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The Case for a Thursday Crucifixion

by Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., May 2001

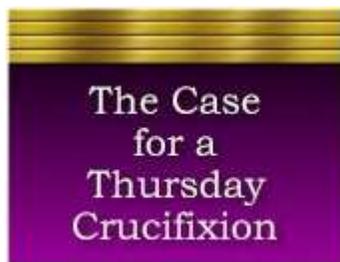
Edited by David Sielaff, March 2005, edited and converted to Article format, July 2022

Read the accompanying [Newsletter for July 2022](#)

Read also the July 1, 2022 Commentary

[Editor's Note: *This article was originally written in 1983 and edited by Dr. Martin in 2001 as a Commentary to update his research. I edited the article in March 2005, reformatted the text for readability, and updated the citations. In this edition I added still more direct links to the evidence for internet readers. If you wish, you can read the original "[May 2001 Commentary](#)" with the same title.*

I reprint this article now because I doubt many of you have read it and it is important to know that the Scriptures are accurate even to seemingly small details about Christ's resurrection. While we can still disagree on some points, you will have solid biblical evidence set before you. DWS]



There is a common opinion throughout the Christian world is that Christ was crucified on a Friday and resurrected near dawn on Sunday morning. There has been a vigorous minority who insist that Wednesday was the true crucifixion day. A few scholars have even opted for a Thursday. The main reason a Wednesday is attractive to some (particularly those Christians who still observe the seventh-day Sabbath) is because Christ's resurrection would then have happened at the end of a weekly Sabbath, just before the sun had set on our Saturday afternoon. This factor supposedly would provide an answer for the "three days and three nights" period that was called the "sign of Jonah."

provide an answer for the "three days and three nights" period that was called the "sign of Jonah."

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

• **Matthew 12:40**

Taking this statement in a literal sense as we figure time today, a period of 72 hours would be meant, and those advocating a Wednesday crucifixion insist that a full period of 72 hours was what Christ meant — not 71 hours or 73 hours, but precisely 72 hours. Those believing in the Wednesday view state with dogmatism that the traditional belief of Friday to Sunday morning (an interval from late Friday afternoon when Christ was placed in the tomb to dawn on Sunday morning) occupied only about 36 to 38 hours, a deficient period of time.

This in no way satisfies the full "three days and three nights" period that Christ said He would be in the

tomb. And, to add resolute authority to their Wednesday opinion, some maintain that those 72 hours in the tomb represent the only sign that Christ was truly the Messiah. To deny that precise period of time is to overthrow the proof of the Savior himself in the only sign He gave that He was the Messiah! The truth is; however, this concept is carrying the matter too far. The sign that Christ was talking about was Christ's resurrection from the dead, not some 72-hour interval of time.

The fact is, however, Friday has good credentials, albeit with some difficulties here and there. But when Thursday is considered as a possible candidate, many of the difficulties involving Friday are ironed out, and the sensitivities of those demanding a Wednesday are also moderated. In this article, I show

- the weaknesses that abound in the Wednesday view,
- the difficulties attached to Friday, and
- how these problems are solved with a Thursday crucifixion.

We will then let our readers decide for themselves which theory they prefer.

And let's face it, all are theories because none of us were there at the time to verify the biblical record as an eyewitness. What I want to do is to rightly evaluate the accounts that the writers of the Bible give us. We at ASK are convinced the biblical writers told the truth. It is up to us, however, with God's help, to assess what the biblical writers actually intended. We think this is possible to do!

Problems of the Wednesday Theory of the Day of Crucifixion

It is the Wednesday theory that is the most vulnerable to positive criticism. It has deficiencies in almost any direction that a person looks. For one, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (a village located about six miles northwest of Jerusalem) talked to our Lord in the late afternoon of Sunday and remarked that that time was **"the third day"** since the crucifixion (Luke 24:20). It is not possible, as some Wednesday proponents say, that **"the third day"** only reaches back to the bringing of spices after a Thursday annual Sabbath, for that day **"was an high day"** (John 19:31).

The **"third day"** that those disciples on the road to Emmaus referred to embraces all the things mentioned in verse 20 and there is nothing in that verse about the women bringing spices. Indeed, the things the disciples were talking about (which happened the third day previously) occupied the time of Christ's trials of condemnation before the Sanhedrin and Pilate. Those events occurred in the early morning hours of the crucifixion day and also, the affairs involving the crucifixion itself occurred from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon.

The **"third day"** referred to by the Emmaus disciples thus included all the morning events of the crucifixion day leading up to, and including, the crucifixion itself. Thus, if one reckons back three days from a late Sunday afternoon, it will come out to

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| a Friday for the crucifixion, | if that Sunday is numbered as the first day of the week, or |
| a Thursday for crucifixion, | if Sunday is <u>not</u> included. |

Look at it this way. If that Sunday afternoon was **"the third day"** from the events of the crucifixion, then

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|-----------------------------|--|
| the "second day" going back | <u>from those events</u> would answer to Saturday afternoon, |
| the "first day" | <u>from those events</u> would reach back to Friday afternoon, |

and the day of crucifixion itself would answer to Thursday afternoon.

Counting Methods

We in our modern world often count things differently. Our American and British way of rendering such things is to exclude the day from which we start. Since Luke said that late Sunday afternoon was the **"third day,"** then:

our first day back would lead us to Saturday;
 the second day back, to a Friday; and
 the third day back, to a Thursday.

Or, if the normal Jewish and Greek method of reckoning is used (which almost always included the day from whence one started counting),

the first day for reckoning was the very day during which the disciples talked to Christ;
 the second day back would have been Saturday; and
 the third day back, a Friday.

This may seem like an odd way of counting ordinal numbers, but this is clearly the manner which biblical personalities preferred. And even Christ himself gave such a reckoning. He said:

“Go you, and tell that fox [Herod Antipas], ‘Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following.’”

• **Luke 13:32–33**

To Christ, the **“third day”** was the day after tomorrow so this means he counted the day on which he made his statement as the first day. This is the common Jewish mode of inclusive dating of events.

(We will discuss the relevance of inclusive reckoning as having priority over our western view of using an exclusive method, later in this article.)

But no matter if one takes the **“third day”** of Luke 24:20 inclusively or exclusively, the phrase could not possibly reach back to a Wednesday from that Sunday afternoon. The case for the Wednesday theory is shipwrecked by this biblical indication alone.

The Problem of the “Dawn” for the Wednesday Theory

There is a second reason Wednesday will not work. Its supporters have Christ placed in the tomb near sundown of Wednesday and resurrected exactly 72 hours later at the end of the weekly Sabbath. They even point to the Gospel of Matthew as promoting this belief. They say that Christ’s resurrection occurred **“in the end of the sabbaths, as it began to DAWN towards the first day of the week”** (Matthew 28:1).

They usually maintain that the Thursday of crucifixion week was the high day Sabbath of Unleavened Bread, the Friday was an ordinary weekday, and at the end of the weekly Sabbath as it was beginning to dawn into Sunday (that is, about 5:50 p.m.), Christ arose from the dead. It was thus, to them, a near twilight of Saturday for the resurrection, not Sunday morning!

The whole idea is nonsense. Who ever heard of the “dawn” of a day (that is, when the sun comes up in the east) as happening when the sun is going down in the west? The word “dawn” in Matthew 28:1 is *epiphoskouse* and it means **“the lightning up”** of the sun in the morning, not the “darkening down” of the sun at sundown.

The truth is verse one of Matthew chapter 28 has been misunderstood for centuries because the phrase “after the Sabbaths” has been attached to **“the dawn of Sunday morning.”** In fact, the original Greek manuscripts had no chapter breaks (or versification) in them at all, even the Greek letters themselves were run together without any separation of words. But if one will simply read the preceding section in Matthew 27:62–66 and affix the phrase **“after the Sabbaths”** to the end of chapter 27, it will be seen that the chief priests and Pharisees set a guard at the tomb and sealed the stone in front of its entrance **“after the Sabbaths”** were over.

That is what happened once the weekly Sabbath had ended, not that that was the time of Christ’s resurrection. The phrase **“after the Sabbaths”** refers to the guards setting up their watches (that is, when the Sabbath days, plural, were over). And, if Matthew 28:1 starts (as it most assuredly should) with the words **“When it was growing light on the first day of the week,”** and we realize that is the time Christ was resurrected,

all becomes harmonious with the other biblical accounts, and we do not have the contradiction that sundown of one day equals the sunrise of the next.

[**Editor's note:** Remember that **every Sabbath ends at sunset**, not in the morning.

Compare side-by-side the two understandings that demonstrate Dr. Martin's explanation. *DWS*]

Matthew 27:65–28:6 with the current chapter break	Matthew 27:65–28:6 with a natural break
<p>⁶⁵ “Pilate said unto them, ‘You have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as you can.’ ⁶⁶ So they went, and</p> <p>[1] made the sepulchre sure, [2] sealing the stone, and [3] setting a watch.</p> <p>[4] ^{28:1} In the end of the sabbath,¹ <i>as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.</i></p>	<p>⁶⁵ “Pilate said unto them, ‘You have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as you can.’ ⁶⁶ So they went, and</p> <p>[1] made the sepulchre sure, [2] sealing the stone, and [3] setting a watch, [4] ^{28:1} In the end of the sabbath.¹</p> <p><i>[A]s it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.</i></p>
<p>² And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for <u>the angel of the Lord</u> descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and [the angel] sat upon it. ³ His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.</p> <p>⁵ And the angel answered and said unto the women, ‘Fear not you: for I know that you seek Jesus, which was crucified. ⁶ He is not here: for HE IS RISEN, as he [Jesus] said.’”</p>	

Notice what this does to the supposition that Christ was resurrected just as the sun was going down at the close of the weekly Sabbath. At that very time, according to Matthew, the chief priests and Pharisees were setting the guard before the tomb, and placing mortar around the stone to seal it. If the angel were rolling away the stone and Christ was coming forth in a resurrected state **at the exact time the chief priests, Pharisees, soldiers, and stonemasons were busy sealing the tomb**, there would never have been a charge that Christ's disciples stole away the body at night.

Since the authorities were very anxious to stop such a belief from developing, it is certainly very reasonable (before they cemented the stone just after the weekly Sabbath had ended) that they checked to see that the body of Christ was still there. Only with such security would they then have sealed the stone. Interestingly, that was the very charge (that the disciples stole away the body by night) that prevailed in the opinion of many Jews after the resurrection (Matthew 28:11–15).

Furthermore, the authorities were aware the body of Christ was still there just after the weekly Sabbath had ended when they sealed the stone, the only night that the disciples could have “**stolen away**” the body was that of Saturday or in the early morning hours of Sunday. This is because **“sealing the stone” was considered “work” and that was not allowed on Saturday** (the Sabbath). This again shows that the resurrection of Christ was early Sunday morning, and in no way could it have occurred near sundown on Saturday evening.

Clearly, the **“the end of the sabbath”** cannot be the same time as **“dawn toward the first day of the week.”**

¹ The word “Sabbath” of Matthew 28:1 in the King James Version is plural in Greek. The phrase is better translated: **“In the end of the sabbaths.”** *DWS*

Wednesday Is Not Possible

There is yet **a third reason** why a Wednesday crucifixion is out of the question. We have available absolute astronomical evidence that Nisan 14 (the day of the crucifixion) could not have occurred on a Wednesday from 29 AD to 33 AD.² Oh yes, it has been suggested that an April 25th date for Nisan 14 might have been a possibility in 31 AD,³ but this late date is thoroughly unnecessary. It would involve an extra lunar month being added to the previous year when there was no need to do so.

The fact is, Nisan 14 could have started at sundown on March 26th and would have lasted until sundown of March 27th. This period is after the Vernal Equinox (a 1st century requirement for the celebration of Passover) and it would have been a time when the barley would have been ripe enough to wave the necessary sheaves (Leviticus 23:9–14). And if the previous winter had been exceptionally cold and long, the mandatory sheaves of barley could have been obtained from the Jericho region where barley always became ripe in early March. And recall the area of Jericho was as much a part of the Holy Land as the region around Jerusalem and the barley fields were authorized for reaping the first sheaf. The point is, Nisan 14 in 31 AD started at sundown on Monday, March 26th. This, of course, is nowhere near a Wednesday.

And, in case someone still wants to insist (for his theological beliefs) that a month had to be added to the calendar in 31 AD in order to have Nisan 14 on a Wednesday, it ought to be mentioned that Sherrard Burnaby's authoritative work titled *Elements of the Jewish and Muhammadan Calendars*⁴ has tables for the occurrence of Nisan 14 from 610 AD to the start of our 21st century and beyond, and over the past 1300 years Nisan 14 in the present Jewish calendar has NEVER occurred as late as April 25th.

Indeed, I can show that it is possible to figure the present Jewish calendar reckonings back at least to the middle of the 2nd century AD, and it can with certainty be stated that Nisan 14 has NEVER been allowed to occur as late as April 25th, as demanded by a Wednesday, 31 AD crucifixion date.

The Lunar-Solar calendar system of the Jews has often been misunderstood. Though certain rituals of observation of the moon and the state of the spring crops were supposed to be in operation during the time of Christ that caused the Jewish authorities in Palestine to postpone a new moon day or to add an extra month to the calendar year, these procedures were nothing more than antiquated rituals nostalgically performed in order to appease the traditionalists.

They were no more significant than the modern ritual in the Parliament in London of yearly looking for the gunpowder that was to blow up the Parliament buildings by Guy Fawkes on November 5th, 1604. The ceremony in London (for traditional purposes) is still carried on to this day, though no one believes that any explosives from Guy Fawkes (who lived in the 17th century) are still in the basement of Parliament.

And so it is with the rituals of watching for the crescents of new moons, and seeing if the spring barley was ripe in the Holy Land. All the new moons (and thus all calendar dates of the year) were known well in advance in the time of Christ. It is inconceivable that the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem (which had to regulate the Lunar-Solar calendar for all the Jews scattered from Spain to India) did not have at their call competent astronomers who could have predicted any new moon, and the calendar years that went along with them, for years in advance.

Why, even solar eclipses (the most difficult of celestial occurrences to calculate) were able to be predicted as early as the 5th century BC. And as for the easier lunar eclipses, we have (as one example alone) the Roman military tribune Sulpicius Gallus in the 2nd century BC forewarning his troops the night before an eclipse of the moon that it would occur right on schedule **“lest they should any of them consider the matter a prodigy”**⁵

² See Jack Finegan's *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, Second edition, revised (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998), p. 363, Table 179. *ELM*

³ Finegan, *Handbook*, p. 363. *ELM*

⁴ The full citation is, S.B. Burnaby, *Elements of the Jewish and Muhammadan Calendars* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1901). *ELM*

⁵ See the text at Livy, *Periochae 44.4–44.5* where Lucius Aemilius Paullus, Roman general and consul: **“before the battle, he told his army that they should not be surprised if the moon should be eclipsed during the night.”** *DWS*]

But there is no need to rely on late evidences. As early as the time of David, one was able to know (beforehand) the exact day of the new moon (and in this case for the start of the new year). “**David said unto Jonathan, ‘Behold, tomorrow is the new moon’**” (1 Samuel 20:5). This shows that predicting the exact day for the occurrence of new moons was known at least a thousand years before the birth of Christ.

It is a foregone conclusion that the times for the beginnings of all the ecclesiastical new years near springtime in Jerusalem in the time of Christ were known several years in advance. And it made no difference if the barley crops around Jerusalem were ripe or not. All the priests had to do was to obtain enough sheaves of barley to equal an *omer* of capacity (about half a gallon) from the area of Jericho (where it was always ripe enough) to officially begin each calculated year.

It is sheer foolishness to suggest anything else as possible. Imagine the problem if the New Year depended on the state of the barley around Jerusalem. The Jews in foreign countries would not have known when to celebrate the springtime feasts at their proper times if all depended on whether the land of Judaea at Jerusalem had such a long winter that the priests had to postpone the start of the year. What ridiculousness!

People throughout the Roman and Parthian worlds were no doubt told at least three years in advance (or probably as much as eight or nineteen years before) when the festivals would be held in Jerusalem. If such a standardized cycle for festival observance was not in force in the 1st century AD (and if the calendar years were truly dependent solely upon the state of the late winter crops in the Holy Land), then the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Parthians, etc., would have laughed the Jews to scorn. Such, of course, was not the case. The Jewish authorities were as adept at astronomical matters as all the rest of the scientific world at the time. And it can be stated dogmatically that the calculation of the calendar years of the Jews (and consequently the times of all the feasts) were known years in advance in the 1st century AD, and new moons were calculated in advance in King David’s time.

But what has all this to do with a Wednesday crucifixion for Christ? It makes the whole proposition completely untenable for a Wednesday on April 25, 31 AD. We know from simple astronomical data that the only weekday possible for Nisan 14 in 31 AD started at the sundown of Monday, March 26th.

When Could Nisan 14 Occur?

Since a Wednesday crucifixion day is not possible from 29 AD to 33 AD let us now look at the days on which a Nisan 14 calendar date could occur during those years.

- In **29 AD** Nisan 14 would only have occurred on Monday, April 18th (actually, the day commenced the evening before at sundown).
- In **30 AD** it was assumed (until recent computer evaluations of the appearance of the moon in March, 30 AD) that Friday, April 7th was the day of Nisan 14, but it is now known that astronomy favors Thursday, April 6th.⁶ In 30 AD the only weekdays possible were
 - a Thursday (if astronomy and the “**three days and three nights**” of Matthew 12:40 are taken into account), or
 - a Friday if inclusive reckoning is used.
- We discussed **31 AD** above.
- In **32 AD**, Nisan 14 was on a Monday.
- And in **33 AD**, the only weekday possible for Nisan 14 was a Friday.⁷

It will be seen that the only years in which the crucifixion of our Lord could have happened (if Wednesday

⁶ I will have more to say on this new astronomical evidence later. *ELM*

⁷ See Finegan, *Handbook*, p. 363 for proof. *ELM*

is now out of the question) would be:

30 AD, where either a Thursday or a Friday may seem to fit, or

33 AD, where only Friday is possible.

First, a General Overview

If it were not for the statement of Christ that his entombment was to last for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40), Friday for the crucifixion would have been an almost certain conclusion.

About twenty-five years ago [in 1976] I began to understand the absurdity of the Wednesday crucifixion, which I had believed for twenty years in support of a denomination that demanded it. I then thought the only answer was the traditional Friday as the day of the crucifixion. However, the astute observations made by some associates of mine seemed to give Thursday good credentials. And when it was recognized that astronomy can now be used in evidence too, we feel it is time to put into the hands of our ASK supporters the information for a Thursday crucifixion.

When one compares the evidence available, the Thursday theory has something to recommend it. But before we get into the matter of Thursday, it will be good to rehearse the evidence for a Friday. Believe me, that weekday is a strong contender, and it cannot be lightly cast aside. Let us look at the evidence for Friday.

The Friday Theory and Inclusive Reckoning

The most powerful warrant that a Friday crucifixion is correct is the persistent usage of inclusive reckoning for numbering days, months, years, and events in the Old and New Testaments. Again, understand what inclusive reckoning means when one starts counting anything in a series. Inclusive usage means it is essential to count the time or event current as number one in the sequence.

Let me give a simple example from the Bible that can easily illustrate what this means. In the Book of Jude, he says that the patriarch Enoch was the seventh from Adam (Jude 14). Now we in the western world would normally exclude Adam from being number one in our count. We would ordinarily say that Seth (Adam's son) was the first from Adam (using exclusive reckoning) and that Enoch was the eighth (see Genesis 5:1–18 or Luke 3:37–38). But this is not the way the Hebrews would reckon the matter. They always started with the events (or the person) current, that is, Adam is the first from Adam, and Enoch was the seventh from Adam (by counting Adam as the first).

The same thing can be found in the genealogy of Christ. Matthew records the fourteen generations from Abraham to David (Matthew 1:6, 17), but to get fourteen one must count both Abraham and David. This may seem odd to us westerners, because we would normally say that one generation from Abraham would be his son Isaac, and not for a moment would we think that Abraham is himself the first generation. However, we are not Hebrews, and our western way of thinking is not relevant in biblical matters.

In almost all occasions that one can find in the Bible, the inclusive manner of reckoning is very much in vogue. There are a host of examples to show this. One that is clear to most people is the figuring of Pentecost. It is known that one should count the 50 days to Pentecost beginning with the Sunday during the days of Unleavened Bread and one must count that Sunday on which the wave sheaf is presented to the Lord as day number one. That way, the Day of Pentecost always comes out to a Sunday (not a Monday as some inexperienced people in biblical usage have demanded using the alien exclusive reckoning). The truth is inclusive usage can be called the actual biblical way which numbers in a series (of events and individuals) are reckoned.

Let me give more examples to show the truth of this. In 1 Samuel 20:5 David said that the new moon (the beginning of a new month and in this case a New Year) was to happen on the morrow. David said he would hide himself to **“the third day at even.”** But that third day was the second day of the month (verses 24–27). In this account, David clearly counted the day current in which he made his request to Jonathan as day number one. The new moon day was day number two. And then, the second day of the month, was day three. This is

plain and simple usage of inclusive reckoning in the Bible.

Several other Old Testament examples could be given, but to keep this article in a reasonable length, I will now point out some New Testament indications which clearly show the persistent usage of inclusive reckonings in matters of days in a series.

New Testament and Other Historical Examples of Inclusive Reckoning

Cornelius, the Roman centurion, received his vision at the ninth hour (Acts 10:3) and immediately dispatched his servants to Peter. The next day at noontime they met Peter (verse 9). Then, **“on the morrow”** they left Joppa for Caesarea (verse 23) and arrived the next day (verse 24) at the exact hour (the ninth) when Cornelius had received the vision (verse 30).

When one counts the hours from the time of the vision to the arrival of Peter, there were exactly 72 hours, yet Cornelius called it the fourth day (verse 30). This, of course, shows a clear usage of inclusive reckoning the day on which Cornelius received the vision was acknowledged as the first day (though only three hours were left to it), and the time Peter arrived was accounted the fourth day.

This kind of reckoning was the normal Roman and Greek way of measuring time. For example, the Olympic Games were reckoned in normal parlance to be held every fifth year to the Gentiles whereas they were only four years apart (as we have them in our modern times).

The Jews normally counted days in the same fashion. A boy was circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 1:59), with the first day being counted from the birth (even if born within the last minutes of the day). Inclusive reckoning for days, weeks, months, and years was the predominant method for societies in the 1st century, and Luke was accustomed to this manner of reckoning.

As a further biblical example, you can also look at the 12 days (Acts 24:11) which accounted for the interval of time from Acts 21:15 to 23:33. There is no way those 12 days can be counted except in the inclusive manner. And most importantly, recall again what Christ said:

“Go you, and tell that fox [Herod Antipas],

‘Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.’”

• **Luke 13:32–33**

No plainer use of inclusive reckoning could be given.

It seems almost certain that the Bible method of counting days was in the inclusive manner, and in Luke he seems to have used it consistently. If this is the case, then Luke’s mention of Sunday afternoon being **“the third day”** from the events associated with Christ’s crucifixion (Luke 24:20–21) is a powerful indication that Friday was the real weekday of the crucifixion. And, if one simply reads the account of the crucifixion from Luke 23:47 to Luke 24:21, a Friday seems almost certain, and the **“sign of Jonah”** must be reckoned idiomatically.

However, we are not through with the matter yet. There is also good evidence for a Thursday.

The Thursday Theory

There may be an example of exclusive reckoning in the account of the crucifixion. There is the phrase **“after three days”** in Matthew 27:63 which the priests and Pharisees interpreted in verse 27:64 to equal **“the third day.”** Of course, it could be argued exactly the reverse. Perhaps the inclusive use of **“the third day”** interprets the phrase **“after three days”** as an idiomatic inclusive reckoning.

This may all sound confusing (and indeed it is to us westerners), but these are matters that must be considered in trying to understand the biblical accounts of the crucifixion. It is no doubt true that no major interpretation can rest on the matter of the **“third day”** equaling the **“after three days”** phrase, because it could be argued to be an inclusive reckoning, or an exclusive one. Criticism could be rendered either way.

The next point that needs to be mentioned is very important to the issue, and this may help us to see a Thursday crucifixion as the answer. That concerns the statement of Christ that he would remain in the tomb for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40). In no way can one figure that interval of time (if taken literally) as being from Friday afternoon to the dawn of Sunday.

The possibility of such a Thursday crucifixion being true is not a new-fangled idea.

- A major article appeared in the journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 27 (1870), pp. 401–429, titled “[The Crucifixion on Thursday – Not Friday](#)” by J.K. Aldrich.
- Shortly after this, Professor Westcott of Britain in his “[An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels](#)” (Cambridge: 1881), pp. 343–349, also maintained that Thursday was the day.
- More recently, primarily based on new astronomical data, Roger Rusk, Emeritus Professor of Physics at the University of Tennessee, has revived the Thursday theory in his article “[The Day He Died](#)” (a free preview only is allowed), *Christianity Today*, March 29, 1974).
- The astronomical indications are powerful for a Thursday. These evidences have convinced me that the case needs to be reopened for investigation. Professor J. K. Fotheringham in his article “[The Evidence of Astronomy and Technical Chronology For the Date of the Crucifixion](#)” (*The Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 35, no. 138 (1934), pp. 146–62) brought out the astronomical data for the appearance of the new moon for Nisan (as they related to Jerusalem), he opted for a Friday crucifixion date for 30 AD.

In his article Fotheringham mentioned that a Professor Gerhardt had contacted Professor Neugebauer, of the Astronomisches Recheninstitut at Berlin, and his calculations showed that it would have been barely possible for the crescent of the new moon to have been seen a day earlier (page 159). With new computer printouts of the astronomical occurrences of the new moons for Babylon and Jerusalem, it appears almost certain that the moon would have been seen a day earlier.⁸

Though all of this may appear technical (and, of course, it is), it remains clear that the crescent of the new moon for Nisan in 30 AD could have been seen a day earlier than that suggested by Fotheringham before the advent of advanced computer printouts. If this is so, then in 30 AD,⁹ Nisan 14 would certainly have occurred on a Thursday (it would have begun at sundown on the previous evening to accord with Jewish usage for the beginning of days).

While some people might be suspicious of astronomical evidence because it is difficult for the laymen to prove or disprove, it can be shown that the data are very powerful indeed to suggest a Thursday crucifixion.

In my calculations, those who know simple mathematics and the basic principles which govern Lunar and Solar movements can easily figure out the elevation of the moon above the western horizon for the appearance of the crescent at any year covered by the computer tables, my figures precisely equaled those of Professor Rusk that he provided back in 1974. And my work was accomplished before I saw Professor Rusk’s article (see above). This latter comment is not an attempt at flattery, but to show that applying proper astronomical procedures should always yield the same results. And in this case they did.

If Thursday has good credentials, then this is how the historical scenario would run¹⁰:

⁸ This can be verified in Bryant Tuckerman’s [Planetary, Lunar, and Solar Positions A.D. 1 to A.D. 1660](#), from the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, 1962, and Herman H. Goldstine’s *New and Full Moons, 1001 B.C. to A.D. 1651* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973), p. 86. These tables must be compared with Fotheringham’s calculations for the appearance of the crescent that succeeds the astronomical new moon. See Fotheringham, *JTS*, page 162. *ELM*

⁹ This year, as I demonstrated in an early “Foundation for Biblical Research Commentator” for April 1983, 30 AD is the only year that fits for the crucifixion. *ELM*

¹⁰ For excellent visual maps and timelines of Jesus’ movements, see the “[ELM Timeline Project](#)” for Charts TL-1h, TL-1i, TL-1j, TL-1K2 (pages 1-2) and Chart TL-1L, pages 4–5. These were carefully compiled by Henry Dye and Tim Parrott. *DWS*

1. Christ died about 3 p.m. on Thursday (Nisan 14).
2. At sundown commenced the annual holyday called the First Day of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 15), see John 19:31.
3. The next evening at sundown would have begun the weekly Saturday Sabbath. There were in 30 AD two Sabbaths in tandem to one another.
4. Then after those two Sabbaths or, as Matthew puts it, at the end of the **sabbaths** (plural, and in this case reckoned as two Sabbaths in tandem to one another), the priests and Pharisees posted the guard and put mortar around the stone, effectively sealing it to the rock escarpment (Matthew 28:1a).¹¹
5. About 12 hours later, as it began to dawn on the first day of the week, the stone was rolled away by angels and Christ emerged, now resurrected from the dead (Matthew 28:1b).

This reckoning allows the **“three days and three nights”** of Matthew 12:40 to be a literal fact (using the inclusive count for the first day). It would also satisfy the **“after three days”** (Matthew 27:63) as literal (using again the inclusive for the first day). And, most importantly, it dovetails exactly with the new astronomical data that are pointing squarely to a Thursday for Nisan 14.

The only major difficulty to the whole scheme is **“the third day”** of Luke 24:21, which if used in the normal inclusive fashion seems to reach back only to Friday. If one, however, accepts an *exclusive* reckoning in this special case, then

the first day back from that Sunday afternoon would have been Sabbath afternoon,

the second day back would have been Friday, and

the third day back would, obviously, be a Thursday afternoon.

If Luke abandoned his normal inclusive usage in Luke 24:21, then all the accounts in the biblical records appear compatible. But, it must be admitted, that the inclusive manner predominates in Luke’s writings.

Perhaps (it has been suggested) the annual Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath appearing in tandem with each other in 30 AD only represented one day in Luke’s reckoning. This may be, but I know of no such usage in any other biblical or secular text. Indeed, the Day of Pentecost was the 50th day from the Sunday during the days of Unleavened Bread, and it always appears abutting to the weekly Sabbath that precedes it, yet that weekly Sabbath is always called the 49th day, and the Pentecost Sabbath of the next day is always the 50th day from that Sunday. This, again, is normal inclusive reckoning.

We now leave the matter in your hands. We thank God that the outcome of the issue is not a life-and-death matter as some Christian denominations view such things. In this article, I have simply wanted to give the evidence on all sides and let you make up your own mind on the matter.

I have close friends who still accept the Wednesday crucifixion, some who accept the Friday theory (with good reason), and some who believe Thursday has the best credentials. You should study the matter yourself. We appreciate your comments, but as for me, I cannot see a Wednesday crucifixion at all since **“the third day”** back from Sunday afternoon (when the two disciples were on the way to Emmaus) cannot reach back to Wednesday in any circumstances.

Ernest L. Martin, 1983, 2001
Edited by David Sielaff, 2022

¹¹ Matthew 28:1a is: **“In the end of the sabbath,”**
Matthew 28:1b is: **“as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.”** DWS