

Three Days and Three Nights

MOST OF US have assumed that Yehowshua (Jesus) died on “Good Friday” and rose from the dead early on “Easter” Sunday morning. Since Yehowshua said he would rise “the third day,” some count part of Friday as one day, Saturday as the second, and part of Sunday as the third. It is pointed out that sometimes an expression like “the third day” can include only *parts* of days, a part of a day being counted as a whole. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* says, for example, that the day of a funeral, even though the funeral might take place late in the afternoon, is counted as the first of the seven days of mourning) (*The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, p. 475, article: “Day”*)

When Yehowshua said: “Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today, and tomorrow, and the day following,” (Luke. 13:32,33), the day following “tomorrow” would have been the *third* day, even though only parts of days would be involved. Many feel this explains the time element between the burial and resurrection of the Father’s Anointed Son.

There are Christians, however, who are not totally satisfied with this explanation. Yehowshua often said he would rise “the third day” (Matt. 16:21 and Mark. 10:34). But he also spoke of this time period as being three days *and* three nights: “As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly,” he said, “so shall the son of man be *three days and three nights* in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:38-40).

That the expression “the third day” can, scripturally, include three days and three nights can be seen In Genesis 1:4-13: “Yhwh *divided* the light from the darkness. And Yhwh called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And the evening and the morning were the first day... and the evening and the morning were the second day...and the evening and the morning [now three periods of day and night] were *the third day.*” This provides an example of how the term “the third day” can be counted up and shown to include three days *and* *nights.*

While we have long favored the view we will present here—which allows for three full days and nights—we would hasten to point out that, as Apostles, the fact we believe Yehowshua did live, die, and rose again, is infinitely more important than some explanation we may offer regarding the time element of his burial.

Since there are twelve hours in a day and twelve hours in a night (John 11:9,10), if we figure a full “three days and three nights,” this would equal 72 hours. But was the time element *exactly* 72 hours? Yehowshua was to be in the tomb for “three days and three nights” and arose “*after* three days” (Mk. 8:3 1), We see no reason to figure this as any less than a full 72 hours. On the other hand, if he was to be raised from the:: dead “*in* three days” (John 2:19), this could not be any *more* than 72 hours. To harmonize these various statements, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the time period was exactly 72 hours. After all, Yhwh is known for exactness. He does everything right on schedule. Nothing is accidental with him.

It was “when the fullness of time was come”---not one year too early or one year too late, “Yhwh sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4). The time for his anointing was foreordained and spoken of by the prophet Daniel, as was also the time when he would be “cut off” for the sins of the people (Dan. 9:24—26). Those who tried to kill him before this time failed, for his “time” was not yet come (John 7:8). And not only the year and time of his death, but the very hour was a part of the Divine plan. “Father,” Yehowshua prayed, “the hour is come...” (John 17:1).

Since there was an exact time for him to be born, an exact time for his anointing, an exact time for his ministry to begin, an exact time for his death, we have no problem believing there was also an exact time period between his burial and resurrection—72 hours *exactly*. If this is correct, then the resurrection took place at the same time of day that he was buried—only three days later. What time of day was this?

Yehowshua died shortly after “the ninth hour” or three in the afternoon (Matt. 27:46 to 50). “The Jews, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbathday, (for that Sabbath was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken...but when they came to Yehowshua...he was dead already” (John 19:31 to 33). By this time, “the even was come” (Mk. 15:42), it was late afternoon. The law said: “His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him *that day*” (Deut. 21:23). In the time remaining before sundown, on the day before the high day Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea obtained permission to remove the body. He and Nicodemus prepared the body for burial with linen clothes and spices, placing it in a nearby tomb (John 19:38-42)—all of this being completed by sundown.

If the resurrection took place at the same time of day as when Yehowshua *was* buried—only three days later—this would place the resurrection close to sundown, *not sunrise*. A sunrise resurrection would have required an extra night—three days and *four* nights. This was not the case, of course. Those who came to the tomb at sunrise, instead of witnessing the resurrection at that precise time, found the tomb empty (Mk. 16:2). John’s account tells us that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb that morning when “It was yet *dark*” and he was not there (John 20:1,2).

The gospel writers tell of several different visits made by the disciples to the tomb on that first day of the week. In *every* instance, they found the tomb **empty**. An angel said: “He is not here: for he is risen, as he said” (Matt. 28:6). The first day of the week was when the disciples *discovered* he was risen (Lk. 24:1,2, etc.), but **nowhere does the Bible actually say this was the time of the resurrection.**

The only verse which seems to teach a Sunday morning resurrection is Mark 16:9: “Now when Yehowshua was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene...” But this verse does not say he was “rising” or that he “did rise” at that time. It says that when the first day of the week came, he “was risen”—past perfect tense.

Since there were no punctuation marks in the Greek manuscripts from which our New Testament was translated, the phrase “early the first day of the week” could just as correctly—some think *more correctly*—be linked with the time Yehowshua appeared to Mary. By simply placing the comma after the word “risen,” this verse would read: “Now when Yehowshua was risen, early the first day of the week he appeared first to Mary Magdalene.” This seems to be the intended meaning, for the verses that follow show that Mark was recording the various appearances that Yehowshua made, not explaining on which day the resurrection took place.

When Sunday morning came, Yehowshua had already risen, the resurrection having taken place around sundown of the day before. Counting back three days would bring us to Wednesday. Would this make three days and three nights? Yes, Wednesday night, Thursday night and Friday night —three nights: also Thursday, Friday and Saturday—three days. This would make a total of exactly three days and three nights or 72 hours.

One day after Wednesday would be Thursday, two days after Wednesday would be Friday, and “the third day” after Wednesday would be Saturday.

But what about the words of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel, and beside all this, today is the *third* day since these things were done” (Luke. 24:21)? Because this happened on the first day of the week (verse 13), and this was “the third day since these things were done,” would this not indicate that Yehowshua died on Friday? It could, if parts of a day are counted as a whole day.

On the other hand, counted another way, one day “since” Friday would have been Saturday, the second day “since” Friday would have been Sunday, and the *third* day “since” Friday would have been Monday! This cannot be correct, nor would this method of counting indicate Friday was the day of the crucifixion.

In seeking to offer an explanation, we submit the following: They had talked about “*all* these things which had happened” (verse 14)—more than just one event. If “these things” included the arrest, the crucifixion, the burial, and the setting of the seal and watch over the tomb, all of these things were not done until Thursday. Yehowshua, we have noticed, was crucified on the “preparation” (Wednesday). “The next day [Thursday], that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, 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” (Matt. 27:62-66). For this reason, the tomb was sealed and guarded. “These things” were not fully completed—were not “done”—until the tomb was sealed and guarded. This happened, as we have already seen, on Thursday of that week, the high day. Sunday, then, would have been “the third day since these things were done,” but not the third day since the crucifixion.

Because Yehowshua was crucified on the day before the Sabbath, it is understandable why Friday is commonly believed to be the day of the crucifixion. But the Sabbath that followed his death was not the weekly Sabbath. It was an annual Sabbath—“for that Sabbath was an high day” (John 19:14,31). This Sabbath could fall on any day of the week and that year, apparently, it came on Thursday.

Yehowshua was crucified and buried on the preparation day (Wednesday), the next day was the high day Sabbath (Thursday), then Friday, followed by the weekly Sabbath (Saturday). Understanding that there were *two* Sabbaths that week explains how the Father’s Anointed Son could be crucified on the day *before* the Sabbath, was already risen from the tomb when the day *after* the Sabbath came—and yet fulfilled his sign of three days and three nights.

A careful comparison of Mark 16:1 with Luke 23:56 provides further evidence there were two Sabbaths that week—with a common work day between the two. Mark 16:1 says: “And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, *bought* * sweet spices that they might come and anoint him.” (• The King James Version is the only translation (of many we have checked) that uses the indefinite “had bought” All others have correctly rendered this as “bought.” It is not uncommon for this verse to be read as though the women “brought” spices, but the word is “bought,” one letter making the difference!) This verse states that it was *after* the Sabbath when these women bought their spices. Luke 23:56, however, states that they prepared the spices and *after* preparing them, rested on the Sabbath: “And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the Commandment.” The one verse says it was after the Sabbath the women bought spices the other verse says they prepared the spices *before* the Sabbath. Since they could not prepare the spices until they had first purchased them, the evidence for two different Sabbaths that week seems conclusive.

Writing in *Eternity* magazine, its editor, Donald Grey Barnhouse, said: “I personally have always held that there were two Sabbaths in our Lord’s last week - the Saturday Sabbath and the Passover Sabbath, the latter being on Thursday. They hastened to take his body down after a Wednesday crucifixion and he was three days and three nights (at least 72 hours) in the tomb.” He cites evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls which would place the Last Supper on Tuesday and quotes from a Roman Catholic Journal published in France that “an ancient Christian tradition, attested to by the Didascalia Apostolorum as well as by Epiphanius and Victorinus of Pettau (died 304) gives Tuesday evening as the date of the Last Supper and prescribes a fast for Wednesday to commemorate the capture of Christ. (*Eternity* June, 1958)

Though strongly holding to the Friday crucifixion, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* says that not all scholars have believed this way. Epiphanius, Lactantius, Wescott, Cassiodorus and Gregory of Tours are mentioned as rejecting Friday as the day of the crucifixion. (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8 .p.378, article: “Jesus Christ.”)

In his book *Bible Questions Answered*, W. L. Pettingill, gives this question and answer: “On what day of the week was our Lord crucified? To us It Is perfectly obvious that the crucifixion was on Wednesday.” (*Pentingill, Bible Questions Answered*, p.182)

Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible says in a note on Matthew 12:40: “Christ was dead for three full days and for three full nights. He was put in the grave Wednesday just before sunset and was resurrected at the end of Saturday at sunset. ... No statement says that he was buried Friday at sunset. This would make him in the grave only one day and one night, proving his own words untrue.” (*Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible*, p. 13.)

The quotations given here from various ministers are especially significant since this belief was not the generally accepted position of the various church organizations with which they were affiliated. In such cases, men speak from conviction, not merely convenience. Such was the case of R.A.Torrey, noted evangelist and Bible institute dean, whose words (written In 1907) well sum up the basic position we have presented here:

“According to the commonly accepted tradition of the church, Jesus was crucified on Friday.. .and was raised from the dead very early in the morning of the following Sunday. Many readers of the Bible are puzzled to know how the interval between late Friday afternoon and early Sunday morning can be figured out to be three days and three nights. It seems rather to be two nights, one day and a very small portion of another day. “The solution of this apparent difficulty proposed by many commentators is that ‘a day and a night’ is simply another way of saying ‘a day,’ and that the ancient Jews reckoned a fraction of a day as a whole day...There are many persons whom this solution does not altogether satisfy, and the writer is free to confess it does not satisfy him at all. It seems to me to be a makeshift...”

“The Bible nowhere says or implies that Jesus was crucified and died on Friday. It is said that Jesus was crucified on ‘the day before the Sabbath.’...Now the Bible does not leave us to speculate in regard to which Sabbath is meant in this instance.. it was not the day before the weekly Sabbath (that is, Friday), but it was the day before the Passover Sabbath, which came this year on Thursday---that is to say, the day on which Jesus Christ was crucified was Wednesday. John makes this as clear as day.

“Jesus was buried just about sunset on Wednesday. Seventy-two hours later...he arose from the grave. When the women visited the tomb just before dawn in the morning they found the grave already empty.

“There is absolutely nothing in favor of Friday crucifixion, but everything in the Scriptures is perfectly harmonized by Wednesday crucifixion. It is remarkable how many prophetic and typical passages of the Old Testament are fulfilled and how many seeming discrepancies in the gospel narratives are straightened out when we once come to understand that Jesus died on Wednesday, and not on Friday.” (*Torrey, Difficulties and Alleged Errors and Contradictions in the Bible*, pp. 104-109.)

(Adapted from *Babylon Mystery Religion Ancient and Modern*, by Ralph Edward Woodrow, International Standard Book Number 0-916938-00-x, 1990 Edition, Chapter 18, Three Days and Three Nights.

[Note* This chapter has been removed from some editions]