

# " AND THE WATCH WAS SET "

*In the long running controversy as to whether the Crucifixion was on a Friday or on a Wednesday, many informative passages have been overlooked. This article takes into account specific details concerning this important event, those usually left out of the story related by the religious community.*

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Central to the issue of whether or not Jesus was entombed a full three days and three nights, is the matter revolving around that Sabbath Day which occurred just after He was put into the Garden Tomb.<sup>1</sup> The prevailing opinion remains that the Sabbath mentioned was a **weekly** Sabbath (a Saturday), while others take strong exception to that assumption, holding instead that the Sabbath in question was an annual Sabbath, not necessarily a weekly Sabbath. After all, we have that clear parenthetical in John 19:31, which reminds us that that day was an "High Day", a fact most Bible scholars would be aware of, in that Jesus was crucified and died ON Passover Day, which always precedes the First Day of Unleavened Bread, the first Annual Holyday in the Jewish calendar.

## Only Two Possible Scenarios

In the Biblical narratives, we can discern two possible scenarios. One being, that the Sabbath before which the crucifixion took place was a weekly Sabbath. This would require that the day also be a 'double' Sabbath, as the day following the Passover (Nisan 14) is always an Annual Sabbath, the First Day of Unleavened Bread. This is the majority position. The other scenario is that the Sabbath in question was an Annual Sabbath, and an Annual Sabbath only, without being limited to any specific day of the week.

Now, knowing that Christ's resurrection occurred before daylight on the First Day of the week, a fact accepted by both advocacies, we are limited to the **two** possible situations central to the argument.

1. That the crucifixion was on a Friday, or,
2. That the crucifixion was on a Wednesday.

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<sup>1</sup> John 19:41

The Friday position being supported by the assumption that Christ was crucified just a day before the weekly Sabbath. This position requires the period of entombment being less than a full three days and three nights, though justified under the explanation that PARTS of three days are incorporated: A few minutes of Friday, all day Saturday, and the first half of Sunday!<sup>2</sup> Generally, thirty-six hours. (Keep in mind that days in that culture began and ended with sunset!)

The Wednesday position accommodates those who insist on a full three-days-and-three-nights entombment: A full seventy-two hours! This position allows, or better said, **requires** that there be two Sabbath Days in that week, with a day in between. The High Day (Annual Sabbath) first, followed by the Weekly Sabbath, on a different day.

(These scenarios, of course, would require the crucifixion be assigned to different years. AD 33 was chosen as the year of crucifixion by the majority, as Passover fell on a Friday in 33 AD. To embrace a Wednesday crucifixion, one would need to assign the years 31 AD (only if the rules of postponement were employed), or 30 AD, as the Passover fell on a Wednesday in both those years.)

Much has been well said in arguing the fine points of the meaning of "three days and three nights", so this article will not delve into that issue directly. Rather, we will here focus on the specific question of whether or not the Biblical narrative gives any evidence of a day existing between TWO separate Sabbaths in that particular week.

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<sup>2</sup> A consideration inherent with the Friday Crucifixion scenario is that the true Wave Sheaf would have been dead at the time the Wave Sheaf was cut, just after sunset, beginning "the morrow after the Sabbath"! (Lev.23:11) Refer also to "The Temple, Its Ministry and Services" by Edersheim, p.204

## Was There a Day Between?

It would seem that IF there is **clear** evidence of a day occurring between the Annual Holyday, and the weekly Sabbath, then the issue would be resolved once and for all. The question is, Is there such evidence?

Well known to those familiar with the arguments presented in support of the Wednesday position is the incident of the women having bought spices after the Sabbath, preparing them, then resting on the Sabbath, according to the Commandment. These references are found in Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56. Mark's account says, "*And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.*" Luke says, "*And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment.*"

Many see this as clear evidence of there being a day between two different Sabbaths! They bought aromatic spices AFTER a Sabbath, prepared them for use during that day, and then rested on the weekly Sabbath, (the one described in the fourth commandment), after having prepared them.

### A Better Resolution Than We've Had!

If this were the only evidence, it still would be substantial. However, it is NOT the only evidence we have. In fact, there is much more.

All these years the answer has been right there on the pages of our Bibles. Why haven't we seen it?

A clue to there being a lot more evidence on this particular question can be obtained from the narrative showing the women, very early in the morning coming to the tomb, wondering among themselves, "*Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?*" Mk.16:2. This tells us that they didn't KNOW something! They were not aware that the stone had been sealed and a watch set by the Roman authorities! When we follow thru in other accounts and bring together all the evidence, we are drawn to an unavoidable conclusion.

## "And the Watch Was Set"!

A significant question, relative to all that happened is, When was the watch set? The women went to the tomb unaware of what had transpired since they were there last. We know from the narrative found in the synoptic Gospels that they HAD BEEN there at some point in time, and were, very early Sunday morning going back to finish what might have been left incomplete! We know Joseph of Arimathea<sup>3</sup> and Nicodemus<sup>4</sup> had to do a very hasty job in performing the burial, as a Sabbath was fast approaching.<sup>5</sup>

### They Kept their Distance!

Three Gospels accounts each make a distinct point of the fact that as Joseph and Nicodemus were preparing Christ's body, the women all watched "*from a distance*".<sup>6</sup> They were not personally involved in the burial. That was men's work, as was preparing the Passover, and it was best left to the two, as that important Night of Solemn Observation<sup>7</sup> was approaching, and touching a dead body, could result in their being excluded from observing it. They "*stood afar off*", as Luke's account states it, leaving no doubt as to their not being involved in the task!

Joseph and Nicodemus completed the burial just as the sun was setting. They rolled the stone into place and left the vicinity. (Mt. 27:60)

But next, it states that two Marys "*saw how the body was laid*".<sup>8</sup> Mark's and Matthew's accounts both mention this, but after the stone had been rolled into place. Their comment in Mark 16 shows that the task of removing the stone was something the three women couldn't handle by themselves. "*And they said among themselves, Who shall roll away the stone from the door...?*" Now, Mark's account shows that they saw the body AFTER the stone was rolled into place and the two men left.

They couldn't have seen how His body was laid until it had been laid in place! If three women couldn't move the stone, then it's safe to assume two women

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 27:57, Mark 15:43, John 19:38

<sup>4</sup> John 19:39, Matthew 27:60

<sup>5</sup> Luke 23:54, Mark 15:42, John 19:42.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:40, Luke 23:49,

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 12:42

<sup>8</sup> Luke 23:55 and Mark 15:47.

couldn't move it. So, when did their seeing the body in place in the grave occur?

The narrative is pointedly clear that the two women kept their respectful distance that first evening. Sitting opposite the sepulcher was as near as they got!<sup>9</sup> Even that passage makes it clear that they kept back at this time. So when did they go and observe how He was laid?

### When Was the Watch Set?

Before we consider an answer to this, we should ask when was the watch set? This also has bearing. We find the women coming to the tomb early Sunday morning oblivious to the fact that the tomb had been sealed! The answer to their question as to who would roll away the stone for them would have been, NO ONE WILL, not without official permission, as it had been **sealed** by Pilate, and was now under armed guard by Roman soldiers!

This overlooked aspect of the narrative is needed to form a clear picture of the events. We need to draw-in every nuance of detail that these synoptic accounts give us. Few Bible students have been thorough in doing so, and as a result, the picture has been less than complete and far from accurate.

Some would pose that the tomb was guarded right from the first evening. The Friday crucifixion advocates especially. However, there is a problem. In John 18:28 we see the Jewish religious leaders avoiding going into the Praetorium "lest they be defiled and not be able to eat the Passover". This would have been the 14<sup>th</sup>. Yet on the Sabbath (the 15<sup>th</sup>) we are expected to believe that some of these same people, and even higher-ups than these, the Chief Priests and Pharisees, did go in to see Pilate for the purpose of getting an official watch set! Exactly when was this? We should know, as the scriptures are very specific!

### On the Preparation Day!

Many would have us believe that this meeting with Pilate took place on the Sabbath, particularly on a double Sabbath, (the 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Unleavened Bread which was also the weekly Sabbath) according to the Friday crucifixion advocates. In fact, that position **requires** that they had to have done so on the

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 27:61

Sabbath, otherwise they'd be suggesting that the watch was set AFTER the resurrection. Think about it! If this wasn't set up almost immediately, the guards wouldn't have been there yet by Sunday morning. Under the Friday crucifixion scenario, this meeting had to have taken place and the watch set before the end of the Sabbath, otherwise the guards wouldn't have been in place in time! The question is, are we to accept that the Chief Priests, after all, would have gone in to see Pilate about setting up a watch on the Sabbath? In light of what we read in John 18:28, would we expect they did? (and that day in John 18 wasn't even a Sabbath!)

In fact, the Biblical narrative shows exactly when this meeting took place, except the way the translators handled it, it isn't as obvious as it should be!

### Obscured By a Comma!

We are told **exactly** when the Chief Priests and Pharisees went in and requested a watch be set. It is so clear in Matthew 27. Yet, because of the way it is worded, most fail to notice what it so powerfully reveals. In verse 62, we find, "***Now the next day that followed, the day of preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate***". The careful reader will here notice that I misplaced a comma! The first comma in the sentence is moved back two words from where it is typically placed. We need to remember that the punctuation as we know it was not present in the original Greek. It was added by the translators. And like with the famous "What's that in the road ahead", or the, "I say unto you today you shall be with me in paradise" sentences, the meaning can change dramatically depending on where we place that missing but all important comma.

The Greek manuscripts did not place commas. They were added much later by the translators, placed in keeping with their take on the meaning.

The question is, can the placement as written above be defended? Let's consider. It says, "*the next day that followed*", so we know for sure this thing wasn't done in advance of anything. The next day is after what? Under the Friday crucifixion scenario, it would have to have been on the Sabbath, in order for the soldiers to have been in place just 18 hours or so prior to the resurrection. But then, it goes on to say "*the day of preparation*". Now, we could take that either of two ways. This is where the comma placement

matters. Either it indicates it was done on the day following the preparation day OR the day it was done was itself that preparation day. Now, if we opt for the traditional early comma, as the KJV and most other versions have it, it creates for us two points of illogic. First, we must deduce that the Chief Priests took the risk of defilement by entering the Praetorium on the Sabbath Day (also a High Holyday) (without any trace of suggestion of that consequence), AND, second, that for some unexplained reason, they opted to refer to the Sabbath in a strange and unique way, by calling it “the day following the preparation day”. Why not simply call it “The Sabbath” straight on? This is more than just unique.

No, the more logical conclusion would be to see the comma as being placed before and after the phrase: “the day of preparation”. However, it often isn’t about logic. Especially when religious dogma is involved, because, you see, if we take it this way, the Friday crucifixion scenario is toast! If in fact the Chief Priests did this on the day following, the day called “the day of preparation”, then the language of this narrative **demand**s that there be a preparation day AFTER the crucifixion!!! That then would show conclusively that there was a day in-between a Sabbath and the Sabbath, the annual and the weekly Sabbaths! That there were TWO Sabbaths involved, separated by a day (that year a Friday)! In other words, this passage is saying that this day which followed **was** ‘the preparation day’, which is the New Testament equivalent of a Friday.

But, more directly, IF there was a ‘preparation day’ AFTER the crucifixion, then the crucifixion WAS NOT ON a Friday!! You can see then why the translators chose to put that comma where they did.

What a difference a comma makes!  
All of this powerfully corroborates the ‘one day between’ scenario revealed in the women with their spices verses given above! (Mk.16:1 & Lk.23:56)

### **Back to Our Question**

So, back to the question asked above. When did the women view Christ’s body, and how could they have been coming to the tomb early Sunday morning still oblivious to the watch having been set? It isn’t all that hard to fathom, considering what we have already reviewed. The women were caught by surprise with

Christ’s arrest, his trial and crucifixion. They had no reason to anticipate these events, and as a result, weren’t prepared for them; especially, having expensive and perishable spices and aromatics on hand. Like what happened with most of us on 9-11, our day stopped as we watched gripped in total shock. Theirs must have too.

### **They Then Kept the Sabbath!**

Watching the day’s events right to the last, they left as did Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus<sup>10</sup>. After the Sabbath (Nisan 15, the First Day of Unleavened Bread) was over, they returned to the as yet unguarded tomb to view how the men had done and to see what might be yet needed. Their conclusion was that there was a need for more spices, which they went to acquire, and prepare, which took most of the day, along with the normal preparations they would have made for the oncoming Sabbath. They didn’t return to the tomb until after the weekly Sabbath was past, which they did at their first opportunity, doing so very early Sunday morning. They were unaware of the other events having taken place while they were preoccupied elsewhere.

Seeing the activity near the tomb, with people entering and re-rolling the stone, the religious leaders saw the possibility of Christ’s body being taken and a ‘hoax’ being perpetrated, so they approached Pilate about a setting a seal and posting guards at the tomb. This would have been on Friday morning, which is consistent with Matthew 27:62. So, not long after the women left on Friday, the sepulcher was sealed and the watch was set. The women didn’t return until after the weekly Sabbath was over, so they didn’t know about the changed situation there at the tomb.

Now, the Chief Priests and Pharisees requested the tomb be guarded until the ‘third day’. Using the method of counting so commonly evident in Scripture, of “today, tomorrow and the third day”, we can see that the ‘third day’ is another way of saying ‘the day after tomorrow’. ‘Today’ would have been Friday, ‘Tomorrow’ would have been Saturday, and the ‘Third Day’ would have been Sunday. It all works! At least, with a Wednesday crucifixion it works. You see, also here, we have evidence that the Chief Priests understood the term “three days and three nights” to

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<sup>10</sup> John 19:39, Matthew 27:60

be an interval longer than a day and a half. Being the “day after” as Matthew 27:62 shows, with one day already passed, and if they thought the count was only involving parts of three days, then why would they ask of Pilate a full three days watch on top of the one already gone by? See the point? They at least understood the language, which Friday crucifixion – Easter Sunday resurrection advocates apparently do not grasp!

So, this explains how the women did not know of the tomb having been sealed as late as Sunday morning, and exactly when the request to have it sealed was made, being done on ‘the day following’!

### On The Road to Emmaus,

Another passage commonly used to illustrate a Friday crucifixion is the account of the two men on the road to Emmaus. This one is an old favorite of many, as it SEEMS to say that Sunday was the ‘third day’! This interesting narrative is found in Luke 24, beginning in verse 13. Being so well known, I won’t take time to relate it here, other than to present the KEY verse, verse 21, which says, “*..and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.*”

You see, Sunday was the third day, Saturday was the second, and Friday was the first! Piece of cake! Or, so it’s typically understood. This seems to work, unless we look at what it really says.

### The Third Day SINCE...

The casual reader will see it as most people see it; especially when the Friday crucifixion idea is implanted in one’s orientation. But, that’s NOT what was said. They didn’t say Sunday afternoon was the third day. What they did say was, Sunday afternoon was the third day SINCE these things were done! It makes an important difference, and when we note that difference, we find this passage also supports more time between the crucifixion and the resurrection than is typically allowed.

When someone says, “The third day since”, the wording actually adds another day. If the speaker would have said, “This is the **first day since** these things were done”, what would we have understood him to be saying? Now, the events being described happened all of one day, Nisan 14, ending just at

sunset. This narrative was also late in the afternoon on the Sunday following. Would the hearer understand the statement “the **first day since** these things were done” to mean the things happened yesterday, or, they are happening AS WE SPEAK? You can see from this, to say “the first day SINCE”, it adds one more day into the count!

One day since, would mean the things were done yesterday. Two days since would mean the day before yesterday. Three days since would mean the day before that, etc., etc. The third day since was Sunday. The second day since was Saturday. The first day since was Friday, but as we saw in the question posed above, “the first day since” means the things were done the day before! So the day these things **were done** was Thursday! The word “since” offsets the event by one more day!

Now, this is an obvious problem for the Friday crucifixion position, as it places the crucifixion at least one day too early. At first, it seems also to not square exactly with the Wednesday crucifixion position either, until we realize that the time these things took place, and **were done**, (in the sense of being completed) was in fact right at the end of the day, the beginning of a Thursday!

Virtually all of the things that ‘were done’ on that Passover Day: the Passover Supper, Jesus’ arrest, His Trial before the Sanhedrin, then before Pilate, then His sentencing, crucifixion, death and burial, all took place within the confines of one day. But they were all done and over with just as the fifteenth day of the month was beginning, that year a Thursday. Thursday was the day these things were “done”. Friday was the first day since these things were done, Saturday the second, and Sunday was the third day since these things were done.

When we understand it this way, it works perfectly with a Wednesday crucifixion. To go with the traditional understanding, we have to say the first day these things were done was Friday, the day in which they supposedly all happened, which would make the “first day since” they happened a Saturday and the second day since a Sunday! You see, adding that word “since” changes the count, offsetting the event by one day from the ‘third day’ designations found in other places!<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Matt.12:40, Luke 18:32-33, etc.

## The Wave Sheaf Ceremony

A footnote on page one makes reference to the Wave Sheaf Ceremony, which was offered on the morrow after the Sabbath.<sup>12</sup> Under either a Friday or a Wednesday crucifixion scenario, the Wave Sheaf would have been offered up on that Sunday morning. Many Bible students hold the opinion that Christ was presented up for acceptance before the Father in Heaven on that morning. The basis of this is His aversion to being touched that morning,<sup>13</sup> stating that He had not yet ascended to the Father, then His, “the Father sent me”<sup>14</sup> statement later in the day, when they were invited to touch Him. This is more thoroughly addressed in my article: “*Who is the Ancient of Days?*”

However, the Wave Sheaf was traditionally CUT just after sunset the previous evening.<sup>15</sup> The problem for the Friday crucifixion – Sunday morning resurrection position is that it has Jesus **still dead** at the time the Wave Sheaf was cut! Many regard Jesus as having been OUR Wave Sheaf Offering, being the first of the first fruits unto God. Under the Wednesday crucifixion scenario, it places the resurrection at the end of the weekly Sabbath, seventy-two hours after His death and burial. He thus would have been **alive** at the time the Wave Sheaf was being cut!

With time for reflection and grateful prayer, taking time to fold the grave cloths,<sup>16</sup> He would have emerged from the tomb some time during the night. We should remember that the women first arriving at the tomb, very early, before it was light, found the stone rolled away with Him **already gone**.<sup>17</sup> The point here is that He was resurrected and gone BEFORE Sunday morning dawned!

## There Was a Day Between!

With the ‘difficult scripture’ being in the Friday crucifixion peoples’ camp for a change,<sup>18</sup> that being

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<sup>12</sup> Leviticus 23:10-11

<sup>13</sup> John 20:17

<sup>14</sup> John 20:21

<sup>15</sup> The Temple, Its Ministry and Services, A.Edersheim, Hendrickson Publishers, 6/98, page 204

<sup>16</sup> John 20:7

<sup>17</sup> John 20:1

<sup>18</sup> Not that the “three days and three nights” in the tomb doesn’t represent a certain difficulty for them also!

the clear statement showing that the Chief Priests approached Pilate on the ‘day following’, with that day being called ‘the preparation day’ (a Friday), we are drawn to conclude that there was in fact a day between two Sabbaths in that year, and thus, that a Wednesday crucifixion is the only workable scenario.

The women buying, then preparing spices before resting on the weekly Sabbath, and the time-frame statement posed by the men on the road to Emmaus both lend strong support to the same conclusion.

A legal declaration of death in the Roman world required that the victim be dead for **three days**. Those who pose a day-and-a-half entombment period deny Jesus a verified and legal death!

Christ was indeed “cut off in the midst of the week” as the Old Testament prophecy suggests!<sup>19</sup> Wednesday is the exact middle of the week. God has given us more than sufficient information about this matter. Why would we disregard it? **Ω**

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel 9:27