

When was Jesus Crucified?

Introduction

There is a lot of confusion surrounding the question: on which day of the week did Jesus die? For example, many wonder how Jesus could have been crucified at the time the Passover lambs were being slaughtered and yet He ate a Passover meal with His disciples. Others ask how He could fulfil the Passover if He died the next day. Or, if Jesus died on Friday the 15th of Nisan in AD 30, then didn't He die on the first day of Unleavened Bread and not Passover? Or, how does He spend three days and three nights in the tomb if He dies on Friday morning and rises on Sunday morning? Consequently, many suggest that He ate the Passover meal before the appointed time, and that He was crucified before that Friday.

Why does it matter? It matters because the Scriptures claim to be inspired by God and if they are not accurate then how can we trust them?

This document will address such questions by considering both the Old Testament texts and the New Testament texts in the light of the relevant Jewish background, and then considering some evidence found in the Jewish records. And we will see that it is possible to reconcile all these apparent discrepancies without changing the intended meaning of the gospel records.

Old Testament and Jewish background

Before we look at the New Testament passages that give details of the timing of the events leading up to the Messiah's crucifixion we will first review what Moses wrote about the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread together with some Jewish background from first century Israel.

Jewish Dates and Days of the Week

First, we need to understand how the Jews count their days of the month and their days of the week. Their day of the month goes from midnight to midnight¹, but their day of the week goes from sunset to sunset². Sunset is defined as the moment when three stars can first be seen in the sky. And, as we are about to see, while the day of the month goes from midnight to midnight, it can be used to specify the day of the week which begins at sunset on that day of the month. This concept is the key to our understanding of when things happen.

¹ This information came to me by word of mouth from Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum.

² This understanding of the day of the week most likely stems from the fact that God describes the days of the creation week as *there was evening and there was morning, one day, etc.* (*Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31*)

An Example: The Day of Atonement

The timing of the Day of Atonement provides a useful example in which God uses both the days of the month and the day of the week to define that day.

Leviticus 23:27

²⁷ “On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD. “

Leviticus 23:32

³² “It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath.”

So, while this day of holy convocation or sabbath is to be *on exactly the tenth day of this seventh month*, it is further explained that it will begin *on the ninth of the month at evening* and continue to the following evening. Thus, we see here that God uses two days of the month to specify the Day of Atonement, which is to be one day of the week from evening on the 9th of the month until evening on the 10th of the month.

In verse 27, God refers to the daylight hours of the tenth day of the seventh month and declares that they shall be a holy convocation. Then in verse 32, He declares that the day of the week beginning on the ninth day of the month and ending on the tenth day of the month is to be a Sabbath day.

The general principle is that, while the day of the month goes from midnight to midnight, it can be used to specify a day of the week which goes from sunset to sunset. And, it can be used to specify either the day of the week beginning on that day of the month or the day of the week ending on that day of the month.

In this example, in verse 27, the tenth day of the month is used to specify a day of the week which ends on that day. And in verse 32, the ninth day of the month is used to specify a day of the week which begins on that day. Further examples of this principle will be found when we look at the passages dealing with the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread, where we will find the day of the month used to specify the day of the week which begins on the given day of the month.

The diagram below represents this visually. The shaded areas show the hours of darkness.

Dates for The Day of Atonement

Jewish Day of Month (7th month)	Jewish Day of Week	Event
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9		
10		Day of Atonement

The day of week is unnamed because it will change from year to year.

What did Moses say about the Feast of Passover?

The relevant passages are Exodus 12:1–20 and Leviticus 23:4–8.

Exodus 12:1–20 (parts relevant to our discussion)

³ ... *'On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household. ...* ⁶ *'You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. ...* ⁸ *'They shall eat the flesh that same night ...* ¹¹ ... *—it is the Lord's Passover. ...*

¹⁶ *'On the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and another holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten by every person, that alone may be prepared by you.* ¹⁷ *'You shall also observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, ...* ¹⁸ *'In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.*

Leviticus 23:4–8

⁴ *'These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them.* ⁵ *'In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord's Passover.* ⁶ *'Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.* ⁷ *'On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.* ⁸ *'But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.'*

The Hebrew word translated at twilight in Exodus 12:6 and Leviticus 23:5 is an idiom meaning literally *between the two evenings*³, referring to the time between sunset and the appearance of three stars. However, the rabbinic tradition places the slaughter of Passover offerings between approximately 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.⁴

Notice that Exodus 12:18 defines an eight-day period during which they are to eat unleavened bread, from the 14th to the 21st day, inclusive of those two dates. This is the origin of the Jewish terms, *the eight days of Unleavened Bread* and *the eight days of Passover*. The first of those days is the Passover day, and the remaining seven are the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

From these passages, we understand that:

1. Late in the afternoon on the 14th of Nisan (the first month) they are to kill the Passover lamb.
2. That same night they are to eat its flesh. Thus, the Passover day, a day of the week, goes from the evening on the 14th day of the month to the evening on the 15th day of the month. Here the relevant day of the week begins on the 14th day of the month.
3. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is the seven days (days of the week) immediately following the day of Passover, and therefore, beginning in the evening on the 15th day of Nisan. Thus, we see that the 15th of Nisan in Leviticus 23:6 gives us the day of the month on which the first day of Unleavened Bread begins at evening.
4. The day of the week on which the Feast of Unleavened Bread ends is the one which begins on the 21st of Nisan and ends on the 22nd of Nisan. This is the seventh day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.⁵
5. And the first and seventh days of Unleavened Bread are days of holy convocation or sabbath.

The diagram on the next page represents this visually. The shaded areas show the hours of darkness.

³ NASB marginal note.

⁴ From an NET study note on Lev. 23:5 See B. A. Levine, *Leviticus (JPSTC)*, 156, for a full discussion of the issues raised in this verse.

⁵ The 1906 *Jewish Encyclopedia*, [V:9 P:313](#), says: '**On the evening of the 14th of Nisan the Feast of Passover begins**; on the 16th, the second day of Passover, the Hebrews offered a sheaf of barley as the first-fruits of the harvest of the current year; and on the same day began the reckoning (Sefirot) of the seven weeks. From the 17th to the 20th are the "middle days," or the "ḥol ha-mo'ed." **The 21st and the 22d are the last feast-days of Passover.** Nisan coincides, approximately, with the month of April.' (emphasis added)

Dates for Passover and Unleavened Bread

Jewish Day of Month (Nisan - 1st month)	Jewish Day of Week [*]	Event
14		Passover Lamb killed Passover meal for each family
15		Day of Passover
16		Unleavened Bread day 1: holy convocation
17		Unleavened Bread day 2
18		Unleavened Bread day 3
19		Unleavened Bread day 4
20		Unleavened Bread day 5
21		Unleavened Bread day 6
22		Unleavened Bread day 7: holy convocation

Exodus 12:1–20; Leviticus 23:4–8

^{*}The day of week is unnamed because it will change from year to year.

The term Passover

The term Passover is used in four different ways. It may refer to:

1. A single day

The Feast of Passover by itself, which is a single day. This is the day when each family will sacrifice a lamb in the temple and then eat it that night.

2. Eight days

The eight-day period beginning with the Feast of Passover. While technically Passover is only one day followed by seven days of Unleavened Bread, by New Testament times people were talking about the eight days of Passover, and all eight days are called Unleavened Bread, or just Passover.

We can see this in the gospels in Matthew 26:17–19; Mark 14:12–16; Luke 22:7–13. For example, Mark says, ¹² *On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, ...*

3. A meal

The meal eaten by all Jews on the first night of Passover is called the Passover. This is the meal that Jesus celebrated with His disciples.

4. A lamb

The lamb that was sacrificed on the first day of Passover in the Temple Compound⁶. This sacrifice is described in Exodus 29:38-39, and Numbers 28:1-8. And the use of the term *Passover* to refer to it can be seen in 2 Chronicles 35:1-19, where it refers to all the sacrifices taking place on the day of Passover, including the lamb in question here.

The Passover lamb was sacrificed at the third hour of the day (9 am) and was eaten by the high priest and the 24 chief priests later that same day.

This is the lamb that was killed at the time of Jesus' crucifixion.

⁶ Edersheim, A. (1896). *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Vol. 2, pp. 565–568). New York: Longmans, Green, and Co. Edersheim writes: “ ... both the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 16:1-3; 2 Chronicles 35:1-19) and Jewish writings show, that the term Pesach, or ‘Passover,’ was applied not only to the Paschal Lamb, but to all the Passover sacrifices, especially to what was called the Chagigah, or festive offering.”

The Lamb of God

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him, he said, “*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29.) There were two concepts of the lamb in the Jewish minds of the first century: the Passover Lamb of Exodus 12; and the Messianic Lamb of Isaiah 53:7.

Isaiah 53:7

⁷ *He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.*

By calling him *the Lamb of God*, John identifies him with both the Passover Lamb (as in the fourth use of the term *Passover*) and the Messianic Lamb of Isaiah 53. Jesus is both lambs.

Timeline from the Old Testament and Jewish Background

So, we conclude that⁷:

1. On the first night of Passover (the first night of the eight-day period) Jewish families eat the Passover meal. This happens on the 14th day of Nisan.
2. Then on the first day of Passover, which happens on the 15th day of Nisan, at 9 o'clock in the morning, a lamb referred to as the Passover is sacrificed. And from that sacrifice only 25 men partake in the afternoon: the high priest and the 24 chief priests.
3. At evening on the 15th day of Nisan, after the first day of Passover has ended, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins.

⁷ Not central to the present discussion, but of general interest are the following additional observations:

- The last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins at evening on the 21st of Nisan and ends at evening on the 22nd of Nisan.
- Unleavened bread is eaten for eight days, from the day of Passover to the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

New Testament passages

There are several passages that give us the timing of the events leading to the Messiah's crucifixion.

1. The Preparation for the Passover meal⁸

Luke 22:7–13⁹

⁷ *Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.* ⁸ *And Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it."*

As already mentioned, the term Unleavened Bread in this context refers to the eight-day period including both Passover and Unleavened Bread, the period from the 14th until the 21st day of the month Nisan.

Which Passover lamb is he referring to here? The answer is in the next verse. Jesus sent Peter & John to prepare the Passover, including the lamb, *so that we may eat it*. Also notice that Luke describes the day as the day *on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed*.

This was the day on which the Law of Moses required the lamb to be sacrificed, namely the 14th day of Nisan. And Jesus kept the Law of Moses perfectly, down to the smallest jot and tittle. Had He violated that Law, He would have sinned and therefore disqualified Himself from being our spotless Lamb. And this is the day on which Luke records that Jesus prepared and ate the Passover with His disciples. Therefore, the lamb was not sacrificed and eaten early as some propose.

And, as we read, they ate it together in the Upper Room that evening – the evening of the 14th of Nisan.

2. The First Trial before Pilate¹⁰

John 18:28

²⁸ *Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.*

The first point to note here is that such defilement would only have lasted until evening and therefore, had they entered into the Praetorium on the morning of the 14th of Nisan, it would not have prevented them from eating the Passover meal that night.

⁸ The passages discussed under this heading are also discussed in Eric Vear, "The Life of the Messiah in His Jewish Context" (2017-01, available from www.vear.info), § 149.

⁹ See also Mark 14:12, and Matthew 27:17.

¹⁰ Eric Vear, "The Life of the Messiah in His Jewish Context", *op. cit.*, § 171

In this context however, *the Passover* refers to the Passover lamb slain and eaten by the priests on the 15th of Nisan. If any of the chief priests became unclean he would not be able to partake of the Passover lamb in the afternoon. Therefore, as John records, they did not enter the Praetorium.¹¹

From this we see that the trial before Pilate took place on the morning of the 15th of Nisan.

¹¹ Edersheim, A. (1896). [*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 565–568). New York: Longmans, Green, and Co. He writes regarding the statement, *so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover*: “Few expressions have given rise to more earnest controversy than this. On two things at least we can speak with certainty. Entrance into a heathen house *did* Levitically render impure for that day—that is, till the evening. The fact of such defilement is clearly attested both in the New Testament and in the Mishnah, though its reasons might be various (Ohol. 18. 7; Tohar. 7. 3). A person who had so become Levitically unclean was technically called *Tebhul Yom* (‘bathed of the day’). The other point is, that, to have so become ‘impure’ for the day, would *not* have disqualified for eating the Paschal Lamb, since that meal was partaken of *after* the evening, and when a new day had begun. In fact, it is distinctly laid down (Pes. 92 *a*) that the ‘bathed of the day,’ that is, he who had been impure for the day and had bathed in the evening, *did* partake of the Paschal Supper, and an instance is related (Jer. Pes. 36 *b*, lines 14 and 15 from bottom), when some soldiers who had guarded the gates of Jerusalem ‘immersed,’ and ate the Paschal Lamb. It follows, that these Sanhedrists could not have abstained from entering the Palace of Pilate because by so doing they would have been disqualified for the Paschal Supper.”

“... both the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 16:1-3; 2 Chronicles 35:1-19) and Jewish writings show, that the term Pesach, or ‘Passover,’ was applied not only to the Paschal Lamb, but to all the Passover sacrifices, especially to what was called the Chagigah, or festive offering (from Chag., or Chagag, to bring the festive sacrifice usual at each of the three Great Feasts).’ According to the express rule (Chag. 1. 3) the Chagigah was brought on the first festive Paschal Day. It was offered immediately after the morning-service, and eaten on that day—probably some time before the evening, when, as we shall by-and-by see, another ceremony claimed public attention. We can therefore quite understand that, not on the eve of the Passover, but on the first Paschal day, the Sanhedrists would avoid incurring a defilement which, lasting till the evening, would not only have involved them in the inconvenience of Levitical defilement on the first festive day, but have actually prevented their offering on that day the Passover, festive sacrifice, or Chagigah. For, we have these two express rules: that a person could not in Levitical defilement offer the Chagigah; and that the Chagigah could not be offered for a person by some one else who took his place (Jer. Chag. 76 *a*, lines 16 to 14 from bottom). These considerations and canons seem decisive as regards the views above expressed. There would have been no reason to fear ‘defilement’ on the morning of the Paschal Sacrifice; but entrance into the Prætorium on the morning of the first Passover-day would have rendered it impossible for them to offer the Chagigah, which is also designated by the term Pesach.”

3. The Second Trial before Pilate¹²

John 19:14

14 Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover ...”

If we examine the Greek text here we find that the translators have added their interpretation to the translation. The words “*the day of*” are absent. A more correct translation would be:

Now, it was the preparation of the Passover. ...

As in John 18:38, the word *Passover* here refers to the lamb slain and eaten by the priests on the 15th of Nisan. John is drawing our attention to the fact that at the very time when Jesus was being sentenced by Pilate, the Passover lamb was being prepared in the temple. His point is that Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is also being prepared for the once for all sacrifice which is about to occur.

From this too, we see that the trial before Pilate took place on the morning of the 15th of Nisan.

4. The Burial of the Messiah¹³

John 19:31–37

³¹ *Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; ³³ but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. ³⁵ And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, “Not a bone of Him shall be broken.” ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”*

Mark 15:42

⁴² *When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath.*

Luke 23:54

⁵⁴ *It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.*

Now what day is it when these things occur? Although there is debate in Christendom about which day of the week Jesus was crucified, we see here evidences that the crucifixion did occur on the Friday.

¹² Eric Vear, “The Life of the Messiah in His Jewish Context”, *op. cit.*, § 173

¹³ *Ibid.*, § 179

The day of preparation

First of all, John says that *it was the day of preparation*. The words *the day of preparation* are all taken from a single word in the Greek: ***paraskeue***. This is a Jewish term meaning a day on which preparations were made for a sacred or feast day. And the identification of the day before the Sabbath as *paraskeue*, the day of preparation, was so common that it eventually became the present-day Greek term for Friday.

High Sabbath

John also tells us that this particular Sabbath was a high Sabbath, meaning that the Sabbath fell on a Jewish feast day. Whenever a feast day, which is always on a fixed day of the month, coincides with the Sabbath day, that Sabbath day is referred to as a high Sabbath.

If it was unacceptable to have Jewish bodies exposed over a normal Sabbath, it was especially so on a high Sabbath. Therefore, they asked Pilate to hasten the death sentence so the bodies could be removed before the Sabbath.

Thus, we learn that the crucifixion of Jesus took place the day before the Sabbath.

External evidence - the Jewish Talmud

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes:

Besides the Gospels, ancient Jewish records such as the Talmud confirm that the day the Messiah died was the Friday during Passover: "On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged ...A Florentine Ms. Adds: and the eve of the Sabbath."¹⁴ This Talmudic quote refers to Yeshua's trial and execution, and the Florentine manuscript mentions twice that He was executed on the eve of the Sabbath, which is Friday. Furthermore, twice it mentions that it was at the Passover, which is why Yochanan stated that the Sabbath was a high Sabbath.¹⁵

This provides further evidence that Jesus was crucified on the 15th of Nisan, the Passover day and the day before the Sabbath.

¹⁴ b. *Sanhedrin* 43a; p. 281, n.7

¹⁵ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of the Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, vol. 4 (Ariel Ministries www.ariel.org), p. 172

Timeline

From the above discussion, we can conclude the following:

1. On Thursday, the 14th of Nisan (the first month):

Late afternoon or early evening, Jesus sent Peter & John to prepare the Passover for Him and His disciples to eat. This included killing their lamb in the temple.

2. That same night:

They ate the Passover together in the Upper Room. After the meal, they went to the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was arrested. Then His trial began.

3. On Friday, the 15th of Nisan:

Early in the morning He was condemned by the Sanhedrin and taken to the Roman trial. At 9 am, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed in the temple, He was crucified.

Dates for Jesus' Last Passover and His Crucifixion

Jewish Day of Month (Nisan - 1st month)	Jewish Day of Week* in AD 30	Event	Gregorian Day of the Week** in April AD 30
14	5	Passover Lamb killed	Thursday 6
		Passover meal with His disciples	
15	6	Day of Passover Crucifixion at 9 am	Friday 7
16	7	Unleavened Bread day 1 High Sabbath	Saturday 8
17	1	Resurrection	Sunday 9

* The Jewish day of week is not named, but numbered, because the Jews only number them. Day 7 is the Sabbath, and day 6 is the day of preparation.

** The Gregorian calendar had not been invented in AD 30, but is commonly extrapolated to that year for the sake of comparison.

Conclusions

When did Jesus die?

Thus, we see that Jesus both ate the Passover lamb at the proper time with His disciples and was crucified the following morning on the first day of Passover at the time when the lamb, also known as the Passover, was sacrificed.

Fulfilment of the Feast of Passover

Another point of interest is that it is not necessary for Jesus to die on the very day of the feast that He fulfills. Jesus died in the first month, yet His death fulfills the Day of Atonement¹⁶, which occurs in the seventh month. In the same way, it is not necessary for Jesus to die at the same time as the Passover lambs on Thursday evening in order for Him to fulfil the feast of Passover¹⁷.

Three days and three nights in the tomb?

The question of how to fit three days and three nights into the period from the death to the resurrection of Jesus is easily resolved with an understanding of the Jewish idiom being used. In the Bible, and in Jewish reckoning, a fraction of a day or of a night was reckoned to include the whole day or night. The term, *three days and three nights*, is an idiom referring to a period that begins at any time during the first day and ends at any time during the third day.¹⁸ The appendix at the end of this document describes this in more detail.

Jesus died and was buried on Friday and rose again in the early hours of Sunday morning. In Jewish reckoning of time, which is inclusive of both the first and last days, that is a three-day period which can be described as *three days and three nights*.

¹⁶ See Hebrews 10:1-10

¹⁷ The word *fulfil* is used in a number of different ways, and does not always refer to a literal fulfilment of a literal prophecy. When we say that Jesus fulfilled a feast of Israel, we mean that the feast is a type of Jesus and Jesus is the anti-type of the feast. A type is an historical event, person or thing which in some way is a pattern or picture of something future. An anti-type is the reality depicted by the type. In the present discussion, Jesus is the reality depicted by the Passover and He is the reality depicted by the Day of Atonement.

¹⁸ See also Dr. Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua, opt. cit.*, pp. 174-176.

Appendix: Three Days? Three nights? How does that work?

The author of the following article is Bob Mendelsohn, CEO at Jews for Jesus. The original was found at <http://aussie-jewsforjesus.blogspot.com.au/2016/03/three-days-three-nights-how-does-that.html>.

Three Days? Three nights? How does that work?

The questions come from a Bible verse, Yeshua said, "For just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12.40) And the question gets asked every Easter. When did Jesus really die? And when did he really rise from the dead?

This might help explain how this works. Clearly whatever day Yeshua died (and I believe it was a Friday), the exact 72 hours calculation will never work. He died in the afternoon, and rose before morning.

During an online debate with Christians about the above Scripture verse, an unlikely contributor to the debate showed us something that I'd heard before, but had never seen proven. Joe Zias, ex-curator of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, an archaeologist with the Israel Antiquities Authority, and a Jewish man who does NOT believe that Jesus rose from the dead or is the Messiah, nevertheless weighed in with a post about the *idiomatic* use in Jewish circles of the phrase "three days and three nights." In brief, Zias said that the phrase is found elsewhere in the Bible and in Rabbinic literature, and that it did not usually refer to a literal 72-hour period of time. He said, "It's one example of many Hebrew idioms used for inclusive time reckoning."

(For those who may have forgotten, an idiom is a word or phrase that MUST NOT be understood to mean the sum total of its parts, or it will surely be misunderstood. Every language and culture has idioms. Some examples in English are, "She went ballistic," "I hit the ceiling," and "I'll be a monkey's uncle!")

A literal interpretation by some well-meaning Christians, of the phrase "three days and three nights" as representing an exact period of 72 hours, displays ignorance of the biblical and rabbinic evidence about the idiomatic use of the phrase "a day and a night," of which "three days and three nights" is merely an expansion. In truth, the idiom refers not to an exact number of hours or of minutes, but simply to a calendrical day, whether complete or incomplete.

In the Bible, a fraction of a day or of a night was reckoned inclusively as representing the whole day or night. This method of reckoning is known as "inclusive reckoning."

A few examples from the Bible and from rabbinic literature will suffice to demonstrate its usage (I am indebted to Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D., Andrews University from his book *The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection* for the following examples and most of the commentary):

1Samuel 30:12 speaks of an abandoned Egyptian servant who "had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights." The idiomatic usage of this expression is shown by the

following verse, where the servant states that his master had left him behind "three days ago" (v. 13). If the "three days and three nights" were meant to be taken literally, then the servant should have said that he had been left behind four days before.

Esther 4:16 mentions that when Queen Esther was informed by Mordecai about the plan to exterminate the Jews, she sent this message to him: "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king." However, we read in 5:1 that Esther went before the king "on the third day." If Esther intended the three days and three nights to be taken literally as a 72-hour period of fasting, then she should have presented herself before the king on the fourth day. These two biblical examples clearly show that the expression "three days and three nights" is sometimes used in the Scriptures idiomatically to indicate not three complete 24-hour days, but three calendric days of which the first and the third could have consisted of only a fraction of a day.

But we also have examples from ancient rabbinic literature. For instance, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, who lived about 100 CE, said, "A day and a night are an Onah [‘a portion of time’] and the portion of an Onah is as the whole of it." (As quoted from the Jerusalem Talmud, Shabbat 9,3; see also Babylonian Talmud, Pesakhim 4a; and the Midrash Rabbah on Genesis 56.1 (commenting on Gen 22:4); Genesis 91.7 (commenting on Gen 42:17-18); Esther 9.2 (commenting on Esther 5:1). Etc. In fact, according to The Jewish Encyclopedia, a standard Jewish reference work, the practice of *inclusive day* reckoning is still in vogue among the Jews today.

"In Jewish communal life part of a day is at times reckoned as one day; e.g., the day of the funeral, even when the latter takes place late in the afternoon, is counted as the first of the seven days of mourning; a short time in the morning of the seventh day is counted as the seventh day; circumcision takes place on the eighth day, even though on the first day only a few minutes remained after the birth of the child, these being counted as one day." ("Day," vol. 6, p. 475). In fact, Joe Zias used the example of "the eighth day" regarding circumcision not necessarily being eight full days. He, being an Israeli Jew, drew it from his own personal experience with inclusive day reckoning.

The examples cited above give sufficient evidence that in biblical times (and until now) the expression "a day and a night" could mean idiomatically "a day," whether complete or incomplete. **Thus, in the light of the prevailing Jewish usage, Jesus employment of the expression "three days and three nights" in Mat 12:40 does not necessarily require that Yeshua would have been entombed for 72 hours. Rather, a full day and two partial days fit the time-frame best, as ancient Christian tradition has historically understood it.** [emphasis added]