

'After Three Days'

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For centuries, the Christian churches of this world have believed that our Savior, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, died for our sins on Friday and rose from the dead on Sunday. Is there any truth to this belief? Can it be proven from the Scriptures? No! Worse, this belief has deceived Christians into accepting false doctrines like Sunday worship and Easter observance.

Was Christ telling the truth when He said, "After three days I will rise"? If not we have no Savior!

But our God does not lie! Here is the truth about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the greatest Man ever to grace this earth, died at about 3 PM on a Wednesday in early spring in AD 31. A few hours later, as sunset was drawing on, He was laid in the newly hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. On the weekly Sabbath, Saturday, exactly three days after His burial, God the Father resurrected His Son to eternal life.

How can we be so precise and dogmatic about these times?

It would be foolish to make such astounding claims without proof. How can we know when these momentous events occurred?

They are written very plainly in the accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection in the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Under the inspiration of God (II Timothy 3:16), these faithful men recorded the words and deeds of their Lord and Savior for the benefit of all humanity. God, as the ultimate author of these accounts, desired all the pertinent details of His Son's life to be written down as a witness to mankind of His perfect life and His sacrifice.

All the clues, all the indicators of the dates and times of these events, are scattered "here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:10) throughout the gospels. Other significant tidbits are strewn among other books of the Bible, somewhat like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. When the various pieces are put together with the remarkably complementary accounts of the gospel writers, the resulting time frame is unassailable.

We *can* know for certain when Jesus died and rose again!

Do We Need to Know?

Is it really important to be able to determine these events so accurately? Christians have lived and died for nearly two millennia. How important was this knowledge to their salvation? Is it even necessary for salvation?

It might be!

In themselves, these dates would be mere trivia if they had no connection to deeper spiritual truths. But this world's Christianity has based two of its most celebrated holidays on its reckoning of the events that occurred during that pivotal week. Good Friday and Easter Sunday, purporting to commemorate Jesus' death and resurrection, are founded on the assumption that our Savior was crucified on Friday and rose from the dead at dawn on the following Sunday.

"So?" one may say. "Isn't celebrating them at a fixed time of the year good enough? Doesn't that honor Christ?"

Not at all!

God is not to be mocked (Galatians 6:7)! In several places in the Bible, He states quite unequivocally that He is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 6:14-15)—He will not be worshiped like any other god (Deuteronomy 12:3-4, 30-31). When He instructed His chosen people Israel in the method of His worship, He warned them neither to add to what He had given them, nor take away from it (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; see Revelation 22:18-19).

For example, notice His terrible wrath when the children of Israel tried to worship Him through the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:1-9). They proclaimed "a feast to the Lord" (verse 5), but He would have none of it! He was so enraged at the people's idolatry that He considered exterminating the whole nation and starting over with Moses' family.

That same God—Yahweh, the Lord of the Old Testament—became Jesus Christ! Will our Savior be worshiped in any way that is based upon a lie? Certainly not! And this in no way takes into consideration the non-biblical (dare we say "pagan"?) traditions and customs that have taken over the commemoration of His sacrifice and triumphant victory!

Another of "Christianity's" false doctrines that is based upon their flawed reckoning of these events is "the Lord's Day." Catholic and Protestant churches around the world are full of sincere but deceived people who believe that Christ changed the day of rest from Sabbath to Sunday. How is He supposed to have done that?

By His resurrection!

If it were proved that He rose from the grave on the Sabbath, what would happen to the foundation of this doctrine? It would disappear! Their theologians would have only the flimsiest "proof texts" to stand on (I Corinthians 16:1-2; Revelation 1:10)!

Nowhere in the New Testament is the perpetual Sabbath covenant abolished (Exodus 31:12-17), for God made the Sabbath for all mankind (Mark 2:27). To the contrary, Jesus kept it (Luke 4:16), Paul kept it (Acts 17:2) and Gentiles kept it (Acts 13:42-44; 16:13)! The author of Hebrews writes boldly, "There remains therefore a rest [KJV margin: *keeping of a Sabbath*] for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9).

So we can see very clearly that the correct dates for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ can become vital to our salvation.

The Sign

If Jesus rose from His tomb Sunday morning after being interred Friday evening, we have no Savior!

It is true! Jesus gave only one sign of His Messiahship:

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, *so will the Son of Man be **three days and three nights** in the heart of the earth.*" (Matthew 12:38-40)

Why did the Pharisees ask Him for a sign? The answer appears in the section immediately preceding their request. Jesus had been preaching that "a tree is known by its fruit" (verse 33), so naturally, these Jews asked for a sign from Jesus to prove He was the Messiah! They wanted to see what fruit He would produce!

Jesus swiftly rebuked them because they had completely missed the point (verses 41-42)! To satisfy their curiosity, they wanted to see a miracle, but the fruit Jesus meant was repentance, good works and spiritual growth. He would make them wait to see the fruits of His ministry.

Thus He says, paraphrasing, "The only sign that will absolutely prove the truth of My message is one that I will have no control over. I will be exactly three days and three nights in the grave. I will be dead. I will not be able to resurrect Myself. So if God the Father resurrects Me after exactly three days and three nights, it will be proved beyond doubt that I am the Messiah."

He gave the same sign in other places to different audiences, each time using similar wording. In John 2:19-21, He says, "'Destroy this temple, and *in three days* I will raise it up.' . . . But He was speaking of the temple of His body."

To His disciples, He says, "The Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise *the third day*" (Mark 9:31; 10:33-34; Matthew 17:22-23; 20:18-19; Luke 9:22).

Mark 8:31 phrases the same period somewhat differently: "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and *after three days* rise again." Even the chief priests and Pharisees remembered His sign. They tell Pilate after the crucifixion, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, '*After three days* I will rise'" (Matthew 27:63).

What Is Three Days?

Can we fit three days between Friday evening and Sunday morning? The general belief among "Christians" is that Christ meant *parts* of three days: part of Friday, all of Saturday, part of Sunday. But is that what He said?

One of the most important rules of biblical interpretation is to allow the Bible to interpret itself. The Bible often explains its symbols and defines its terms. Is there a biblical definition of what constitutes a "day" and a "night"? Yes, there is!

Jesus Himself supplies the definition in John 11:9-10:

Are there not *twelve hours in the day*? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.

The plain meaning is that He recognized the twelve hours of daylight to form a "day," and the corresponding twelve hours of darkness He called "night." Thus three days and three nights would be made up of six twelve-hour periods or 72 hours.

This is the same method He uses in the Old Testament—in fact, in the very first chapter of the Bible! "God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. . . . So the evening and the morning were the second day. . . . So the evening and the morning were the third day" (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13). Here are three days and three nights so clearly defined anyone can understand!

What about the sign of Jonah? Was the prophet in the great fish's belly for a complete 72 hours? The marginal note in Bullinger's *Companion Bible* for Jonah 1:17 reads: "**Three days and three nights.** The Hebrew idiom 'three days' can be used for parts of three days (and even of years): *but not when the word 'nights' is added*" (our emphasis). By the addition of "nights," the expression becomes more specific, precluding the idea of "parts" of days!

The differing expressions Christ used help to define "three days" even further. We already know "three days and three nights" refers to a 72-hour period. What about the other phrases? Do they mean the same?

» Jesus said He would rise "the third day." This narrows that period to no less than 48 hours and no more than 72 hours from His burial.

» He also said "in three days" He would rise. The outer limit for the duration of His stay "in the heart of the earth" could be no more than 72 hours.

» Two other times it is said that He would rise "after three days," meaning He must be in the grave at least 72 hours and not a second less!

When we compile all of these factors, we can reach only one definite conclusion: ***Jesus Christ was in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea exactly 72 hours to the second!*** If He was resurrected either earlier or later, we have no Savior because the only sign He gave would have failed!

He would be a fraud!

But we have assurance that "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). What God prophesies comes to pass (Isaiah 46:9-11). In this instance, His Word was fulfilled to the very second!

What Time of Day Was He Buried?

Now that we know that Jesus remained dead in the tomb for 72 hours, we can discard the traditional Good Friday—Easter Sunday scenario. It is simply not possible to fit three 24-hour days between them, especially if we are to believe He rose from the dead at dawn on Sunday!

Does this tradition—a dawn resurrection—have any basis in fact? If not, what time of day was Jesus raised?

Matthew, Mark and Luke are very specific about when Jesus died. John records only the time of the crucifixion (John 19:14-16). Luke gives the most succinct report:

And it was about the sixth hour [when He was crucified], and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commend My spirit.'" And having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23:44-46)

Jesus remained on the cross for three hours before He died "at the ninth hour" (Mark 15:34; see Matthew 27:46). Since they were using the Hebrew method of counting the hours of the day from sunrise, the gospel writers indicate that Jesus was crucified around noon and died about 3 PM. They are remarkably unanimous on this point.

Mark continues the account:

Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. . . . And . . . he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. (Mark 15: 42-43, 45-46)

Several points stand out in this passage:

» Evening was beginning—at best Joseph had only about three hours before sunset, when the Sabbath would begin. The task of preparing and applying the spices for burial required work, which is expressly forbidden on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-10). Additionally, Deuteronomy 21:22-23 demands that an executed criminal be buried before nightfall, and the Jewish law of the time required all dead bodies to be buried before a Sabbath or a feast day (John 19:31).

» Before he could take the body down, Joseph had to go before Pilate and receive permission. At first Pilate did not believe Jesus had died so quickly, so he called the centurion of the crucifixion detail to verify it (Mark 15:44-45). This delay must have taken at least a half hour.

» After being granted the body, Joseph went to a local shop and bought several yards of fine linen in which to wrap Jesus. With the help of Nicodemus, he then took the body down, wrapped it in the linen—along with about a hundred pounds of spices—and placed it in the tomb (John 19:39-41).

With all this activity and work between the various locations, Joseph and Nicodemus must have had very little daylight left when they finally rolled the stone over the entrance to the tomb. On this point

all the accounts again concur; sunset was *very* near (Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31).

No one disputes that Jesus was laid "in the heart of the earth" at sunset. If, as we have shown, He was buried for exactly 72 hours, ***He was also resurrected at sunset — not at dawn !***

The Preparation Day of the Passover

All four gospel writers mention that Jesus was tried, convicted, crucified and buried on a preparation day. Without any further clarification, one would assume that they meant a Friday, the weekly preparation day before the Sabbath. But can other days be considered preparation days as well?

Yes, indeed! God Himself gave the instructions about the use of the preparation day to the Israelites before they reached Mount Sinai (Exodus 16:23). The Jews later considered this to be so important that they made sure each of the holy days, which are also Sabbaths, was preceded by a preparation day. Since the holy days can fall on any day of the week, the preparation day can fall on any day of the week as well.

This is very relevant to the Passover. Not only is the Passover a festival in its own right, it also functions as the preparation day for a holy day, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. According to the calculated Hebrew Calendar, Passover can fall on a Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Sabbath.

Clearly, our Savior was crucified on a Passover day (Matthew 26:2). Thus, it was on one of these days of the week that Jesus was killed and buried.

But was the Sabbath in question the weekly Sabbath or an annual, holy day Sabbath? What can the Bible tell us?

John writes, "Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover" (John 19:14). The word "Passover" in this context requires some explanation. At some time before Christ's day, the Jews had begun calling the day of Passover and the following seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6-8) by the single name "Passover." This has caused great confusion for non-Jews, especially when they read the account of this particular Passover. But John 19:31 should clear up any confusion: "Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for ***that Sabbath was a high day***) . . .!"

So, without a doubt, Jesus was crucified on a Passover day, Nisan 14, and the Sabbath that followed was the first day of Unleavened Bread, an annual holy day, a high day. This only makes sense, for the apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 5:7, "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."

What Day of the Week?

Every year as Easter approaches, churches often proclaim on banners, marquees, signs, billboards and television, "He is risen!" It would probably be a good bet to wager that most of the members of these churches have really never studied the section of Scripture from which this quotation comes and its corresponding sections in the other three accounts.

We should not accept the traditional view so easily, and to find the truth, we must return to the story flow. The three synoptic writers (Matthew, Mark and Luke) record that Joseph and Nicodemus had an audience as they prepared Jesus' body. "And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid" (Luke 23:55).

If we continue in Luke's account, we get the impression that the women hurried to a spice shop, bought the spices and oils, prepared them and then rested on the Sabbath (verse 56). But we would be wrong!

We have to go to Mark 16:1 for some vital information: "Now *when the Sabbath was past*, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him." Logistically, the sequence of events cannot be otherwise. If Joseph barely had time to bury Jesus' body before sundown, how much less time would the women have had to do all that they needed to do!

So the harmonized accounts show that when Joseph took Jesus down from the cross, the women followed him to see where he would place the body. They then returned to their lodging and observed the holy day Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread. The day after the holy day, they went to a shop, bought spices and oil, took them back to their lodging, prepared them for use on the body and "they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56).

There were two Sabbaths within that 72-hour period!

These women bought and prepared spices "when the Sabbath had past" and then "rested on the Sabbath"! They rested twice: once on "a high day" and once on the weekly Sabbath two days later.

This can mean only one thing! Jesus was crucified and buried on a Wednesday, the holy day fell on Thursday, the women prepared spices on Friday and our Savior was resurrected at sunset on the Sabbath as the day ended! The events cannot be worked out any other way with the plain evidence provided in the Holy Scriptures!

Matthew 28:1 provides additional proof of two Sabbaths occurring that week. However, the Bible's translators, confused by the Greek wording of this verse, have consistently mistranslated it. Matthew writes, "Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn" The wording of the original text, though, reads, "after the Sabbaths"—plural!

The Wavesheaf

God restored several major truths to His church through the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong. One of these is the understanding of the observance and types of God's festivals commanded in Leviticus 23. The world, without the revealed understanding of the holy days, has little idea what God is working out on this earth. But after careful study and observance of these days, we find that within the annual holy day cycle, God unveils His awesome plan of salvation for all mankind!

To summarize these festivals, the **Passover** reminds us of Christ's sacrifice, when He took our sins upon Himself. **Unleavened Bread** pictures a Christian's life-long task of removing sin from his life. **Pentecost** memorializes the giving of the Holy Spirit and looks forward to the reaping of the firstfruits of God's Family. The day of **Trumpets** signifies the second coming of Jesus Christ and the

resurrection of the saints. The **day of Atonement** shows access to God being opened and our sins being completely removed by Jesus Christ, while the **Feast of Tabernacles** typifies His coming thousand-year reign on earth. Finally, the **Last Great Day** represents the Great White Throne Judgment period when all mankind will have an opportunity for salvation.

Few people realize, however, that Jesus Christ fulfilled another Old Testament festival upon being resurrected. This festival, in which a priest waved "a sheaf of the firstfruits of [Israel's] harvest" before the Lord, was held each year on the day after the weekly Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:10-11). Thus, a priest would have conducted this wavesheaf ceremony on the day after Christ's resurrection.

During this period, according to the Mishnah, the sheaf to be waved in the ceremony was reaped from the field as the Sabbath ended and Sunday began. "R. Hananiah, Prefect of the Priests, says, 'On the Sabbath it [the barley] was reaped.' . . . On the Sabbath, he [the priest] says to them, '[Shall I reap on] this Sabbath?' They shall say, 'Yes'" (Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation*, "Menahoth," p. 753-754). So, at dusk at the end of the Sabbath, the priest "put the sickle to the grain" (Deuteronomy 16:9). When was the sheaf waved? Histories of the time show that it was waved about the same time as the daily morning sacrifice, that is, about 9 am on Sunday.

The reaping and waving of the sheaf symbolized Israel giving the first and best of the harvest to God and its subsequent acceptance by Him. It is exactly this symbolism that Jesus fulfilled! As the weekly Sabbath was ending, exactly 72 hours from His burial, God resurrected Him from the dead! God "reaped" the first and best of His spiritual harvest (I Corinthians 15:23).

Yet, even so, Jesus had not fulfilled the entire ritual! Notice John 20:17, where the resurrected Christ is speaking to Mary Magdalene: "Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God."'"

As the firstfruits of God's Family, Jesus had not yet appeared before the Father for acceptance as our Savior and High Priest! He had not yet been "waved"! The context of John 20 shows that it was still early in the morning, and most likely, shortly after Mary returned to the disciples, Jesus ascended to His Father's throne in heaven to be accepted as our Redeemer—at about the same time the priest waved the sheaf before God in the Temple. God fulfills His Word to the letter!

More Proof of a Wednesday Crucifixion

Daniel the prophet received an intriguing prophecy from the archangel Gabriel in Daniel 9:24-27. This passage is known as the Seventy Weeks Prophecy, for Gabriel gives a seventy-week time frame for the coming of the Messiah. He divides the first sixty-nine weeks into two periods, the first of seven weeks and the second of sixty-two weeks.

And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself. . . . Then He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week [the seventieth week]; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.

The prophecy shows that the Messiah would die, "but not for Himself." That is in perfect agreement with the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ! He gave Himself to redeem us from our bondage to sin and death (Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 2:1).

Next, the prophecy says He would "confirm a covenant with many." Is this not what He did? Did He not become the Mediator of a new and better covenant (Hebrews 9:15)? When He instituted the new symbols for the Passover, Jesus says about the wine, "For this is My blood of the *new covenant*, which is shed for *many* for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28; see Mark 14:24).

Then Gabriel prophesies that the Messiah would bring the need for ritual animal sacrifices and offerings to an end. The writer of Hebrews plainly states, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Christ's sacrifice was much more effective: "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).

The angel says the Messiah would accomplish this "in the middle [*midst*, KJV] of the week." Obviously, its primary meaning refers to the middle of the seventieth week, or literally, three and a half years, the exact length of Christ's ministry. However, as we have seen, God fulfills His prophecies perfectly. Not only did Jesus' ministry last for three and a half years, but He also died on a Wednesday, the exact middle day of a week!

Prophecy Pinpoints Year Too

What is so amazing about the often neglected Seventy Weeks Prophecy is that, not only does it give us a clue to the *day* of Christ's death, it indicates the *year* of His death as well! Of course, it is not as simple as looking up a fact in an almanac, but enough information is available to discover the year very accurately.

Gabriel says, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks" (Daniel 9:25). The ending point is fairly plain: the revealing of the Messiah. But what is the starting point?

Historians know of at least four decrees made by the Persian emperors "to restore and build Jerusalem." Cyrus made one in 538 BC, Darius I made one in 520 BC and Artaxerxes I made two, one in 457 BC and one in 444 BC. Which one is the correct command?

All of them could fit the description in Daniel 9:25. All of them are concerned with restoring Jerusalem to its former function as the Jewish religious capital and trade center. But only one of them fits the time constraints, and this becomes clear when we work out the puzzle of the seventy weeks.

We have to do a little arithmetic to find the terminus for each of these decrees. The expression "seventy weeks" literally means "seventy sevens," and the year-for-a-day principle applies here (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:4-6). We must multiply seventy weeks times the seven years in a week of years, which equals 490 years. Gabriel, however, says it is only sixty-nine sevens "until Messiah the Prince." Thus, $69 \times 7 = 483$ years.

If we add 483 years to each of the dates of the decrees, what do we find? (Remember to add one year for crossing the non-existent year 0.)

- $538 \text{ BC} + 483 \text{ years} = 55 \text{ BC}$. No significant biblical event.
- $520 \text{ BC} + 483 \text{ years} = 37 \text{ BC}$. No significant biblical event.

- 457 BC + 483 years = AD 27. Jesus is baptized and begins His ministry.
- 444 BC + 483 years = AD 40. No significant biblical event.

God made it easy! We have only one choice!

Daniel 9:26-27 is very specific that the Messiah would work for three and a half years, half of a week, before being "cut off." When we add three and a half years to AD 27, we find that Christ's ministry ended in AD 31, the year of His crucifixion and resurrection!

The Passovers in the Gospels

If His ministry lasted three and a half years, then during this period Christ must have observed four Passovers, the final one being the day of His death. This last Passover is, of course, the best known and best documented of them all. Matthew and Mark, in fact, do not mention any others, leaving Luke and John as our only sources for the other three.

But do we find evidence of three others in the gospels? Yes, we do. It seems that John, writing his chronologically arranged account many years after the publication of the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, tried to highlight periods in Jesus' ministry that the others had not mentioned. So when we harmonize the four gospels, we can construct a solid framework of Christ's three-and-a-half-year ministry around the Passovers.

1. The Passover of AD 28 is mentioned in John 2:13 and 23. During this time, Jesus cleansed the Temple the first time and first mentioned the sign of His Messiahship.
2. Combining the next time reference in John 4:35 ("There are still four months and then comes the harvest") with Luke 6:1 ("Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first . . .") indicates Passover time in AD 29. The harvest Jesus spoke of was the spring harvest, occurring during the spring holy day season. The strange phrase "the second Sabbath after the first" describes either the second of the seven annual holy days of the year, namely, the last day of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:8), or the second of the seven Sabbaths that were counted from Unleavened Bread to Pentecost (verse 15). Without mentioning it directly, both of these choices show Jesus keeping a second Passover season during His ministry.
3. The third Passover, that of AD 30, is found plainly in John 6:4: "Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near." Jesus fed the five thousand (verses 10-14) and walked on the Sea of Galilee (verses 16-21).
4. Christ's last Passover, on which He was killed and buried, is attested to by all the gospel writers. It was so indelibly stamped upon their memories that they devote a combined thirteen chapters (15 percent of the gospels) to that one day!

Therefore, we see very clearly that the four gospels verify the three-and-a-half-year ministry prophesied in the Seventy Weeks Prophecy. This conclusively proves that Jesus died in AD 31 when, according to the Hebrew Calendar, Passover fell on a Wednesday, not a Friday!

Common Misunderstandings

Several verses in the gospel accounts, when taken alone, can seem to contradict the conclusions we have reached here. But when all the available evidence is gathered, they fit in quite well with a Wednesday crucifixion and Sabbath resurrection. In most cases, the true meaning of these verses depends on seeing what they *really* say without reading an interpretation into them. This is one of the cardinal principles of Bible study: *The plain, commonsense meaning of a scripture is to be preferred over a more fanciful one.*

Luke 24:21 is one of these misunderstood verses: "Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened." Two of the disciples, traveling to Emmaus, were conversing with the resurrected Christ, though they did not know it was He (verses 13-16). They were rehearsing what had happened in Jerusalem to Jesus by the chief priests and rulers of Judea (verses 18-20).

This conversation occurred on Sunday, the same day that the women, Peter and John had gone to the tomb only to find it empty. Yet these disciples heading to Emmaus say that it had only been three days, not four. How do we reconcile this to the facts that we have proved?

The key is in the repetition of the words "all these things," "these things" and "the things" of verses 14, 18-19 and 21. "Things" is modified by the disciples' specifying in verse 20 that they were speaking of the actions that "the chief priests and our rulers" had done to Christ. The fact that is often forgotten is that their ignominious actions against Him did not end with delivering Him to Pilate for crucifixion! Notice Matthew 27:62-66:

On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

The day after "the Day of Preparation" was Thursday, the first day of Unleavened Bread! These Jewish leaders went to Pilate on the holy day to "guarantee" that their Messiah would not rise from the dead! And with the guard in place and the tomb sealed, they felt certain nothing more would happen.

Thus, when the two disciples on the road to Emmaus say that Sunday "is the third day since these things happened," they are counting from the last despicable actions of the chief priests and Pharisees on Thursday, not Wednesday. Note that their words preclude a Friday crucifixion as well, since Sunday is only the second day from Friday.

Another verse that often causes problems comes from this last passage, Matthew 27:64, where the chief priests say, "Therefore command that the tomb be made secure *until the third day.*" Commentators say this proves that Jesus did not have to be in the tomb a full three days, but only parts of three days. However, they fail to recognize that the priests spoke this on *Thursday*, not Wednesday. They were asking Pilate to seal and guard the tomb *at least through the Sabbath*, when three days and three nights would have fully elapsed since Christ's death and burial!

A third problematic verse is Mark 16:9, translated in the New King James Version as, "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared. . . ." The King James Version translates it, "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared. . . ." Finally, *The Interlinear Bible*, in its word-for-word translation, renders it, "having risen And early on the first of the week, He appeared. . . ." Does this verse say the resurrection was early on the first day of the week?

Here is another instance of the translators mistranslating a verse because of their preconceived beliefs! The commentators admit the construction of the sentence is unusual, but refuse to acknowledge its plain sense. The literal translation, with only slight modification, gives the best rendering: "And having risen, early on the first day of the week He appeared. . . ."

The Greek form translated "having risen" (*anastas*, an active aorist participle) suggests an action completed prior to the time of the main verb, in this case, "appeared." Thus, Jesus was resurrected sometime *before* He appeared to Mary Magdalene early on the first day of the week. That is all that Mark is trying to say! Placing a simple comma after "rose" (NKJV) or "risen" (KJV) is the easiest way to resolve the matter. The words of the angel to the women, "He is risen!" (Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6) also give the sense that He was raised at some point prior to His Sunday morning appearances.

So we see that this verse neither proves nor disproves a Sabbath or a Sunday resurrection! The clues about when He really was raised from the dead—Sabbath at sunset—are found in other verses.

From Puzzle to Picture

It is really no mystery! The authors of the gospels, honest men with a wonderful story to tell, gave us a straightforward account of the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They gave us all the pieces of the puzzle we need to construct a clear, precise picture of those events. And when we have them in the correct order, they tightly interlock like a jigsaw puzzle. Everything fits perfectly when the puzzle is solved.

And in a way, this picture we have reconstructed throughout this booklet is only a detail of a larger puzzle we call "the truth." It expands to illustrate, not only the historical facts, but also the way of life that God has given us to live. As we saw, details like the death and resurrection of Christ serve to undergird the truths of the Sabbath and holy days, God's fulfillment of His Word, the work of God and Christ on our behalf and so forth.

Of course, beyond the details of His death and resurrection is the amazing fact that our Savior voluntarily gave Himself to be crucified to pay the penalty for our sins. His perfect life and sacrificial death paid for our imperfect and self-centered lives. As the author of Hebrews writes:

Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. (Hebrews 9:28)

It is for this second appearance that all creation eagerly waits (Romans 8:19). Just as Christ rose from the dead, so will His faithful disciples when He returns. On this Paul writes,

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. . . . For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout,

with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (I Thessalonians 4:14, 16-17)

What a wonderful goal we have! Because we believe in Christ's awesome work on our behalf, and live according to His way of life, He has given us the potential to share eternal life with Him in the Kingdom of God! What a tremendous hope! What an incomparable future! What a wonderful God!