

Notes on the Chronology of the Passion Week

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Nov 2007

There are two major problems in the Passion chronology. When did the women buy and prepare the spices? And how many days was Jesus in the tomb? The first is a detail often overlooked in the chronological question. The second is assumed, but often the relevant texts are glossed over since the answer is already “known.”

1. Preparation of the spices by the women

In Mark 15:42–16:2, the women buy the spices *after the Sabbath was over*. In Luke 23:54–24:1, however, the spices are prepared *before the Sabbath*. If both statements refer to the same thing in the same way, both cannot be correct. There are several possible ways to handle the seeming discrepancy. First notice exactly what the texts do say. The following chart lists them in parallel.

Mark	Luke
Crucifixion was on Preparation Day (= day before Sabbath), 15:42	Crucifixion was on Preparation Day (Sabbath about to begin), 23:54
Women saw Jesus' body entombed, 15:42-47	Women saw Jesus' body entombed, 23:55
	Women went home and <i>prepared spices</i> , 23:56
<hr/> <i>/Sabbath/</i>	<hr/> Rested on the <i>Sabbath</i> , 23:56
When Sabbath was over [prob. Sat. evening]: <i>bought spices</i> , 16:1	
Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise: went to the tomb, 16:2	First day of the week, very early in the morning: went to the tomb

A. Possible Harmonizations of the Chronology

1. Possible harmonization with a Friday crucifixion view

- **Fri. (Preparation Day)**
 - Crucifixion
 - Burial before 6 pm
- **Sat. (Sabbath & Passover)**
 - Women rested
- **Sun.** (i.e., first day of the week)
 - (after 6 pm Sat.): buy spices and prepare them
 - (after 6 am Sun.): go to the tomb

Problem: How does this mesh with Luke's sequence? The only possibility seems to be that perhaps Luke does not record the events chronologically. The real sequence would be: go home, rest on Sabbath, prepare spices....

2. *Second possible harmonization with a Friday crucifixion view*

- **Fri. (Preparation Day)**
 - Crucifixion
 - Burial before 6 pm
 - Women buy spices, go home and prepare them
- **Sat. (Sabbath & Passover)**
 - Women rested
- **Sun.**
 - (after 6 pm Sat.): buy *more* spices and prepare them
 - (after 6 am Sun.): go to the tomb

Problem: There is not enough time between Jesus' death at 3 pm and beginning of the Sabbath at 6 pm. Must include: Joseph's trip to Pilate to request permission, confirmation of Jesus' death by Pilate, removal of the body, preparation for burial, transportation to tomb, stone rolled and sealed, women leave some time later (still sitting watching after Joseph leaves, Mt. 27:61).

B. Alternate Solution: A Wednesday Crucifixion

The crucifixion may not have been on Friday as traditionally taught, but *on Wednesday!* This view enables a harmonization of Mark and Luke and results in a viable chronology:

- **Wed. (Preparation Day)**
 - Crucifixion
 - Women saw Jesus' body entombed
 - Women went home
- **Thurs.**
 - Passover = High Sabbath
- **Fri.**
 - When Sabbath was over: bought and prepared spices
= Mark: bought spices *after* the Passover High Sabbath (Thurs. ⬆)
= Luke: bought spices *before* the regular weekly Sabbath (Sat. ⬇)
- **Sat.**
 - Weekly Sabbath
 - Rested on the Sabbath
- **Sun.**
 - First day of the week: went to the tomb

2. Three Days and Nights

[English text following is NIV—which is not always consistent in translating the key phrase!]

Matt. 12:40, For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be **three days and three nights** in the heart of the earth (ὥσπερ γὰρ ἦν Ἰωνᾶς ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ τοῦ κήτους **τρεις ἡμέρας καὶ τρεις νύκτας**, οὕτως ἔσται ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς **τρεις ἡμέρας καὶ τρεις νύκτας**)

Mark 8:31, He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and **after three days** rise again (Καὶ ἤρξατο διδάσκειν αὐτοὺς ὅτι δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πολλὰ παθεῖν καὶ ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι ὑπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ τῶν ἀρχιερέων καὶ τῶν γραμματέων καὶ ἀποκτανθῆναι καὶ **μετὰ τρεις ἡμέρας** ἀναστῆναι).

Mark 9:31, “... because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and **after three days** he will rise” (ἐδίδασκεν γὰρ τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοται εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων, καὶ ἀποκτενοῦσιν αὐτόν, καὶ ἀποκτανθεὶς **μετὰ τρεις ἡμέρας** ἀναστήσεται).

Mark 10:34, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. **Three days later** he will rise” (καὶ ἐμπαίξουσιν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐμπτύσουσιν αὐτῷ καὶ μαστιγώσουσιν αὐτόν καὶ ἀποκτενοῦσιν, καὶ **μετὰ τρεις ἡμέρας** ἀναστήσεται).

Problem: How do you get 3 days and 3 nights between 3 pm Fri. and 6 am Sun.?

Days: Sat.

Nights: Fri. night, Sat. night

The usual explanation (i.e., as given by those holding a Friday view) is that any part of a day/night counts as a whole day (or night).¹ But even if that were so, there are still only two nights?! And there are only very small parts of the first and third days (probably less than an hour each?).

A Wednesday crucifixion also resolves this problem. There are three days: Thurs., Fri., and Sat.; and three nights: Wed. night, Thurs. night, and Fri. night. The resurrection occurred sometime *after* 6 PM Sat., specifically, early Sun. morning.

¹ I'd be curious to know if this could be documented as a valid explanation in terms of “day reckoning” in the first century. Perhaps it is, but I don't remember reading any documentation of it. It seems to me that this is often simply assumed.

No solution is without its problem on this matter. The problem for a Wednesday view is that the following passages seem to place the resurrection *on the third day* rather than *after* the third day. This is the reverse of the problem noted above, but it is a problem for *either* view as to how best to harmonize Matt 12:40; Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:34 with the following texts. It is interesting that all of the following passages have only a dative case expression (i.e., no preposition to make it more explicit) and may well have adequate flexibility to mean *after* three days (i.e., “in three days,” counting the intervening days from burial to resurrection: Thurs., Fri., Sat.). Mark’s statements, which use the more specific μετά + dative, seems the more explicit and clear in terms of chronology. I thus assume that it is better to understand the other accounts in light of Mark rather than vice versa. The proposed Wednesday view seems to make such a reconciliation easier.

Matt 16:21, From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and **on the third day** be raised to life (Ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς δεῖκνυῖν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱερουσόλυμα ἀπελθεῖν καὶ πολλὰ παθεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ ἀρχιερέων καὶ γραμματέων καὶ ἀποκτανθῆναι καὶ **τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ** ἐγερθῆναι).

Matt 17:23, They will kill him, and **on the third day** he will be raised to life.” And the disciples were filled with grief (καὶ ἀποκτενοῦσιν αὐτόν, καὶ **τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ** ἐγερθήσεται. καὶ ἐλυπήθησαν σφόδρα).

Matt 20:19, “. . . and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. **On the third day** he will be raised to life!” (καὶ παραδώσουσιν αὐτὸν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εἰς τὸ ἐμπαῖξαι καὶ μαστιγῶσαι καὶ σταυρῶσαι, καὶ **τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ** ἐγερθήσεται).

Luke 9:22, And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and **on the third day** be raised to life” (εἰπὼν ὅτι δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πολλὰ παθεῖν καὶ ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ ἀρχιερέων καὶ γραμματέων καὶ ἀποκτανθῆναι καὶ **τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ** ἐγερθῆναι).

Luke 18:33, “**On the third day** he will rise again” (καὶ **τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ** ἀναστήσεται).

Luke 24:7, “The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and **on the third day** be raised again” (λέγων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὅτι δεῖ παραδοθῆναι εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων ἀμαρτωλῶν καὶ σταυρωθῆναι καὶ **τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ** ἀναστῆναι).

Luke 24:21, but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, **it is the third day** since all this took place (ἡμεῖς δὲ ἠλπίζομεν ὅτι αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ μέλλων λυτροῦσθαι τὸν Ἰσραὴλ· ἀλλὰ γε καὶ σὺν πᾶσιν τούτοις **τρίτην ταύτην ἡμέραν** ἄγε ἀφ’ οὗ ταῦτα ἐγένετο).

Luke 24:46, He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead **on the third day**” (καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι οὕτως γέγραπται παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν **τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ**).

Acts 10:40, but God raised him from the dead **on the third day** and caused him to be seen (τοῦτον ὁ θεὸς ἤγειρεν **τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ** καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτὸν ἐμφανῆ γενέσθαι).

1 Cor 15:4, that he was buried, that he was raised **on the third day** according to the Scriptures (καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται **τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ** κατὰ τὰς γραφάς).

Perhaps also relevant: Matt 27:64, “So give the order for the tomb to be made secure **until the third day**.

Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first” (κέλευσον οὖν ἀσφαλισθῆναι τὸν τάφον **ἕως τῆς τρίτης ἡμέρας**, μήποτε ἐλθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ κλέψωσιν αὐτὸν καὶ εἰπωσιν τῷ λαῷ· ἠγέρθη ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἔσται ἡ ἐσχάτη πλάνη χείρων τῆς πρώτης).