

Three Days and Nights

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There are several solutions to this problem. Some have suggested that a special Sabbath might have occurred, so that Jesus was actually crucified on a Thursday. However, a solution, which seems to me to be more convincing, is that Jesus was indeed crucified on a Friday but that the Jewish method of counting days was not the same as ours.

In Esther 4:16, we find Esther exhorting Mordecai to persuade the Jews to fast. "Neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day" (NKJV). This was clearly in preparation for her highly risky attempt to see the king. Yet just two verses later, in Esther 5:1, we read: "Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace." If three days and nights were counted in the same way as we count them today, then Esther could not have seen the king until the fourth day. This is completely analogous to the situation with Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection.

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40; NKJV).

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb (Matthew 28:1; NKJV).

Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again'" (Luke 24:5-7; NKJV).

If the three days and nights were counted the way we count them, then Jesus would have to rise on the fourth day. But, by comparing these passages, we can see that in the minds of people in Bible times, "the third day" is equivalent to "after three days."

In fact, the way they counted was this: part of a day would be counted as one day. The following table, reproduced from the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry (CARM)_website, shows how the counting works.¹