

Considering a Friday Crucifixion

***A Careful Reading of the Crucifixion Accounts Provides Many Factors to Consider.
Most see in them a Friday Crucifixion with a Sunday Morning Resurrection.
Are there Significant Details that Bible Students have Overlooked?***

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A 16-page booklet titled: “*Friday Crucifixion and Sunday Resurrection*” by Pastor Dan Gayman¹ was loaned to me for review and comment. ***Responses to his questions are interspersed in bold italic type.***

Page 1 refers to the Crucifixion and Resurrection as being among the cornerstones upon which the revelation of Jesus Christ was built. It is posed that the Friday crucifixion was not challenged until the Age of Rationalism. Page 2 continues, suggesting that it was the liberal element which posed that challenge. ***In fact, it was the conservative movement that raised the issue in the modern age. Liberals are inclined toward non-challenging positions.***

Page 2 also places the timing of the challenges to the longstanding position of a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection to the mid 1800’s or later. That is repeated on page 16 with the pastor’s statement of belief in the Friday / Sunday position of main-stream Christianity. ***It may be. It was after multiple translations and reference works (Concordances, etc.) became available that such scrutiny came to bear on traditional teachings.***

The booklet considers 21 questions. Responses to each of those questions is posed here.

Question 1: Three-days-and-three-nights. Since this expression occurs only once in the NT, (Mt. 12:40) then it should be dismissed, being that there aren’t two or three witnesses (scriptural references). We should then disregard the idea of a full 72 hour burial. ***The clarity of the expression “three days and three nights” is hard to ignore. The religious people of that day knew how long Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, and would know exactly what was meant by making that comparison.***

Keep in mind, this quote was by Christ Himself. A person is taking a chance dismissing a clear statement such as this, especially considering who was speaking. To downgrade it to mean just parts of three days on the strength of tradition is risky at best. What is often overlooked is the fact that in the Roman world, a person must be dead three full days in order to be declared ‘legally dead’. To opt for a period of time from late Friday afternoon until the hours pre-dawn of a Sunday (some 36 hours) denies Christ a legal death. That would have fired an argument in the first century had it actually been the case.

Question 2: Being a Hebrew idiom, the expression “three days and three nights” can then be interpreted to mean any part of three days. ***This is a common explanation, but those who do that are reluctant to consider and admit that we are allowed under this explanation only two nights and one day! The burial, being placed in the tomb, not the hour of His death was the time-start criteria, and the resurrection was well before dawn according to John 20:1. One might claim a sliver of Friday afternoon as ‘part of a day’, but the same can’t be done with Sunday morning! Christ was raised long before the daylight part of the day began. (John 20:1) Our question to ourselves is, Does this meet the requirement of ‘three days’? Keep in mind, in that age, days began and ended at sunset, not at midnight.***

Question 3: Absence of evidence among early church ‘fathers’ of belief in a Wednesday crucifixion. ***A much better source would be the New Testament. Early Church ‘fathers’ were already well on their way into apostasy by the early second century. Keep in mind also the bias against “Jewish” beliefs and practices that was growing by the early 300’s AD. They deliberately chose to set the date for Easter to NOT coincide***

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with the Passover, though Christ's death was ON the Passover day. They also despised and were outlawing Sabbathkeeping by the early 300's. Read up on the Quartodeciman Controversy.

Question 4: NT writers missed the opportunity to repeat the "three days and three nights" expression. *Absent of the modern controversy, why would they see particular need to do so? The expression 'three days' alone would be sufficient in any society in any age. Only when we get into this area of theology do we need such precise affirmation before we'll believe it.*

Question 5: Forty days and forty nights of Matthew 4:2 is not repeated by Mark and Luke. Only Matthew mentions the 'nights'. *What does this gain us? Does the absence of mention of the nights mean that He didn't fast at night, only during daylight? This example should reinforce the 'three days and three nights' expression being stated more simply as 'three days' in other places as meaning the same thing.*

Question 6: Was it the resurrection or the time spent in the tomb the sign offering proof of Christ's Messiahship? *According to what Christ Himself plainly stated in response to the Jews demand for a sign, it was the interval in the tomb. Jonah wasn't dead, but was 'entombed' in the great fish.*

Incidentally, we should recognize that we have two intervals here: The interval that Christ was dead, AND the interval that He was in the tomb. Being placed in the tomb was the greater consideration according to Christ's prophecy in Matthew 12:40. People will often count from the hour of His death. Is there legitimate basis for doing that anywhere? (But, then, counting from the time of death in some cases might lend validity to occasional mention of 'after three days'.)

Question 7: The 'third day' and 'after three days' matter. *These terms being used often and interchangeably locks us into a situation that should not be minimized. The only way 'the third day' and 'after three days' can both be correct is if we are talking about an interval of exactly 72 hours! Rather than being a 'proof' of fractions of days as a legitimate way to count, using these interchangeably holds us to the full term!*

Question 8: Chief priests and Pharisees requested a watch be set until 'the third day'. *Now, this item is particularly relevant and revealing. Exactly WHEN did the chief Priests go in and request the watch be set? We have clear record that they wouldn't go into the Praetorium to see Pilate on the day prior to their Passover, lest they become defiled and unable to keep the Passover. (John 18:28) They had no awareness prior to Passover that His death would occur so soon! Even Pilate was surprised by the suddenness. (Mark 15:44) Typically, crucified people took days to die. So, they wouldn't have requested the watch prior to His death (and we see they wouldn't enter the Praetorium just then anyway, and they certainly wouldn't do so ON Passover itself (considering that they observed Passover as the 14th day of the first month was ended, into the night hours of the 15th.) So, when did they request the watch? Now, also, we should note that they were told to go and make the tomb fast. The Romans didn't do that! The Romans only provided the manpower for the watch. Then, their making the tomb fast would also have been done AFTER the Passover, which couldn't be done until the daylight part of the 15th at the earliest. BUT the 15th was an Annual Sabbath, the First Day of Unleavened Bread! Forgetting the fact of it being an annual Sabbath (a double Sabbath, weekly AND annual if we opt for a Friday crucifixion) would they have conducted this business (doing or ordering the work of securing the tomb) ON a Sabbath? This is our problem to solve. (these were the chief Priests, remember) IF they waited until the Sabbath was over before requesting the watch then their request would have been made on Sunday morning, AFTER the resurrection had already occurred! Not likely!*

'Until the third day' was their request. In their time, tomorrow being the first day, the second day being the day after tomorrow and the third day, the day after that. Their request reflects their understanding of just how long the expression 'three days' involved. Speaking to Romans, they would've expected the Romans to understand the same thing. Only religious people, it seems, would consider 'the day after tomorrow' as being the third day. IF they were to wait until after the

Passover to request the watch, then the next day would have been a double Sabbath. Are we going to insist that this was when they requested the watch and did the work of securing the tomb? If not, there wouldn't have been time to do it without breaking the Sabbath!! Think this one thru carefully.

Question 9: Men approaching Emmaus used the phrase "today is the third day since these things were done". *This particular incident is noteworthy in its own right. The statement was made in the late afternoon of Sunday. But is the expression 'the third day' exactly the same as 'the third day since'? When was the second day since? (Saturday afternoon) When was the first day since? (Friday afternoon) When was the day these things were done, if Friday afternoon was 'the first day since these things were done'?*

Their expression would indicate Thursday was the day these things were done. Well, just when were these things all done? All done including the burial, which was the key element of the 'three days and three nights' requirement stated by Christ? (being in the heart of the earth / buried in other words) If the crucifixion and death occurred on a Wednesday, the burial was hastily completed just as the sun was setting ending Wednesday and beginning Thursday, their exclamation was exactly correct. They weren't saying 'this is the third day', they were saying it was the third day since! Adding the word 'since' offsets the time interval by one more day! So, actually in this account, we have more evidence of a Wednesday crucifixion.

If someone were to say to you, "Today is the first day since an event happened", would you think it had happened yesterday, or would you think that the event in question was happening as we speak? See what it does when adding the word 'since' to the statement?

Now, work it from the other way. If the burial had taken place as Friday was ending and the Sabbath was drawing on, as a Friday crucifixion scenario would have it, the end of the Sabbath would be the first day 'since' the entombment, Sunday evening would be the second day 'since'.

Monday evening would then be the third day since... It just doesn't work! Their statement has to take us back more than 36 hours.

Question 10: The crucifixion occurred on the preparation day. *That would be true, if we allow the wording in Mark 15:42 to mean a Friday. The question is, was there only one preparation day in that week? Was the day prior to an annual Sabbath EVER referred to as a preparation day? In fact, the Passover was the most labor intensive of all of their religious observances. It required enormous preparation. Thousands of lambs were sacrificed at the Temple. Enormous quantities of wash-water and fire wood to roast the lambs would have been needed. All was brought into the City and up to the Temple Mount manually. There was no faucet, and firewood was brought in from considerable distances.*

Evidence of Two Sabbaths

Actually, we have at least two passages which indicate that there were two Sabbaths and two preparation days in that particular week. The failure to make note of that fact is what allows people to perpetuate their Friday crucifixion scenario.

We have the account of the women buying spices to prepare after a Sabbath, then resting on the weekly Sabbath before bringing them to the tomb. (Compare Mark 16:1 with Luke 23:56) We have the women buying spices after the Sabbath, but preparing them before the Sabbath then resting on the Sabbath. This is a contradiction unless there was a day between two Sabbaths, one annual and the other the weekly Sabbath. (A Wednesday crucifixion provides that.)

Another indication of there being two Sabbaths is the watch request, mentioned above. Matthew 27:62 contains a very curious passage. It suggests that the watch was requested on the Sabbath (the day after the preparation), if we allow it to read as it's translated and punctuated. But there was no punctuation in the original Greek. The translators inserted a comma after the word preparation. They had good reason to place it where they did, because if they didn't, the

passage could be seen as saying the day they requested the watch was the preparation day, which under a Friday crucifixion scenario would have been the day prior to Christ's death, and the day other passages state they wouldn't enter the Praetorium in order to not be defiled to where they couldn't observe their Passover. So, they **HAD** to place the comma where they did! But with a Wednesday crucifixion, that Wednesday would have been the preparation day for the Passover, Thursday would have been the annual Sabbath, the First Day of Unleavened Bread, then the next day would've been a Friday, the preparation day for the weekly Sabbath, a day in which the chief Priests and others could legally have entered the Praetorium to conduct their business with Pilate of ordering a watch and doing the physical work of securing the tomb. (Also the day when vendors would have been open for business where the women could have bought and then prepared the spices they needed.)

If we place the comma after the word 'followed', rather than after the word 'preparation', the passage would indicate that the day the chief Priests made their watch request was in fact the preparation day, a Friday! That would make Friday the day between the Annual Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath. An interval that provides exactly for a three-days-and-three-nights entombment! This was 'the next day' after the entombment that is here called the preparation day! Men have confused a clear scripture by mis-placing the comma. The watch request was made on a Friday, the day after the entombment, and after the Passover was no longer a matter of concern with regard to entering the Praetorium to meet with Pilate.

Question 11: The account of the women resting on the Sabbath after preparing spices. See the comments above regarding this. The women wouldn't have bought spices for His burial before His death, as they didn't expect this to happen. It was after the hasty entombment, with Joseph and Nicodemus using what they had on hand (which the women had seen as inadequate) that they decided to buy more. They did so after the annual Sabbath, taking them home to prepare them, then resting on the weekly Sabbath (the one referred to

in the commandments) bringing them to the tomb on Sunday. (Compare Mark 16:1 with Luke 23:56) Keep in mind that the first preparation day ended while they were still at the tomb area watching, and no spice seller would be open for business on the Sabbaths, so they had to wait until after the Sabbath to buy and prepare the spices! Not only that, but being at the crucifixion site and tomb area all day, they would've needed to secure the money to buy spices. They weren't cheap, and they wouldn't have had the cash on them without expecting to need it! Especially not knowing IF any more spices would be needed until Joseph and Nicodemus were done with their preparations, which weren't done until sunset!

Question 12: That Sabbath was an High Day. John saw need to clarify a point other Gospel writers failed to mention. (So here was a point of truth that the Gospel writers expected their readers to have understood!) We should know that in any event, in that the day after the 14th Passover is always the First Day of Unleavened Bread, an annual Sabbath: A High Day. What we need to answer is whether or not those two Sabbaths coincided or were on different days. The Friday crucifixion position makes them coincident.

Question 13: The term 'preparation' itself. Why would it not be a Friday? Linguistically, it could be either. In most places, the use of that word does refer to a Friday. But, keep in mind that High Days (Annual Sabbaths) also required 'preparation', the Passover particularly.

Question 14: One used meaning is the day before the weekly Sabbath, why would it ever be used to mean a day prior to an annual Sabbath? Why would it not? See the next item.

Question 15: Was the 'preparation of the Passover' in John 19:14 unmistakably tied to a Friday? Here we have a very specific reference. This particular preparation was that one prior to the Passover. Making such distinction would suggest it wasn't referring to a Friday necessarily.

Question 16: Wave Sheaf was offered on a Sunday. It was. However, this offering is related to a particular day of the week, the morrow after

the weekly Sabbath. (Though Jews of the Phariseean persuasion regarded it as the morrow after the First Day of Unleavened Bread, (as do Jews today)) making Pentecost fall on Sivan 6, irrespective of the day of the week. But Christ's experience affirmed the Sadduceean persuasion of Wave Sheaf always being a Sunday.

Question 17: The Sadducean Tradition for a Sunday Wave Sheaf offering is endorsed! *Yes.*

Question 18: The prophet Hosea mentions what is understood to be Christ being raised on the third day. *This does not preclude three days and three nights. See questions 7 & 8. Also, Daniel 9:27 (the 70-weeks prophecy) states that He shall be cut off in the midst of the week. Friday is not the middle, but Wednesday is. Being ON the third day would work if the resurrection was even right at the very END of the third day. This excludes nothing, except perhaps a day earlier than the third day!*

Question 19: Would a resurrection on a weekly Sabbath be consistent with a mandated Rest? *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. With accounts of healings on the Sabbath, why would the Father raising His Son at the end of a weekly Sabbath be problematical? The priests all 'break the Sabbath' in performing their mandated Temple duties on behalf of the people, as we see stated in Matthew 12:5. This should not be a problem.*

Question 20: Why would the women wait two days before going to anoint the body with spices? *An interesting question! This strongly suggests that there were two Sabbaths in that week. The first, the annual Sabbath, after which they sought and bought and prepared spices, then the weekly Sabbath that they rested on prior to bringing what they had prepared to the tomb. If we take the position that the two were coincident, then the post-Sabbath purchase and pre-Sabbath preparation are at odds with each other. A matter easily resolved by there being a preparation day in-between two Sabbaths. It also tells us that the women were respectful of the Sabbath, not choosing to open the grave during it.*

Question 21: Should the clarity of Matthew 12:40 be set aside, in that it isn't supported by a second or third witness? *This issue is the same one brought up in question 1. Why would we reject a passage that injects clarity just because it only appears in that extra-specific form once? But an overriding issue in all of this hasn't been addressed.*

Day of the Week Impacts the Year!

When we declare the Crucifixion to have been on a Friday, we are forced to assign it to a particular year. *It is possible to know what day of the week Passover fell on in the various years of the first century. Most churchgoers are oblivious to this fact. Days of the month are tied to the phases of the moon, a time-piece that is astronomically accurate and re-calculable. It is possible to work it backwards and determine which day of the week Passover fell on in any given year, which talented people have done.*

If Passover day, the 14th day of the first lunar month, was a Friday, we must place Christ's death into only certain possible years. Now based on the presumption that Christ was 33½ years old at the time of His death, theologians chose one of those Friday years and called it 33 AD. They worked out the calendar we use today from this basis. The problem is, it places Christ's birth and Herod's death (which was months after Christ was born) into the years BC. Herod died in the spring of 4 BC. Thus, Christ had to have been born the previous fall, in 5 BC! (Christ was born 4½ years 'Before Christ'!?) What should be year 1, we identify as 4 BC. (Herod's death is placed in Josephus in proximity to an eclipse, so we can use astronomical data to reliably place the date.)

But the calendar in use today was shifted to accommodate the Friday idea many years later.

Now, if we want to correct that and hold to a Friday crucifixion, we have only a limited few years to select from. The Passover fell on a Friday in 19 AD, 26 AD, and 33 AD. It fell on a Wednesday in 20 AD, 23 AD, 24 AD, 27 AD, and 30 AD. Working from a 5 BC birth, Christ would have been 33½ years old in 30 AD. (Subtract 1 year as there's no year zero.) We can't assign

Passover to a Friday willy-nilly without it having affect on the year in which His birth and death occurred. This is an inescapable fact. We already know from the year of Christ's birth that 33 AD wasn't correct! It would've actually made Him 36½ years old at His time of death!!

Passover Differences

Another point of clarification we should note is the difference in observation of Passover that can impact this discussion. The religious minority observed Passover as the 14th day of the month was just beginning, just after sunset. We see that in the example of Christ and His disciples. The traditional practice of the Jewish majority was to kill their Passover mid-afternoon within the 14th day (some 20 hours later) eating it after dark (in that it took some 4-hours to roast) taking them well into the 15th. We can see evidence of that in the statement in John 18:28. They hadn't yet kept the Passover, where Christ's disciples already had! Also, John's clarification in John 19:42 suggests it was the Jews' preparation day (for their Passover). It would be theirs, but not the disciples', as the disciples and those of the minority persuasion had kept the Passover the night before! This distinction is also significant. If it were referring to the preparation for the weekly Sabbath, it would have been everyone's preparation day, and no such distinction (as saying it being the Jews' Passover) would've been necessary!

Fred Coulter's "Harmony of the Gospels" and his volume on "The Christian Passover" spends considerable time explaining all of the historical records regarding this event. (www.cbcbg.org)

Factors to Consider

It was the Christian community from the second century that mis-dated the day and year of the crucifixion using only a cursory reading. We actually have a lot that confirms a week in which:

- ◆ *The crucifixion date is inexorably tied to the Passover,*
- ◆ *There were two Sabbaths in that week, annual and weekly, both were not on the same day,*

- ◆ *There were two preparation days, John makes clear distinction of one being for an High Day,*
- ◆ *The time of entombment was important, starting the three days and three nights count,*
- ◆ *The women buying and preparing spices before the weekly Sabbath but not before His death,*
- ◆ *The watch being set on the weekly preparation day (not on the Sabbath) and the request not being made prior to His death, (noting the indiscriminate placement of the comma.)*
- ◆ *The men on the road to Emmaus affirmed a 'third day since' which would count back to a Thursday.*
- ◆ *The Last Six Days narrative of the Gospels also locks us into specific days of the week,*
- ◆ *Suggesting a Friday to Sunday interval of death denies Christ a legal death as the Roman world would see it. (The Lazarus resurrection incident illustrates a similar duration for an unquestioned death verification.)*

Recommended Reading

My articles on "And the Watch Was Set", "When the Sabbath was Past", "Atonement and the Holy of Holies", "The Day After the Preparation Day", each consider aspects of this question.

The Crucifixion date and day of the week is not independent of other important Biblical Truths. We need to be as careful with this as we are with other more significant beliefs.

In fact, there is much to support and lock us into a Wednesday crucifixion, when all the evidence is taken into account objectively. Ω

Recommended Links and Sources:

www.ccofgod.org
www.ucg.org
www.cbcbg.org
www.goldensheaves.org
www.faith-once-delivered-org