy usage of the day, and that usage recognized inclusive reckoning of time. In simple language, this means that any part of a day was counted as a whole day.

Before we turn to the Bible for confirmation of this principle, let us read the authoritative

statement of the *Jewish Encyclopedia* on the matter. "A short time in the morning of the seventh day is counted as the seventh day; circumcision takes place on the eighth day, even though, of the first day only a few minutes after the birth of the child, these being counted as one day" (vol. 4, p. 475). How clearly this defines the Hebrew method of computing time. Any small part of a day was reckoned as the entire twenty-four hour period. It is the Hebrew form of speech and language. Scores of contradictions would appear in both Old and New Testament if this principle were ignored. We must compare Scripture with Scripture and use the idiom of the language in which the Bible was written. Inclusive reckoning was taken for granted by all writers of the Scripture.

Let us now notice a few examples of this usage in the Bible that will clarify the problem before us. In Genesis 7:4 God said to Noah, "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth." But in verse 10 we read, "And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth." The marginal reading expresses it as "on the seventh day." Pity the poor chronologer who tries to figure that one out. When did the flood come? In seven days? On the seventh day? Or after seven days? The answer

is simple when inclusive reckoning is applied. The day on which God spoke to Noah counted as the first day, and the day on which it started raining was the seventh day. Even if God spoke just ten minutes before the end of that first day, it was still counted as one of the seven. And if it started raining at noon on the last day, it was also counted one of the seven. The same principle is revealed in the circumcision of babies. Genesis 17:12 specifies "he that is eight days old." But Luke 1:59 reads "on the eighth day." Luke 2:21 uses still another expression: "When eight days were accomplished."

Further proof for inclusive reckoning is seen in Joseph's dealing with his brethren. "He put them all together into ward three days. And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; ... go ye. ..." (Genesis 42:17-19). Consider also the tax issue between King Rehoboam and the people. "Come again unto me after three days. ... So ... all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day" (2 Chronicles 10:5, 12).

These examples are only a few of the many which could be cited to establish this important point. The Hebrew usage requires only that some part of each of the days should be involved in the time period.

The Third Day

Now we are ready to apply this clearly established rule to the time Jesus was in the tomb. At least a part of three days had to be included in the period He was actually dead. The most frequent expression Jesus used in describing the resurrection was the “third day.” He defended His repetition of the term on the basis of the Scriptures. “And said unto them, *Thus it is written*, and thus is behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (Luke 24:46).

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus employed the same expression when they spoke of the terrible events surrounding the crucifixion. Unconscious of the fact that they were talking to Jesus, who had been resurrected earlier that same day, one of them said, “To day is the third day since these things were done” (Luke 24:21).

Clearly, those people understood how to count the days and to determine which was the third one. They knew because it was a common idiom of their language. But Jesus did not leave any question in the matter. It almost seems that He anticipated the perplexity of later Christians who might not know about inclusive reckoning. Therefore, He gave such a plain, conclusive explanation of how to locate the third day that no one would ever need to doubt again. “Behold,

I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following” (Luke 13:32, 33).

How simple Jesus made it! Even a child can figure when the third day comes. The third day will always be the day after “to morrow” from any certain event. The first day is counted in its entirety, the whole of the second day, and the third day in its entirety.

Now we can understand the conversation Jesus had with the Jewish leaders and why they interpreted it as they did. He said, “Destroy this temple, and *in three days* I will raise it up” (John 2:19-21). Later, after the crucifixion, the chief priest said to Pilate, “Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, *After three days* I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until *the third day*, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away” (Matthew 27:63, 64).

With Christ’s definition of time before us, the picture snaps into clear focus. Speaking prophetically of His own death and resurrection, He said, “To day (crucifixion) and to morrow (in tomb), and the third day I shall be perfected (resurrection).” There are all three days in their sequence. Even though He died in the late afternoon, the

entire day would be counted as the first day. The second day would span the Sabbath when He slept in the tomb. Even though He was resurrected in the early hours on the third day, inclusive reckoning would make it one of the three days.

The Resurrection on Sunday

Now the time has come to pinpoint the actual days of the week when these events took place. Again, we are amazed at the perfect harmony of the Scriptures on the subject. There can be no question but that He arose on Sunday, the first day of the week. Mark emphatically states, “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene” (Mark 16:9). Sunday is the first day of the week, and that is when He was resurrected. Words could be no plainer. Even the original Greek construction of the text will allow no other meaning. He did not rise from the grave on Saturday, as some contend. Neither was He crucified on Wednesday. There is not a scintilla of Bible evidence that He died on the fourth day of the week.

According to the inspired record, Christ was put to death on the “preparation day,” and the preparation day was not Wednesday. In all the pages of biblical history, the preparation day has been Friday. Please read Mark 15:42, 43, “And

now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea ... went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.”

Some might question whether this could be one of the ceremonial yearly sabbaths of the ordinance system. Notice these words, “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).

The day following the crucifixion was not only the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, but it was a *high Sabbath*. This means that a yearly Sabbath in that particular year happened to fall on the weekly Sabbath. In this case it was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Luke clearly identified that preparation day as the one immediately preceding the weekly Sabbath. “And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on. And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day *according to the commandment*. 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” (Luke 23:54-24:1).

Surely there can be no question as to the time elements involved. He died on the preparation day, or the day before the weekly Sabbath. The next day is designated as “the sabbath according to the commandment.” Since the commandment says, “The seventh day is the sabbath,” we know that this had to be the day we call Saturday. Furthermore, after describing the events of the preparation day in verse 55 and the Sabbath day in verse 56, the very next verse says, “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” (Luke 24:1).

Please take note that after preparing the spices on the afternoon of the crucifixion (Friday), and resting over the Sabbath (Saturday), they came to the tomb with the spices on the first day of the week (Sunday) to do the work of anointing. This was their first opportunity after the Sabbath to carry out the preparations made on Friday afternoon. This is when they discovered that Christ was risen.

If the crucifixion took place on Wednesday, how can we explain why the women waited until Sunday to come to the sepulchre? Why didn’t

they come Thursday or Friday to anoint His body? Did they not understand that after four days His body would be decomposing and their work of love would be in vain? The answers to these questions constitute the strongest case against a Wednesday crucifixion.

The Bible, in fact, offers incontestable proof that no one would have attempted such an anointing under those circumstances. When Lazarus had been dead four days, Jesus ordered the stone removed from his tomb. Martha, the sister of Lazarus, protested in these words, “Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.” (John 11:39).

These words of Martha reveal the fact that no woman of that day would have considered it possible to prepare a body for burial four days after death. To Martha it seemed an irrational act even to open the tomb of Lazarus. To the other women who prepared the spices it would have been equally unreasonable to enter Christ’s sepulchre four days after He had been crucified.

In view of the amazing weight of biblical evidence to the contrary, how can some still cling to the Wednesday crucifixion idea? The entire scheme is based upon the twisted interpretation of a single Bible text. The “three days and three nights” phrase is forced into artificial

conformity with current English forms of speech, instead of the common usage of the people living at that time.

Those who believe that Jesus died on Wednesday and rose on Saturday base much of their evidence on Matthew 28:1: "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."

Figuring that the first day of the week "dawns" at sundown Saturday night as the Sabbath ends, these people assume that the women discovered the empty tomb in the twilight moments of the Sabbath, just before sundown. They count backwards exactly seventy-two hours and arrive at Wednesday evening just before sundown for the crucifixion.

Is this a valid conclusion? Or is there evidence that the women could not have visited the empty tomb on Saturday evening? There is indeed positive biblical proof that they did not. We find that evidence in Mark's account of the visit to the sepulchre: "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. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the

sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" (Mark 16:1-3).

There is no question about this being an early Sunday morning visit. It is at sunrise. The very same women are named as in Matthew's account. Can we correctly assume that these same women had been to the tomb the night before and found Jesus risen? Impossible. Why? Because of the question they asked as they approached the garden on Sunday morning, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" If they had been there Saturday just before sundown and found the tomb empty, they would have known that the stone was already rolled away from the door. This is absolute proof that they had not been to an empty tomb the day before.

It also proves that Matthew's "dawn" refers to the dawning represented by the sunrise and not sunset. There is no contradiction between the two accounts.

Seventy-Two Hours Not Biblical

Those who insist that Christ was in the grave a full seventy-two hours contend that the three days and three nights must be taken in the full-literal sense. But such a contention is absolutely contrary to the testimony of the Scriptures.

An example of the way the Bible uses the term is found in Esther 4:16. We read these words of Queen Esther to Mordecai: “Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, *night or day*: I also and my maidens will fast likewise.” (Esther 4:16). Do not overlook the fact that they were to fast three days and three nights. Yet almost the next verse tells us, “Now it came to pass on *the third day*, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court.” (Esther 5:1). Here is a perfect example of how three days and three nights terminate on the third day!

We have already learned how Jesus explained the third day. He said “to day, and to morrow, and the third day” (Luke 13:32). Please think for a moment! When Jesus walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus on Sunday afternoon, after the resurrection, Cleopas said, “To day is the *third day since these things were done*” (Luke 24:21).

No one denies that this was on Sunday. But listen, if Jesus had been crucified on Wednesday afternoon, Cleopas would have had to say “To day is the *fifth day since these things were done*.” Count it for yourself—Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and most of Sunday! Later the same day—the first day of the week—Jesus made

this statement: “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (Luke 24:46). Who was right? Jesus was right and Cleopas was right! But those who claim the Wednesday crucifixion are wrong. Christ died on Friday, the preparation for the Sabbath—that was the first day. He rested in the tomb on the Sabbath according to the commandment—that was the second day. He arose on the first day of the week which was Sunday—that was the *third day*! How simple!

The proponents of a Wednesday crucifixion use a devious argument to explain away the words of Cleopas on the road to Emmaus. They contend that he was not counting the three days from the time of Christ’s death, but rather from the sealing of the tomb by the Roman authorities the day after he was crucified. For this theoretical conjecture there is not a fragment of evidence in the Bible. Cleopas did speak about the trial of Jesus and certain events leading up to His crucifixion. By taking a bit of exegetical license one could possibly reach back to those events from which to reckon the third day. But by no stretch of the imagination could any point beyond the death of Christ be used in computing the three days.

In every related text the third day is counted from the time of His death on the cross.

Matthew said He would “be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matthew 16:21). Mark wrote that He must “be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). Luke’s account reports that He must “be slain, and be raised the third day” (Luke 9:22).

Repeatedly, the Scriptures emphasize the death of Jesus as the starting point of the three days. To begin counting a full day after the crucifixion is not only unbiblical but grossly imaginary. The sealing of the tomb is never once referred to in connection with the period of time He was dead.

The expression “three days and three nights” does not indicate a precise computation of hours, minutes, seconds. We read that “forty days and forty nights” were spent by Christ in the wilderness of temptation. However, the writers of two of the gospels state it simply as a period of “forty days,” showing that inspiration was not pinpointing the hours or minutes.

The Four Days of Cornelius

Now let us consider a final clear-cut example of inclusive reckoning that should lay this point to rest with every open-minded reader. It is taken from the New Testament and reveals graphically how days were numbered in the days of Jesus.

In Acts 10:3 Cornelius “saw in a vision evidently about the *ninth hour* of the day an angel of God coming in to him.”

Follow the story carefully now. He was instructed in the vision to send men to Joppa and call for Peter. “And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and ... he sent them to Joppa. On the *morrow*, as they went on their journey, and drew night unto the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray” (verse 7-9). While praying he had a vision, and the men knocked at his door when his vision ended (verse 17). Please notice that this is one day after Cornelius received his angel visitor.

Peter invited the men to come in. He “lodged them. And *on the morrow* Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him” (verse 23). Take note that this is now the second day since the men were dispatched by Cornelius. “*And the morrow after* they entered into Cesarea. And Cornelius waited for them” (verse 24). This is the third day since Cornelius had his angelic vision. But don’t miss this point—a few minutes later, in talking to Peter, Cornelius said, “*Four days ago* I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing” (verse 30).

Now we get the picture in mind—it had been exactly three days, to the very hour. Yet Cornelius said, “*Four days ago.*” How could he say it was four days when it was only three days? Because he used inclusive reckoning, which meant that parts of four days were involved. In the same way the Bible described the time of Christ’s death as three days and three nights even though it was only a part of those three days.

Passover Week Proves Resurrection

Now we are brought to another line of evidence that constitutes the final proof positive that the resurrection of Jesus occurred on Sunday. It was to this particular evidence that Paul turned in his persuasive Corinthian discourse on the resurrection. He said, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins *according to the scriptures*; And that he was buried, and that He rose again *the third day according to the scriptures*” (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).

It is most significant that Paul confirmed the death of Jesus, and also His resurrection on the third day, on the basis of the Scriptures. Evidently, Paul understood that the Old Testament contained prophecies which set forth the time sequence of the crucifixion and the

resurrection. According to Paul, Jesus had to rise on the third day in order to fulfill the word of God. Furthermore, Jesus also declared, “*Thus it is written*, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (Luke 24:46).

Is there such a Scripture—an “It is written”—in the Old Testament that can establish the actual day that Christ was raised from the dead? Yes! And it had to do with the special annual observance of the Passover service.

In Leviticus 23:5, 6 we read about the first two days of that solemn Passover week. “In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord’s passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord.”

Right now we will not take the time to establish the days of the week for these special observances. It is not essential to the proof we are seeking to establish. Just let your mind grasp this truth—*the fourteenth day of the month was the slaying of the passover, and the fifteenth day was the feast of unleavened bread.*

Our next question is: What happened on the sixteenth day of the month? We shall now prove from the Scriptures that the sheaf of the firstfruits was offered on that sixteenth day. That service was first celebrated when the children of Israel

came into the promised land. God commanded it in these words: “When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: *on the morrow after the sabbath* the priest shall wave it” (Leviticus 23:10, 11).

What Sabbath is the verse talking about? The weekly Sabbath or the yearly passover sabbath? The answer appears as we read the actual experience of their entrance into the land, recorded by Joshua. God told them that after entering the promised land they should offer the firstfruits to Him before eating of the first harvest themselves. Joshua described how the Israelites passed over the Jordan while the river was flooded at the harvest time. “For Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest” (Joshua 3:15). This is very important to understand because the grain was ready for reaping, and they would more quickly be able to eat of the land and offer the first sheaf to the Lord.

After crossing dryshod through the flooded Jordan, after God rolled back the waters, the children of Israel camped at Gilgal. “And it came to pass, when the priests that bare up the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the

midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho” (Joshua 4:18, 19).

Now we come to the next event that took place four days later. “And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho” (Joshua 5:10).

In strict obedience to the commandment of the Lord, the grateful but weary wanderers stopped to slay the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. The next verse tells us what happened on the following day, “And they did eat of the old corn of the land *on the morrow after the passover*, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day” (Joshua 5:11).

Please notice that they observed the feast of unleavened bread on the fifteenth day of the month, following the slaying of the Passover lamb on the fourteenth. They also ate the last of the old corn, because the new crop of grain was ready to harvest. We continue reading to discover what happened on the next day, which was the sixteenth day of the month. “And the

manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year” (Joshua 5:12).

The sheaf of firstfruits was to be offered to the Lord before they ate of the harvest of the land. Since they began to eat of the fruit of the land on the sixteenth day, following the feast of unleavened bread, it is certain that they offered the firstfruits also on that day. Please remember that the Lord had commanded them to offer the firstfruits of the harvest “on the morrow after the sabbath” (Leviticus 23:11). It was indeed on the day following the yearly sabbath of unleavened bread that the wave sheaf was offered, and the new harvest began to be eaten by the people that selfsame day.

Now the sequence of Passover events appears in sharp focus, and we will list them in the exact order revealed in the Scriptures.

1. *Fourteenth day*—Slaying of Passover lamb,
2. *Fifteenth day*—Feast of Unleavened Bread,
3. *Sixteenth day*—Firstfruits of harvest presented.

By way of historical confirmation of these points, here is the testimony of Josephus, a contemporary of Jesus and a historian: “Nisan ... is the beginning of our year, on the *fourteenth day* of the lunar month ... and which was called the Passover. ... The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the Passover, and falls on the *fifteenth day* of the month, and continues seven days. But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the *sixteenth day* of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth They also at his anticipation of the firstfruits of the earth, sacrifice a lamb, as a burnt offering unto God” (Book III, Chapter X, par. 5, pp. 79, 80).

Christ Our Passover

You may be wondering how these facts relate to the time of Christ’s death and resurrection. Here is where the beauty of the Bible reveals itself. Jesus was the One to whom all those types and ceremonies pointed. He was the true Passover Lamb. That is why John cried out, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36). Paul showed how Jesus fulfilled the Passover: “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, ... but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7, 8).

This is exactly why Jesus died on the fourteenth of Nisan. He did it to fulfill the Scriptures. Paul declared, “Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). He had to die on the same day that the Passover lamb died in order to meet the prophetic type and to establish His identity as the true Passover Lamb.

But just as surely as Jesus died on a certain day according to the Scriptures, He also “rose again the third day, according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:4). He not only was our Passover, but He was *also the firstfruits!* Paul ties it specifically to the resurrection: “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Again in verse 23, “But every man in his own order: *Christ the firstfruits!* afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.”

No wonder, then, that Paul wrote so confidently about the resurrection on the third day according to the Scriptures. Christ rose from the dead as the firstfruits of those that slept. He was the antitype of the wave sheaf, and His resurrection took place on the very day that the wave sheaf was to be presented before the Lord.

We can now understand why Jesus and His followers used the expression “third day” more than any other to describe the resurrection.

Prophecy had decreed hundreds of years earlier that He would be the fulfillment of the types and shadows surrounding the Passover observance. As the firstfruits, it was essential for Christ to be “harvested” and “presented” before the Lord “on the morrow after the sabbath.” In the year of the crucifixion the Passover sabbath coincided with the weekly Sabbath, making it “a high day” (John 19:31). It was the next day after that Sabbath that Jesus arose from the grave—on Sunday.

When Mary saw Him in the garden after His resurrection, Jesus said, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). Why did Jesus bid Mary not to hold Him or delay Him (as the Greek text implies)? Because He had to ascend that same day to present Himself before the Father as the firstfruits from the dead.

The biblical proof of those three successive days during Passover week completely shatters the Wednesday crucifixion theory. He had to die on Friday to fulfill the Scriptures concerning His death as the Passover lamb. He had to be resurrected on the third day after His death to meet the scriptural type of the firstfruits. Only three

days can be involved in the time sequence, or the Word of God is broken.

In the light of this tremendous, undeniable evidence of the Word of God, we can positively affirm that Jesus was not, and could not have been, resurrected on the Sabbath. Neither could He have been crucified on a Wednesday.

The issues here are much deeper than most people realize. Had Christ not fulfilled every single Old Testament type and shadow pointing forward to His atoning death and resurrection, He would be an imposter and fraud. It was absolutely essential that every prophecy of the Messiah should be fulfilled in His life and death. In a special sense, the prefiguring of His victory over the grave was the capstone of hope for both Old and New Testament believers. Just as the sheaf of firstfruit grain held the promise and assurance of abundant harvest, even so our blessed Lord's glorious resurrection is the guarantee of a mighty harvest in the resurrection soon to take place. "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19).

Shadows Which Are Contrary To Us

The tragedy is that some Christians still cling to the dead types and ceremonies just as though the great anti type had never come. Because Jesus was the true Sin Offering, the daily animal

sacrifices ceased the very moment He died on the cross. The veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom, signifying that there was to be no more sprinkled blood in the holy place (Matthew 27:51). That slain lamb on the altar had been only a shadow pointing forward to the death of the Messiah. When the shadow led up to the body that cast it, there could not possibly be any shadow beyond. Therefore, sacrifices became only empty rituals after the atoning death of Jesus.

In the same manner, the yearly Passover service, with its types and shadows, pointed forward to the sacrifice of the true Passover Lamb on the cross. The annual typical lamb, the old leaven, and the yearly wave sheaf were the shadow leading up to the body, which was Christ. After His death and resurrection, the old observances would be just as meaningless as the daily sacrifice of sin offerings. In a sense, to continue observing the type after the anti type came would be a denial that Christ was the true fulfillment. This is why Paul spoke of the fulfilled types as being contrary to the Christians. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; ... Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, ... or of the

new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Colossians 2:14, 16, 17).

Please notice the clear evidence that meat and drink offerings, as well as certain *shadowy* holy days and sabbaths, came to an end when Jesus died. Now let us ask: Which sabbaths were nailed to the cross and canceled by the death of Jesus? Paul specified that they were “sabbath days which are a shadow of things to come.” This certainly could not mean the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. It came into existence before sin came in to the world. It could not be a shadow. Shadows were introduced as a result of sin and pointed forward to the deliverance from sin. But there were other *yearly sabbaths* which were *shadows*, and they are specifically described in Leviticus 23:24, 25. They fell on certain set days of the month and came only once a year. “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, ... an holy convocation. ... Ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord.” This was the annual feast of trumpets. It was called a sabbath, but it was a yearly, shadowy sabbath.

Three other annual sabbaths are described in that same chapter, one of them being the Passover sabbath and another the feast of unleavened

bread. Verses 37 and 38 sum up all of them in these words: “These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: *Beside the sabbaths of the Lord.*”

These texts show without question that the shadowy annual sabbaths were distinct from the weekly sabbaths of the Lord which were observed each seventh day. But don’t miss this point: Paul did not indicate that the weekly Sabbath was blotted out at the cross. He designated only the sabbaths that were shadows of things to come. The meat and drink clearly had reference to the various offerings that were required on those ceremonial sabbaths. *These were nailed to the cross!* The Passover and feast of unleavened bread were included in those sabbaths which were blotted out.

No Christian today needs to celebrate those annual feast days and typical observances. Paul implies that to do so is to go contrary to Christian principles. They are now dead forms, bereft of any meaning. Just as the animal sacrifice for sin is meaningless since Christ came, so the other types and shadows are empty since the real Lamb has died. This is why Paul wrote, “For even

Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven ... but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7, 8).

May we fasten our faith upon the true Sin Offering, the true Passover, and the true Firstfruits, refusing to be drawn back to hollow forms and empty shadows.



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