

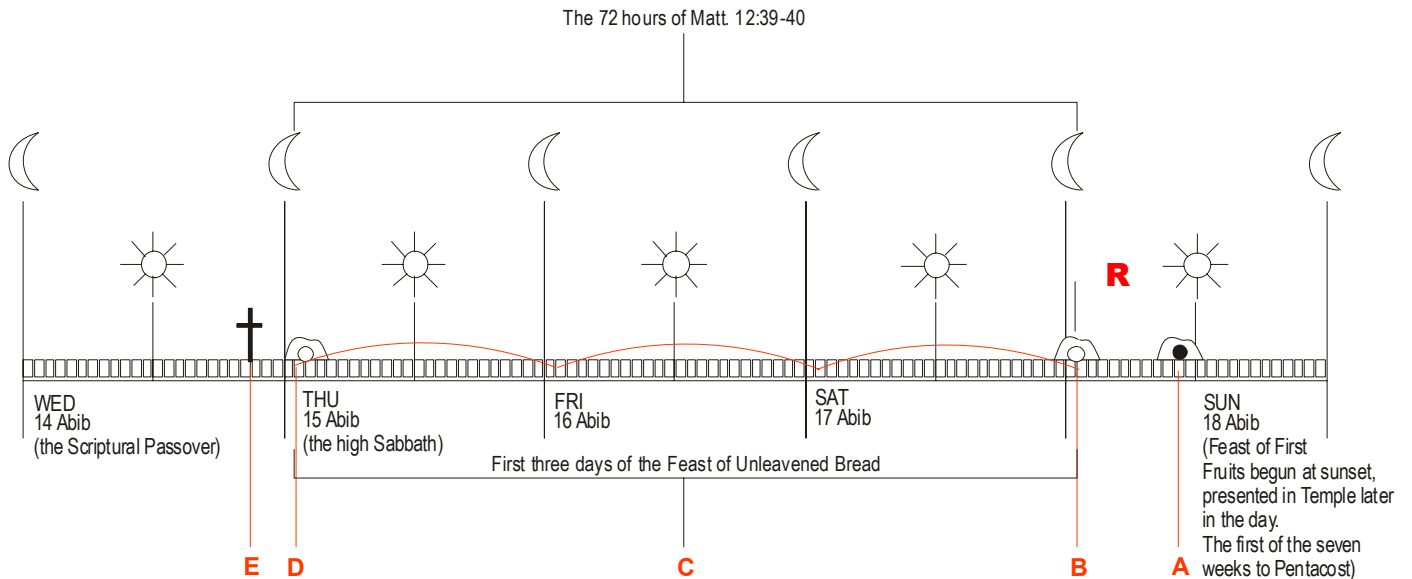
The Death and Resurrection of Christ: An Alternate Timeframe

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I offer the following observations and conclusions purely in the spirit of *Semper Reformanda* (always reforming). The Church has for too long been satisfied with her own traditions and assumptions, in spite of both warnings and contradicting evidence from Scripture. Yet in spite of my conclusions, in the end I believe that the truth of what I write here should make no significant difference to those whose faith is founded upon the bountiful mercy and lovingkindness of God given to us in the life and work of our faithful Saviour, who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings forever. Doubtless, there will be objections, some based on material not covered in this simple work. There is a vast amount of information and truly a whole book could be written about this subject. Nevertheless, I can honestly proclaim that my only intent is to be true to the biblical record and therefore to bring honour to Christ, whatever my shortcomings as researcher and writer might be.

The purpose of this work is to show that Christ was crucified on Wednesday, not Friday, and was resurrected on the evening of the first day of the week, according to the Hebrew measurement of days, which is from sunset to sunset. I am using the word sunset to mean the beginning of time following the moment the sun completely sets beneath the horizon. This is followed by a time of twilight or dusk and then, gradually, full darkness, which is the evening proper. Twilight or dusk is the period when birds begin to roost (Ex. 16:12) and when lamps are lit (Ex. 30:8)

Figure 1



(For the following argument, you may wish from time to time to refer to Figure 1 above.)

Scripture tells us that sometime before daybreak on the first day of the week after Christ's crucifixion and burial, some of Jesus' female disciples arrived at His tomb (**Fig. 1-A**). From the context of scripture, I believe they arrived sometime between approximately 4 am and 6 am. In any event, their arrival occurred before full daybreak. (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). From all accounts, by the time of their arrival one or more angels had rolled away the tombstone from the entrance of the burial chamber. The body itself was nowhere to be seen. Apparently, Christ had risen even before the women arrived at the tomb (**Fig. 1-B**).

As recorded in Matt. 12:39-40 and 27:63, after His crucifixion, Christ would be entombed for three full days. Moreover, in Mark 8:31, He says He will rise again after three days (which implies *not before three days*). In Mark 10:34 He says "on the third day" and in John 2:19 He says "in three days." Many consider all these references to be free vernacular or casual expressions of duration. However, while there is some reason to concede that Mark 10:34 and John 2:19 are casual or imprecise, there is no reason to consider the words in Matt. 27:63 or Mark 8:31 as casual expressions. Nor do the casual expressions used deny the truth and validity of the other more precise terms. We should rather take them at their face value and as evidence of Christ's fulfillment of Scripture.

In Matthew 12:39-40, Christ stated categorically and unequivocally that the only sign He would give to His enemies would be that of the prophet Jonah. "But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was *three days and three nights* in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth [emphasis added]." I believe that in this passage Christ is actually clarifying the less precise expressions used in Mark 10:34 and John 2:19. That is to say, He is telling us exactly what He means in those verses. Let scripture interpret scripture!

Nor does Christ leave us to determine on our own what He means by the terms "days" and "nights." According to Scripture (Gen. 1:4-13; John 11:9-10) the terms "day" and "night" were defined as periods of light and darkness, each period lasting twelve hours. This would indicate to me that, counting backwards from the moment just before His resurrection on Sunday, Christ would have been in the tomb since either late Wednesday evening or early Thursday—remembering that an entire (24 hour) Hebrew day was counted from sunset to sunset, not midnight to midnight (**Fig. 1-C**). However, we know that Christ celebrated Passover with His disciples on the evening prior to His arrest. This was a momentous event, recorded in all four gospels. So, in light of its obvious prominence in both testaments, let us very briefly review the meaning of Passover before going any further.

Passover is a commemoration of the event when God's death angel passed over the houses of the faithful Jews who, in obedience to God's command, had earlier that evening sacrificed a lamb and sprinkled its blood on the lintel and doorposts of their homes. Yet this same angel destroyed the entire first born of the Egyptians, man and beast, the same night. Consequently, as a memorial of this event, Jehovah told the Jews to sacrifice and consume a lamb for each household every 14th of Abib from that time forward. The night following the first Passover, the Jews left Egypt with a high hand (Num. 33:3; Deut. 16:1). Passover was a pivotal day in the Jewish festal year and was always to begin with the coming of sunset of the 14th day of the month of Abib, also known as Nisan (see Lev 23:5-6; Num. 9:1-3; 28:16-17 for scriptural injunctions).

Now depending on your vantage point (from the OT looking forward or the NT looking back) you have one of two choices. You could say that Christ's Passover sacrifice was a type of re-

enactment of God delivering His people from slavery and death in the land of darkness. Conversely, you could say the original Passover was but a type and shadow of Christ's final and perfect Passover sacrifice on the cross (as well as a demonstration of the fulfilment of prophesy and His necessary fulfilment of Scripture). It is the latter view joyously held by Christians.

According to Scripture, Christ was the Passover of His people "for even Christ our Passover is sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7) who also "taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). And Christ's identification as the Passover lamb by Himself and others would seem to dictate that He must die on the same day as the lambs *should* have been sacrificed in every Jewish household: the 14th of Abib (**Fig.1-D**). Referring to extra-biblical calendars, (which, in all honesty, are essentially just scholarly guesses based on known facts and principles) we see in the year 30 CE (the year of Christ's death according to the considered opinions of most Protestant scholars) that the 14th of Abib was on a Wednesday. So therefore, if we count back seventy-two hours (three nights and three days) from early Sunday, we arrive at Wednesday (the 14th of Abib), the day of the crucifixion. Now we also learn from Scripture that the week following the Passover was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This feast commemorated the flight to freedom in the desert following the first Passover. But while according to Scripture the feast always followed Passover, in the common custom of Jesus' day the Jews considered Passover to be part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and often referred to the entire feast by that name. This is illustrated from Scripture in such passages as Deuteronomy 16:1-4 and Luke 22:1, in distinction to other passages, (Lev. 23:5-8 for instance) which actually clarify God's intention. This is simply another instance of scripture clarifying scripture.

But why is the Feast of Unleavened Bread important to this particular discussion? Its importance is found in the fact that the first day of the feast is also a "high day" or "holy convocation", a Sabbath, in other words. The myth of the Friday crucifixion was able to become a tradition in the Church because there were two Sabbaths during the week of Christ's crucifixion. In the OT, not every Sabbath was the weekly Saturday or seventh-day Sabbath. God describes His feast Sabbaths (or high days, or holy convocations) in Lev. 23, in such verses as 24, 26-32 and 39. In Leviticus 23, God speaks of and describes His Sabbaths. Specifically in 23:3, He defines a Sabbath as a day of rest in which no work was to be done: "Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the *sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD* in all your dwellings [emphasis added]. In this verse, God describes the weekly Sabbath and further names it as a "holy convocation." In 23:5-8, He describes both Passover and the separate Feast of Unleavened Bread and states that the first day of the *feast*, not Passover, is a Sabbath day, a holy convocation: "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the *first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.*" With these words, God is describing a Sabbath even though He does not use that particular expression. This comes clear in the other verses in Leviticus to which we have already referred. "But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein." The Sabbath spoken of in Luke 23:52-54 and for which the Jews were in preparation was one of the high day Sabbaths. It was not the upcoming weekly Sabbath.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the 15th of Abib. By the time of Christ however, as we have already made note of, Jewish tradition dictated that they celebrate the Passover as a part of the week long feast, even though, according to God's standards, Passover was to be the day preceding the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread: "Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover" (Luke 22:1). According to this custom, Passover actually took place on the 15th of Abib, not the 14th as was required by God. Jesus had already

eaten a scriptural Passover with His disciples in the upper room before He was betrayed by Judas' kiss and taken prisoner by the mob. "Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover" (John 18:28). So the Jews were keeping Passover on the 15th of Abib, not the 14th which was the day prescribed by God. This will explain why Matthew seems to contradict himself when he says, "Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?" (Matt. 26:17). In this verse, he seems to be saying that Christ ate Passover on the 15th and not the 14th. But we must remember that Matthew wrote his gospel for other Jews, who would themselves have incorrectly understood Passover to be the first day of the feast. (Recall that in Matt. 3:7, Christ called the leaders of the Jews—mostly Pharisees and Sadducees—a generation of vipers. This should clearly indicate His attitude toward them and their traditions, which were no longer scriptural.)

The preparation day spoken of in John 19:14 and 42 as well as in Luke 23:52-54, was in fact the true biblical Passover, which had already begun as the sun set hours earlier. It was the coming evening between the end of this day and the beginning of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that was being referred to in the words "and the Sabbath drew on" in Luke 23:54. It was the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the 15th of Abib, the first day of the feast, "And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!" (John 19:14). "This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. *And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on*" (Luke 23:52-54).

However, there is one other important piece of the puzzle that we need briefly to look at. This is the Feast of the Firstfruits, when the first sheaf of barley was ceremonially cut down and later presented in the temple as the Wave Sheaf (Lev. 23:9-11 KJV). Actually, there are two Firstfruits—the Early Firstfruits and the Latter Firstfruits. It is the Early Firstfruits that concerns us here. Alfred Edersheim describes the ceremony in his work *The Temple, Its Ministry and Service*. We will not be examining this feast at length, as it would lead us too far afield. Suffice it to say that the celebration was one in which the very first of the barley was presented to the LORD as the first fruit of the harvest. The first of the barley represented and was, as it were, a promise of the larger crop to come. (The word Firstfruits in Hebrew actually means "a promise to come"). Moreover, like the firstborn of the flocks, it was dedicated to God. Now according to Leviticus, the sheaf was presented and dedicated to God on the day after the Sabbath. This means that the first fruit would be presented on that day which we know as the first day of the week and which the Jews universally signified as the "day after the Sabbath." Edersheim is accurate in his description of the celebration, but not in its occurrence within the overall calendar of feasts. There are two traditions on when Firstfruits actually occurs: the Messianic and the Rabbinic. I maintain that in order for Christ to fulfill Scripture, the Messianic view must be correct. Edersheim assumes however that the Rabbinic is correct, due to his misunderstanding concerning the day of Passover. He maintains that the Sabbath in question was the high Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which he also mistakenly identifies as the scriptural Passover (Abib 14). In fact, the wave sheaf was cut at the beginning of the day after the weekly Sabbath following Passover, prepared during the dark watches of the same day and presented to God by the priests during the daylight hours of the first day of the week, usually in the morning.

So in order to meet all the biblical requirements and not merely the traditional requirements of the Pharisees and Sadducees, Christ could not have been crucified on Friday as this was not the

actual biblical Passover. Nor was the following seventh-day Sabbath a high day such as the first of the Unleavened Bread, but was rather the Feast of First Fruits and the beginning of the seven weeks culminating in Pentecost. The high day Sabbath was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and occurred on Thursday. Referring to John 19:31 should make this clear: “The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (*for that sabbath day was an high day,*) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away” [emphasis added]. That this preparation was during daylight hours should be clear from passages such as Mark 15:42 and Luke 23:54.

Paul testifies as to the validity of the OT Scriptures by saying to the Corinthians that Christ died, was buried and resurrected *according to Scripture* (1 Cor. 15:3-4). We must also remember that in Scripture Christ is referred to as not only the Passover lamb but also, in 1 Cor. 15:20-23, as the “first fruits”, “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.” And in addition, it behoves us to remember that it was a stated purpose of Christ to fulfil the Law as given to Israel according to Scripture (Matt. 3:15; 5:17). This means that when we read of the various ordinances and feasts throughout the OT, we can be sure that they all pointed to Christ as their ultimate fulfillment and completion. We know then, that Christ, the second person of the Godhead, has obeyed and fulfilled scripture for us. When we read of Christ as being the first fruits of his people, we know that this pointed to a Sunday resurrection as well as an ascent to the Father before He presented Himself to His disciples later the same day (John 20:17).

What was the actual time of Christ's crucifixion and entombment? It is important to know this if, as we have seen, Christ was not only the Passover of His people, but also their first fruits, who would guarantee to them the same resurrection that God the Father had given Him and without which our faith is empty (1 Cor. 15:12-23). We know that He was crucified around the third hour, approximately 9 am (Mark 15:25) and that He was alive up to the ninth hour, (**Fig. 1-E**) which is about 3 pm (Mark 15:34). We also know that after He died, several other things happened in succession. First, we know from Matt. 27:57 and Mark 15:42 that the body was on the cross until sunset or the beginning of twilight (which amounted to about three or four hours) and that Joseph of Arimathaea had first to get Pilate's permission to remove the body from the cross (Matt. 27:58; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:52; John 19:38). We also know from Mark that Pilate would not release the body until the centurion who pierced Christ's side could attest to His death (Mark 15:44-45). All this took yet more time, probably the better part of an hour in addition to the several that Christ's body had been hanging on the cross following His death. Then the body would have to be removed from the cross. That probably took at least 30 minutes. In addition, there would have been no Jewish men around who could do this, as it was now the high Sabbath, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:42). Therefore, the Roman guard would have been paid (by Joseph and or Nicodemus) to remove Christ's body or else Joseph, with the help of his (presumably) converted servants would have been forced to do this. Then Joseph, along with Nicodemus, would have had their servants carry the body, along with wrappings and embalming materials, the short distance to the tomb. They would then have quickly washed the body, applied the spices, wrapped the body in the linen grave clothes and finally rolled the stone in position to secure Christ's grave (Matt. 27:59-60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53; John 19:40, 42). All this would have taken at least another hour. Therefore, in total, it could have been up to five or six hours from the time Christ died until He was literally entombed. This means that His entombment in the “heart of the earth” would not have happened until well into the evening. By then it would have become Thursday the 15th of Abib and it would be a full

seventy two hours later that Christ's resurrection would begin. Moreover, of course, how long a resurrection takes no one knows. But clearly the timing puts the completion of His resurrection well into the first day of the week. We observe that Christ could not be raised on Sunday morning, say around daybreak, because that would mean He could not be in the "heart of the earth" a full seventy-two hours and still fulfil Scripture, which spoke of an afternoon crucifixion and an evening entombment. If a Sunday morning (around or just before dawn) resurrection is the case, it means His body would have been placed in the tomb just before the hour of sunrise on the Thursday before. This would break Scripture, as I believe I have demonstrated already. But if, as I propose, Christ was placed in the tomb just as the scriptural Passover was ending and the high Sabbath was beginning (the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread) it means He must have been in the tomb at least until the beginning of sunset on Sunday because Passover (when He had to be crucified) was on the Wednesday before (a full seventy-two hours).

Let me conclude by affirming that, like most Christians, I believe that Christ had to be resurrected on the first day of the week (our Sunday) in order to completely fulfil OT Scripture and to inaugurate a new Sabbath day, the Sabbath of the New Covenant that faithful Christians refer to as the Lord's Day.

It is interesting that in the modern *Complete Jewish Bible*, Mark 8:31 is translated as, "He began teaching them that the Son of Man had to endure much suffering and be rejected by the elders, the head cohanim and the Torah-teachers; and that he had to be put to death; but that after three days, he *had to* rise again" [emphasis added]. But this begs the question, "Why did He have to rise again?" And of course as His disciples we know that He had to rise again to finally prove and demonstrate His power over death, as well as to promise and assure His followers that this too would be their reward one day and finally, on the day of Pentecost, to pour out the Holy Spirit on those ordained to believe in Him. However, none of this could have been possible without God fulfilling His very own Scriptures, which He has done and is doing in Christ.