

THREE DAYS and THREE NIGHT?

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[Editor's note: Although most of us have never explained satisfactorily to ourselves the time element of how Jesus was three days and three nights in the tomb, we have not let it disturb our faith. In this re-study by our friend, Greg, we do not intend to imply that it must be made an issue. He does offer a studied explanation, surprising as it may strike you, that is worthy of your consideration. My thanks to him for sharing it. -CH]

Traditionally, it is thought that Jesus was crucified and buried on a Friday and rose up on the following Sunday. But is this true? Many skeptics use this scenario to discredit the Bible because it does not allow enough time for Jesus to be in the earth 3 days and 3 nights as stated in Matt. 12:40, 27:63; Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:34.

Many refer to the verses that state “*on the third day be raised*”. They have reasoned that portions of three days satisfy the requirements. They rightly state that the Jewish day began at sundown. So a small portion is allowed late Friday before sundown, all of Saturday, and half a day Sunday, evening to morning (Saturday night to us). With this they say Friday is the first day, Saturday the second, and Sunday the third. But this really only allows for about half the time required. Even then only two nights can be extracted here, and the scripture plainly says 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40). I do not think we should attempt to solve the mystery by splitting hairs or using a technicality like three portions of days. Can there be another solution? Consider the following:

The thing that is most often overlooked is the fact that there were two Sabbaths involved. The first Sabbath was an annual Sabbath, that is the first day of the feast of the unleavened bread, which was on the 15th of Nissan. This Sabbath was called a *Great Sabbath* or a *high day*. It was to be observed like the weekly Sabbath, where no work was to be done. The second Sabbath was the weekly Sabbath.

Lev. 23:3 states, “*For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings.*” This is the weekly Sabbath. Verse 5 tells us the Passover was on the 14th day of the first month (Nissan) and verses 6-7 tell us that the 15th was the first day of the feast and was a holy convocation or a Sabbath. This is also verified by Josephus, (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book 3, Ch.10, Sec. 5). Each day was reckoned from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32).

John 19:31 says they did not want the bodies to remain on the crosses because the next day was a high day, or literally, Great Sabbath day.

Mark 16:1 has the women buying spices after the Sabbath so they could anoint Jesus' body. Luke 23:54-56 has the women preparing the spices before the Sabbath and resting on the Sabbath. How could this be? If there were two Sabbaths with one day between them, the women could have purchased and prepared the spices after the first Sabbath and before the second.

If Jesus was buried just prior to Friday evening, Saturday evening would make one day, and risen before daybreak Sunday morning would account for only 1-1/2 days, or about 36 hours, only half of three days.

If Jesus was buried just before sundown Wednesday, with Thursday being the Great Sabbath, Friday being the day in between, with the weekly Sabbath being Saturday, such would allow for 3 days and 3 nights in the tomb. John's account tells us that the women went to the tomb before daylight and he had already risen by that time, meaning Jesus could have risen anytime after dark Saturday night.

The scriptures say, "*After three days rise again*" in Matt. 27:63 and Mk. 8:31. So any time after sundown would be allowable, because it would have been "*after three days*". It also fits with Matt. 12:40, "*Three days and three nights*". Yes, there are passages that say, "*On the third day rise again*", so this limits one's ability to be dogmatic either way, even though the word "*on*" is absent from the Greek in all of those cases.

Wednesday being the time of crucifixion gives the chance for the women to buy and prepare the spices. If Friday was the day of the crucifixion, followed by the Sabbath, with the women arriving at the tomb at day break, when did the women buy the spices and have time to prepare them? Also, Thursday cannot be the day of crucifixion because there is still no time allowed for the purchase and preparation of the spices with two Sabbaths back to back. Either way how could they have time to buy the spices after the Sabbath(s), prepare them and still get to the tomb by the crack of dawn? It would have been unlawful to do so. The only scenario that fits is Wednesday being the crucifixion, Thursday- day 1 (the Great Sabbath), Friday- day 2, Saturday- day 3 (the weekly Sabbath) and Jesus rising after that, sometime after dark.

Perhaps our tradition has been a bit flawed and could stand some re-thinking as in the case of eschatology and other related topics. -Greg Rasaka,
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