



**THE TIME**

**of the**

**CRUCIFIXION**

**and the**

**RESURRECTION**

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Loretta, Daniele, and Gianluca  
whose love and support  
motivates me to  
greater service  
for the Lord

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# PREFACE

What has led an author to write a book may sometimes be of as much interest to a reader as the content of the book itself. My desire to investigate the time element of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection has been aroused, first of all, by the numerous letters I have received from the readers of my two books *From Sabbath to Sunday* and *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*.

The letters in question were generally written by seventh-day Sabbathkeeping Christians belonging to different denominations, but holding in common the belief that Christ was crucified on a Wednesday afternoon and that He arose exactly 72 hours later on a Saturday afternoon. Many of these Christian friends have taken time to write to me, on the one hand, to express their appreciation for my historical and theological defense of the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping, but on the other hand, to register their disappointment at my failure to consider those Biblical texts which supposedly support the Wednesday-Crucifixion/Saturday-Resurrection of Christ.

My failure to address this question in my previous research was simply due to my unawareness of the existence of a differing view on the day of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection. The effort that so many well-meaning Christians have made during the last few years to make me aware of the fundamental importance they attach to the Wednesday-Crucifixion/Saturday-Resurrection has challenged me to examine this question at the earliest convenient time.

The occasion which precipitated my undertaking this investigation was the assignment I received in October 1984 from Dr. B. B. Beach—the Director of the Inter-Church Council of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists—to prepare a paper on this subject to be presented at the annual dialogue with representatives of the Church of God (Seventh Day).

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The dialogue was held on the campus of Loma Linda University in California, on January 18-20, 1985. I wish to express to Dr. B. B. Beach my gratitude for challenging me to make time for this investigation, which otherwise could have been postponed indefinitely on account of other pressing demands.

The questions raised during our dialogue with the representative of the Church of God (Seventh Day) made me aware of the necessity to further research certain issues and to expand my paper into a book. The results of this expanded research are now being submitted in this book, with the hope that this will help to rectify some of the mistaken conclusions which have been reached regarding the time of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection.

A word of explanation should also be given for the inclusion of the last two chapters, which are not directly related to the main objective of this study. These two chapters developed out of two major considerations. First, the search for a possible resolution to the apparent contradiction between the two time references given in Matthew 28:1 led me to examine the possible existence in Bible times of two methods of day reckoning: from sunset to sunset and from sunrise to sunrise. This investigation developed into a full separate chapter, namely, the fifth.

Second, the discovery of the possible existence in Bible times of two methods of day reckoning, led me to consider the thorny problem of when to begin and end the Sabbath in the Arctic regions where the sun, for certain periods of the year, sets very early, or very late, or not at all. The study of this question also developed into a full chapter, namely, the sixth.

My interest in the latter question was aroused while attending an International Sabbath Conference which was held in St. Albans, England, on September 19-22, 1983, under the auspices of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. One of the issues addressed by the Conference was, when should the Sabbath begin and end in the Arctic regions? The discussion made me aware of the inadequacy of the sunset-to-sunset reckoning for these regions, even if the meaning of sunset was broadened to include the end of twilight or the diminishing of light.

This project has offered me the opportunity to wrestle with the thorny question of the time to begin and end the Sabbath in those regions where the sun at certain periods of the year sets very early, very late, or not at all. It is my fervent hope that the recommendation being offered by this study will contribute to the resolution of this complex problem. If differing views should persist, may the spirit of mutual respect and charity prevail.

# Chapter 1

## THE WEDNESDAY CRUCIFIXION AND SATURDAY RESURRECTION

Christendom has been quite in agreement throughout the centuries, not only on the fundamental importance of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection, but also on the days of their occurrence. The Friday afternoon Crucifixion and the early Sunday morning Resurrection have been generally accepted as undisputed facts.

In recent years, however, several Christian Churches have advanced the view that Christ was entombed on Wednesday afternoon and that He arose exactly seventy-two hours later on Saturday afternoon. The most well-known exponent of this view is Graham Scroggie, who presents it in his book, *A Guide to the Gospels*.<sup>1</sup> Among the churches that have accepted this view as one of their fundamental beliefs are The Church of God (Seventh Day) and the Worldwide Church of God, The Church of God International, and The Assembly of Yahweh.

**Objectives.** The objective of this study is not to express a value judgment on minority Christian churches which hold to the Wednesday-Crucifixion/Saturday-Resurrection view. Truth is not decided upon by majority vote. Rather this study aims first of all at examining the three main texts adduced in support of the above-mentioned view in order to determine their probative value.

Second, an investigation will be made into the possible co-existence of two methods of day reckoning in Bible times, namely, from sunset to sunset and from sunrise to sunrise. The results of this investigation will form a basis for suggesting a possible resolution to the apparent contradiction in Matthew 28:1 (one of the three key texts), as well as for recommending when to begin and end the Sabbath in the Arctic regions.



It is our hope that this study will contribute to a fuller appreciation of the trustworthiness of the Gospels' accounts of the time element of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection as well as to solve the thorny problem of when to begin and end the observance of the Sabbath in the Arctic regions where the sun at certain periods of the year sets very early, or very late or not at all.

## THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE WEDNESDAY

### CRUCIFIXION

The primary support for the Wednesday-Crucifixion/Saturday-Resurrection is based upon the interpretation of three major texts: (1) Matthew 12:40, (2) John 19:14, 31, (3) Matthew 28:1-6. In view of the fundamental importance attached to these three texts, we shall quote each of the three texts and then state the relative arguments derived from them.

**Matthew 12:40.** The first text, Matthew 12:40, reads: "For 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" (Matt 12:40). To the proponents of the Wednesday Crucifixion date, this text specifies that the duration of Christ's entombment in the heart of the earth would be "a full three days and three nights which is equal to 72 hours."<sup>2</sup>

This conclusion is drawn from the assumption that when "days" and "nights" are specifically mentioned, they represent not an idiomatic expression but a literal period of *three whole days*. Since between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning there are less than two whole days, it is argued that Christ must have been crucified on Wednesday afternoon and must have risen 72 hours later, namely on Saturday afternoon, in order to fulfill the three full days prophecy.

**John 19:14, 31.** To support the Wednesday dating of the Crucifixion, appeal is made to a second text, John 19:14, which reads: "Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, 'Behold your King.'" This text is interpreted as teaching that the "preparation day" of Christ's Crucifixion was not the day preceding the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, but rather the day preceding the annual Passover Sabbath which on that year supposedly occurred on a Thursday.

To substantiate this conclusion, appeal is made to the fact that in the Old Testament, days other than the seventh day of the week are called *sabbaths* (Lev 23:24, 39). Thus the Sabbath mentioned in the Passion narratives was

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allegedly an annual ceremonial Passover Sabbath, which John calls “a high day” (John 19:31) to differentiate it from the seventh-day Sabbath.

Some find further support for the Wednesday Crucifixion in Daniel’s prophecy of the “seventy weeks” (Dan 9:24-27) which speaks of the Messiah being cut off “in the midst of the week.” They point out that “while this prophecy has the application of a day for a year, so that this 70th week became a literal seven years, Christ being ‘cut off’ after three-and-a-half years’ ministry, as He was, yet it is significant that He was also ‘cut off’ on the middle of a literal week.”<sup>3</sup>

**Matthew 28:1, 5-6.** The third text, Matthew 28:1, 5-6 is regarded as the “final clinching proof,” because it allegedly pinpoints the time of the Resurrection as being Saturday afternoon. The text reads: “In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre . . . And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Matt 28:1, 5-6, KJV).

To the proponents of the Wednesday Crucifixion, this text teaches that Christ arose before “the end of the Sabbath,” because when the women arrived at the sepulchre “in the end of the Sabbath” they discovered that their Lord had already risen. Furthermore, they maintain that by counting backward from Saturday afternoon the prophetic three days and three nights of Christ’s entombment, one arrives at Wednesday afternoon as the time of Christ’s Crucifixion.

In view of the fundamental importance attached to the three cited texts by Wednesday Crucifixionists, each of them will now be examined in a separate chapter to determine whether or not they support the above interpretations.

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (London, 1948), pp. 569-577.

2. *The Time Element in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ*, published by the Bible Advocate Press of the Church of God (Seventh Day), p. 7. Reference will often be made to this booklet because in our view it provides a concise and yet well-articulated defense of the Wednesday-Crucifixion view.

3. Herbert W. Armstrong, *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday* (Pasadena, California: Ambassador College, 1972), p. 12.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

# Chapter 2

## THE SIGN OF JONAH

Is the “Good Friday, Easter Sunday” tradition a fact or a fable? Few Christian churches believe that this tradition is truly a fable devoid of Biblical support. This belief rests first of all on the interpretation of the so-called “sign of Jonah.”

In response to a request for a sign by some doubting scribes and Pharisees, Christ made a startling statement: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For 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” (Matt 12:39-40).

### I. THE DURATION OF THE ENTOMBMENT

What is the sign of Jonah that Christ gave to His unbelieving generation as a proof of His Messiahship? Wednesday Crucifixionists firmly believe that the sign consisted not simply of the *resurrection* which Christ, like Jonah, would experience after a temporary burial, but primarily of the *exact period* of 72-hour entombment in the heart of the earth.

**An Exact Length of Time.** This conviction is emphatically expressed, for example, in the booklet *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*, published by the Department of Theology of Ambassador College: “Jesus offered but one evidence [of His Messiahship]. That evidence *was not the fact of the resurrection* itself. *It was the length of time* He would repose in His grave, before being resurrected.”<sup>1</sup>

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The implication of this contention is clearly stated in the next paragraph which reads: “Jesus staked His claim to being your Savior and mine upon remaining exactly three days and three nights in the tomb. If He remained just three days and three nights inside the earth, He would prove Himself the Savior—if He failed in this sign, He must be rejected as an impostor.”<sup>2</sup>

**72-Hour Entombment.** Statements such as the ones just quoted clearly reveal the fundamental importance attached to a 72-hour duration of Christ’s entombment. This conviction rests on the assumption that when “days and nights” are explicitly mentioned in the Bible, they represent literal 24 hour days. Appeal is made to the creation week where each day consists of “evening and morning” that is, of a day and a night.

The designation of each creation day as “evening and morning” is seen as “the only Bible definition which explains and counts up the amount of time involved in the expression ‘the third day.’ It includes three dark periods called ‘night’ and three light periods called ‘day’—three days and three nights, and Jesus said they contained twelve hours for each period [John 11:9-10]—a total of 72 hours.”<sup>3</sup>

## II. THE SIGN OF THE RESURRECTION

The interpretation which views the sign of Jonah as being primarily an exact 72-hour period of Christ’s entombment is discredited by three major reasons. These, as we shall now show, indicate that the sign of Jonah consisted not in a 72-hour entombment but in the miracle of the Resurrection.

**Absence of Time Reference.** The first significant reason is the absence of any time reference in the other two passages mentioning the sign of Jonah (Matt 16:4; Luke 11:29-32). In Luke 11:29-30 Jesus says: “This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation.”

Note should be taken of the fact that in Luke there is no reference to the length of time Jonah survived in the whale’s belly. If the sign of Jonah consisted of the time factor, Luke could hardly have ignored it. The comparison in Luke between Jonah and Christ is not in terms of identical duration of entombment, but of similar miraculous Resurrections: “as Jonah . . . so will the Son of man be.”

The book of Jonah suggests that Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites through the miraculous way in which God raised Jonah out of the whale’s

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belly and cast him alive on shore. This experience gave Jonah the compulsion to preach, and the Ninevites the conviction to repent. In the same way as God's rescue of Jonah revealed Jonah's prophetic mandate which led many Ninevites to repent, so Christ's Resurrection would reveal His Messiahship which would lead many to believe.

The vast majority of commentaries consulted agree in viewing the sign of Jonah as being primarily the sign of Christ's Resurrection. Norval Geldenhuys, for example, writes in *The New International Commentary on The Gospel of Luke*: "Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, because he appeared there as one sent by God after having been miraculously saved from the great fish (as it were raised from the dead) as a proof that he was really sent by God. So also Jesus will by His resurrection prove conclusively that He has been sent by God as the Christ, the promised Redeemer."<sup>4</sup>

**A Parallel Example.** A second significant reason is found in the similar passage of John 2:19 where in response to the same request by the Jews for a sign Jesus replied: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." In this statement Christ makes His Resurrection the unmistakable sign of His Messiahship. By virtue of the parallelism between this text and Matthew 12:40 (in both places a sign is asked for and given), it seems legitimate to conclude that the sign of Jonah is essentially the same in both places, namely, the sign of the Resurrection, which is implicit in the first text and explicit in the second.

**The Testimony of the Catacombs.** A third reason is provided by the early Christians' pictorial representation of the sign of Jonah. In numerous frescos of the catacombs, Christ's Resurrection is symbolically represented as Jonah being spewed out by the whale. In fact, the scene of Jonah (known as "Jonah's cycle" because it consists of different scenes) is perhaps the most common symbolic representation of Christ's Resurrection.

The catacombs indicate, then, that the early Christians identified the sign of Jonah with the *event* of the Resurrection and not with its time element. Paul himself indirectly confirms this view when he writes that Christ was "designated Son of God in power . . . by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:4).

In the light of the above considerations we conclude that the sign of Jonah given by Christ as a proof of His Messiahship consists primarily in His future Resurrection and not in an exact 72-hour entombment. Christ's Resurrection was the unmistakable vindication of His Messiahship, of which the emergence of Jonah from what was a temporary living burial was in some sense a foreshadowing.

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### III. INCLUSIVE RECKONING

The literal interpretation of the phrase “three days and three nights” as representing an exact period of 72 hours ignores the abundant Biblical and Rabbinical evidence on the idiomatic use of the phrase “a day and a night,” to refer not to an exact number of hours or of minutes, but simply to a calendrical day, whether complete or incomplete. Matthew, for example, writes that Jesus “fasted forty days and forty nights” in the wilderness (Matt 4:2). The same period is given in Mark 1:13 and Luke 4:2 as “forty days,” which does not necessarily require forty complete 24 hour days.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note that in Biblical times 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.

**An Abandoned Egyptian.** 1 Samuel 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’s Visit to the King.** Another explicit example of inclusive day reckoning is found in the story of Esther’s visit to the king. 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” (Esther 4:16).

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. However, we are told a few verses later that Esther went before the king “on the third day” (Esther 5:1). Examples such as these clearly show that the expression “three days and three nights” is 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.<sup>6</sup>

**Rabbinical Literature.** Explicit examples for inclusive day reckoning are also found in Rabbinic literature. Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, who lived about A.D. 100, stated: “A day and a night are an Onah [‘a portion of time’]

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and the portion of an Onah is as the whole of it.”<sup>7</sup> There are other instances in Rabbinic literature where the “three days and three nights” of Jonah 1:17 are combined with Old Testament passages which mention events that took place “on the third day.”<sup>8</sup> “It is in this light,” writes Gerhard Dilling in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, “that we are to understand Matthew 12:40.”<sup>9</sup>

**Jewish Practice.** The practice of inclusive day reckoning, according to *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, a standard Jewish reference work, 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.”<sup>10</sup>

The examples cited above clearly indicate that in Biblical times the expression “a day and a night” simply meant a day, whether complete or incomplete. Thus, in the light of the prevailing usage, the expression “three days and three nights” of Matthew 12:40 does not require that Jesus be entombed for 72 hours, but for a full day and two partial days.

#### IV. ON THE THIRD DAY

A conclusive confirmation of the Biblical method of inclusive day reckoning is provided by the two most common Greek phrases used in the Gospels to describe the time between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, namely, *te trite hemera* and *meta treis hemeras*, which can be literally translated as *on the third day* and *after three days*, respectively. The latter phrase, which is used four times in the Gospels (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Matt 27:63), if taken in isolation would confirm the literal interpretation of “three days and three nights” (Matt 12:40), since the latter requires the Resurrection to take place after three whole days from the time of the Crucifixion.

**A Parallel Usage.** This interpretation, however, is discredited by the fact that the very same statement of Christ which contains the phrase “after three days” in one Gospel, is reported in another Gospel with the phrase “on the third day.” To clarify this point, in the following table we shall set out the occurrences of these two phrases in the parallel passages of the Synoptic Gospels:



**Mark 8:31**

“after three days rise again”

**Matthew 16:31**

“on the third day be raised”

**Luke 9:22**

“on the third day be raised”

**Mark 9:31**

“after three days he will rise”

**Matthew 17:23**

“he will be raised on the third day”

**Mark 10:34**

“after three days he will rise”

**Matthew 20:19**

“he will be raised on the third day”

**Luke 18:33**

“on the third day he will rise”

**Identical Meaning.** This comparison clearly indicates that Matthew and Luke understood Mark’s “after three days” as meaning “on the third day.” Further evidence for the basic identity of the two phrases is provided by Matthew 27:63-64. In verse 63 the Jewish leaders tell Pilate that Christ had said, “After three days I will rise again.” In actual fact, up to this point only the expression “on the third day” occurs in Matthew (16:21; 17:23; 20:19), which suggests the identical meaning of the two phrases.

Verse 64 provides additional confirmation when the Jewish leaders request Pilate to have the tomb guarded “until the third day.” David Clark keenly observes in his article “After Three Days,” published in *The Bible Translator*, that “Unless this expression [‘until the third day’] referred to a space of time identical with, or at least as great as, that referred to by ‘after three days’ in the previous verse, then the guard would not extend over the whole of the critical period, and the entire paragraph would thus lose its point.”<sup>11</sup>

The same author expresses astonishment at the fact that translators of all major English versions have entirely overlooked “the awkward fact that *after three days/three days later* does not mean the same thing in English as *on the third day*.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, for the sake of accuracy, Clark proposes to use the phrase “on the third day” consistently in all the passages mentioned above.

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## V. FIRST DAY APPEARANCES

The literal interpretation of the “three days and three nights” is also discredited by Luke’s account of Christ’s appearance on Sunday evening to the two disciples who were going to the village of Emmaus. Christ, whom they had not recognized caught up with them and asked them, “What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?” (Luke 24:17).

The two men, surprised at Jesus’ unawareness of what had happened in Jerusalem, recounted to Him “how our chief priests and rulers delivered him [Christ] to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, *it is not the third day since this happened*” (Luke 24:21).<sup>13</sup>

**Third Day on Sunday Evening.** To appreciate the significance of the last statement, notice must be taken of two facts. First, the statement was made on the “evening” of the first day when the day was “far spent” (Luke 24:29). Second, “the third day” refers specifically to the events mentioned in the immediate context, namely, Christ’s condemnation and Crucifixion. It is obvious, then, that if Christ had been crucified on a Wednesday afternoon, those two disciples could not have referred to that event on a Sunday night, saying: “It is now the third day since this happened.” According to the Jewish inclusive day-reckoning, it would have been the *fifth day* and not the third.

## VI. CHRONOLOGY OF PASSION WEEKEND

The chronology of the Passion weekend provides further evidence of the idiomatic usage of the phrase “three days and three nights.” The days of the Crucifixion, entombment, and Resurrection are given in clear sequence and with considerable clarity in the Gospels as Preparation day, Sabbath, first day.

Mark, who writes for a Gentile readership less familiar with Jewish terminology, explains with utmost clarity that Christ was crucified on “the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath” (Mark 15:42). In the following chapter it will be shown that both the term “preparation” (*paraskeue*) and “Sabbath-eve” (*pro-sabbaton*) are two technical terms used unmistakably to designate what we call “Friday.”

Mark, then, is most precise in explaining that the Crucifixion took place on what today we call “Friday.” The next day is designated by Mark as “sabbath” (Mark 16:1) which in turn is followed by the “first day of the week” (Mark 16:2). Mark’s chronological sequence leaves absolutely no room for a two-day interval between the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Similarly Luke makes it clear that the day of Christ's Crucifixion was followed, not by a Thursday or a Friday, but by a weekly Sabbath. He writes: "It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning" (Luke 23:54). By linking the beginning of the Sabbath to the end of the day of Preparation, and the beginning of the "first day of the week" (Luke 24:1) to the termination of the Sabbath (Luke 23:56), Luke leaves absolutely no room for two full days to intervene between the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

**No Two Sabbaths.** Some wish to make room for intervening days by arguing that between the Wednesday Crucifixion and Saturday afternoon resurrection there were two Sabbaths: the first, a Passover Sabbath which fell on a Thursday; the second, a weekly Sabbath which fell on the regular Saturday. Such an argument is based on pure speculation because nowhere do the Gospels suggest that two Sabbaths intervened between the day of the Crucifixion and that of the Resurrection.

Support for the two-Sabbath view is sought in the plural form the Sabbath in Matthew 28:1 takes, which literally reads "at the end of the Sabbaths." This text is viewed as "a vital text" which "proves that there were TWO Sabbaths that week with a day in between." The first Sabbath, Thursday, allegedly was "the annual high-day Sabbath, the feast day of the days of Unleavened Bread," while the second was "the weekly Sabbath, Saturday."<sup>14</sup>

This conclusion is untenable, because, as Harold W. Hoehner points out, "The term Sabbath is frequently (one-third of all its New Testament occurrences) in the plural form in the New Testament when only one day is in view. For example, in Matthew 12:1-12 both the singular and plural forms are used (cf. esp. v. 5)."<sup>15</sup> There is then no Biblical basis for a Passover Sabbath which occurred two days before the regular weekly Sabbath.

The clear and uninterrupted chronological sequence of days given in the Gospels is: Preparation day, Sabbath day, and first day. This sequence leaves absolutely no room for a literal interpretation of the phrase "three days and three nights" as representing an exact period of 72 hours.

**Conclusion.** The foregoing considerations have shown, first, that the sign of Jonah given by Christ to prove His Messiahship consisted not in an exact 72-hour entombment, but in His Resurrection on the third day after His death. Second, the phrase "three days and three nights" (Matt 12:40) is an idiomatic expression which in Bible times meant not necessarily three complete 24-hour days (72 hours), but rather three calendric days, of which the first and the third could have consisted of only a few hours.

The latter conclusion is supported by the prevailing inclusive method of day-reckoning, by the parallel usage of the phrases “after three days” and “on the third day,” and by the uninterrupted chronological sequence of days which does not allow for three complete 24-hour days. A recognition of these facts adequately explains how Jesus fulfilled His prediction of a “three days and three nights” entombment by being buried on Friday afternoon and rising early on Sunday morning.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Herbert W. Armstrong, *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday* (Pasadena, California: Ambassador College, 1972), p. 4; emphasis supplied.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
4. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 334. Similarly Leon Morris comments: “For the Ninevites the sign was the reappearance of a man who had apparently been dead for three days. For the men of Jesus’ day the sign would be the reappearance of the *Son of Man* on the third day after His death” (*The Gospel According to St. Luke*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids, 1982], p. 201.
5. Similar examples are found in Gen 7:4, 12; Ex 24:18; 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Job 2:13.
6. For more examples and a discussion of the inclusive reckoning, see *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. II, pp. 136-137; vol. V, pp. 248-251.
7. Jerusalem Talmud, *Shabbath* 9, 3; cf. also Babylonian Talmud, *Pesahim* 4a.
8. See *Midrash Rabbah*: Genesis 56,1 (on Gen 22:4); Genesis 91,7 (on Gen 42:17-18); Esther 9,2 (on Esther 5:1).
9. Gerhard Dilling, “hemera,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1974), vol. II, p. 950.
10. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Day,” vol. IV, p. 475.
11. David Clark, “After Three Days,” *The Bible Translator* 30 (July 1979): 341.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 342, 343.

13. Emphasis supplied.

14. Herbert W. Armstrong (n. 1), p. 13.

15. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1977), pp. 69-70.

# Chapter 3

## THE DAY

### OF THE CRUCIFIXION

Is the Wednesday Crucifixion a fact or a fable? Wednesday Crucifixionists firmly believe that it is a Biblical fact. To support it, they appeal not only to the sign of Jonah examined in the previous chapter, but also to a second key text, namely, John 19:14, where the day of Christ's Crucifixion is designated as "the day of Preparation of the Passover."

The conclusion drawn from John 19:14 is that Christ was crucified, not on a Friday—the Preparation day for the Sabbath—but on a Wednesday—the Preparation day for the annual ceremonial Passover Sabbath, which that year supposedly fell on a Thursday. Thus, all the references to the "Preparation day" of Christ's Crucifixion (Matt 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31, 42) are interpreted in the light of John 19:14 as meaning Wednesday—the day preceding the Passover Sabbath (Thursday)—rather than Friday—the day preceding the regular seventh-day Sabbath.

The three major reasons generally given in support of this conclusion are succinctly stated in the booklet *The Time Element in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ*, published by the Church of God (Seventh Day): "Firstly, the day before the weekly Sabbath was never called a 'preparation' in the Bible; secondly, the weekly Sabbath (as designated in the Ten Commandments) was never called or referred to as a 'high day'; and thirdly, the same writer (John) tells us . . . exactly which occasion this preparation day preceded. He said: 'And it was the preparation of the Passover' (John 19:14) . . . Thus, after John states this 'was the preparation of the passover' (in verse 14), we must understand . . . that 'the sabbath day' in verse 31 corresponds to 'the passover' in verse 14."<sup>1</sup>

A brief analysis will now be made of the three given reasons in an attempt to determine what is meant by the "Preparation" day mentioned in all the four Gospels as a time reference of the day of Christ's Crucifixion.

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## I. PREPARATION DAY

The first reason given for interpreting “the day of Preparation” as meaning Wednesday rather than Friday is that “the day before the weekly Sabbath was never called a ‘*preparation*’ in the Bible.” This reason is puzzling, to say the least, because it flies in the face of the irrefutable Biblical and historical usage of the term “Preparation-*paraskeue*” as a technical designation for “Friday.” In addition to its occurrence in John 19:14, the term “Preparation-*paraskeue*” is used five times in the Gospels as a technical designation for “Friday” (Matt 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31, 42).

**Mark’s Definition.** Mark 15:42 provides what is perhaps the clearest definition of the expression “day of Preparation” by the statement: “It was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath.” Note that in Greek the two phrases “the day of Preparation” and “the day before the Sabbath” are each given with a single technical term: “*paraskeue*-Preparation,” and “*prosabbaton*-Sabbath-eve.” Translated literally the text reads: “It was Preparation, that is, Sabbath-eve.” For the sake of clarity, Mark uses two technical terms here, both of which unmistakably designate what we call “Friday.”

The term “*prosabbaton*-Sabbath-eve” was used by Hellenistic Jews to designate explicitly and exclusively “the day before the Sabbath, i.e. Friday” (Judith 8:6; 2 Macc. 8:26).<sup>2</sup> Thus Mark, by defining “*paraskeue*-Preparation” as being the “*prosabbaton*-Sabbath-eve,” gives the clearest possible definition to his Gentile readers of what he meant by “*paraskeue*,” namely, the day before the weekly Sabbath. Clarifications of time references by a qualifying clause are common in Mark, evidently because the author knew that his Gentile readers were generally unfamiliar with Jewish terms and customs.<sup>3</sup>

**A Technical Designation for “Friday.”** An English reader could fail to see the technical usage of the term “Preparation,” because in the English language such a term is a generic noun which does not mean “Friday.” The situation was much different in the Semitic Greek of our Palestinian document, however, where the term “*paraskeue*” was the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic word “*arubta*-eve,” both of which were commonly used to designate “Friday.”

In Aramaic, as Charles C. Torrey explains, “the middle days of the week were designated by numbers, ‘third, fourth, fifth,’ but Friday was always *arubta*; there was no ‘sixth day’ of the week; . . . Its Greek equivalent, *paraskeue*-Friday, was likewise adopted, from the first, by the Greek Church.”<sup>4</sup>

The early Christian usage of the term “*paraskeue*,” as a technical designation for Friday is well attested outside the New Testament. The

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*Didache* (or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*), dated between A.D. 70 to 120, enjoins Christians to fast on “the fourth day and Preparation” (8:1), that is, Wednesday and Friday. It is noteworthy that Friday is designated simply as “Preparation-*paraskeuen*,” without the article or the noun “day,” thus indicating the technical usage of the term.

By the time of Tertullian (c. A.D. 160-225) *paraskeue* had already become such a fixed name for Friday that he even argues that this had been the name for Friday since creation<sup>5</sup> These, and similar examples<sup>6</sup> clearly indicate that Christians adopted the Jewish practice of numbering the first five days of the week and of naming the sixth and the seventh as *paraskeue* and *sabbaton*—Preparation and Sabbath.

**The Need for a Clarification.** Christians coming from a Gentile background had to learn this Judeo-Christian nomenclature of the week-days, because in the pagan world the week-days were not numbered but named after the seven planetary deities (*dies solis, dies lunae, . . .*). This may explain why Mark, in writing to a Gentile-Christian readership who had only recently learned the Judeo-Christian nomenclature of the week-days, deemed it necessary to clarify what he meant by “*paraskeue*-preparation,” by adding the qualifying phrase, “that is, the day before the sabbath” (Mark 15:42). This clarification may also have been necessitated by the fact that the seven-day planetary week itself had been recently introduced in the Roman world where the eight-day week (*nundinum*) was still used side by side with the planetary week.<sup>7</sup>

Additional and conclusive evidence that “*paraskeue*-Preparation” is used in the Gospels to designate “Friday” and not “Wednesday” is provided by the sequence in which the days of the Passion weekend are given: “Preparation, Sabbath, first day” (Matt 27:62; 28:1; Mark 15:42; 16:1; Luke 24:54-55; 24:1). Both Mark and Matthew explicitly place the beginning of the first day at the end of the Sabbath (Mark 16:1; Matt 28:1). The latter could hardly have been a Thursday Passover Sabbath, because Thursday is not followed by the first day of the week.

**A Reason for the Misunderstanding.** The failure to recognize the technical usage of the term “Preparation” as the name for “Friday,” has caused some to misinterpret John’s phrase “it was the day of Preparation of the Passover” (John 19:14) as meaning “the day of Preparation *for* the Passover.” The latter is in fact the translation of the American Revised Standard Version. On the basis of this misunderstanding, Wednesday Crucifixionists argue that in John “the day of Preparation” means not Friday but the Wednesday preceding the Passover day, which supposedly fell on a Thursday.



This conclusion ignores the fact, cogently stated by Norval Geldenhuys, “that at the time when John wrote, the Greek term *paraskeue* (‘preparation’) was already for a long time the technical term used to indicate ‘Friday,’ the equivalent of the Hebrew *erebh shabbath*.”<sup>8</sup> The recognition of this fact is evident in the right translation which is found in the A.V., R.S.V., and N.I.V., namely “the day of Preparation of the Passover.”

This means, as Geldenhuys explains, “that the day of the Lord’s crucifixion was the Friday of the Passover, the Friday that falls during Passover week, i.e., Passover Friday (Good Friday). It is a grammatically correct rendering and all the evidence is in favor of it.”<sup>9</sup>

The foregoing considerations make it abundantly clear that in the Gospels, as stated by Moulton and Milligan, noted authorities on the Greek language: “*paraskeue* is a technical designation for Friday.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, the first reason, which claims that “the day before the weekly Sabbath was never called a ‘preparation’ in the Bible” must be regarded as false, because, as we have shown, the very opposite is true.

## II. A HIGH DAY

The second reason given for interpreting “the day of Preparation” as referring to Wednesday rather than Friday is based on John’s definition of the Sabbath day which followed the Preparation day of Christ’s Crucifixion. John explains: “that sabbath was a high day” (John 19:31). It is argued that since “the weekly Sabbath (as designated in the Ten Commandments) was never called or referred to as a ‘high day,’”<sup>11</sup> then the latter must have been not the regular weekly Sabbath but the annual ceremonial Passover Sabbath (Lev 23:5-7).

In support of this conclusion, a third reason is given, namely, that John 19:14 “tells us exactly which occasion this preparation day preceded. He says: ‘And it was the preparation of the passover.’”<sup>12</sup> Thus the “high day” Sabbath of John 19:31 is interpreted as being the “Passover” day of John 19:14, and by the same token “the day of Preparation” of verse 31 is interpreted as being the Passover day of verse 14. Since in the year of Christ’s Crucifixion, Passover day supposedly fell on a Thursday, the day of preparation for the latter would obviously be a Wednesday.

**A Ceremonial Sabbath.** The reasons given in support of this conclusion rest on three major mistaken assumptions. First, it is assumed that since certain annual feasts such as the Day of Atonement are designated as “sabbath” (Lev 23:24, 32, 39), then all the references to the Sabbath found in

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the Passion narratives must refer not to the weekly Sabbath but to the annual ceremonial Passover Sabbath.

This assumption is discredited by the fact that the day of atonement is designated by the compound expression *shabbath shabbathon*, meaning “a sabbath of solemn rest” (Lev 23:32; 16:31). But this phrase is rendered in the Septuagint by the compound Greek expression “*sabbata sabbaton*,” which is different from the simple “*sabbaton*” used in the Passion narratives. It is therefore linguistically impossible to interpret the latter as a reference to the day of the Passover or to any other annual feast day, since these are never designated simply as “*sabbaton*.”

**High Day: Passover or Sabbath?** The second mistaken assumption is that the term “high day-*megale hemera*,” used in John 19:31, is employed in the Scripture to designate the annual Passover feast (a ceremonial Sabbath), rather than a special weekly Sabbath. Unfortunately, no Biblical or extra-Biblical examples are cited to support this assumption—the reason being simply that no such examples exist .

Israel Abrahams, a noted Jewish scholar, finds no instance before John 19:31 of the use of the term “high day” or “Great Sabbath” in Rabbinical literature. His opinion is that the later Rabbinic use of the term “Great Sabbath” to designate the Sabbath of the Passover season was borrowed from the church.<sup>13</sup> While the latter is difficult to prove, it is a well-known fact that the church coined the terms “Good Friday” and “Holy Saturday” as designations for the special days of Christ’s Crucifixion and burial. It is noteworthy that Georgius Codinus (15th century) gives the official term for “Good Friday” as “*he megale paraskeue*—the great Preparation.”<sup>14</sup> This suggests the possibility that even the Sabbath of the Passion week came early to be known by Christians as a “high day” or a “Great Sabbath.”

Note should be taken also of the fact that, according to examples given by Strack and Billerbeck, in later Rabbinic literature the seventh-day Sabbath is regarded as a “high day” if it fell on Nisan 15, since that was the first day of the Passover festival, or if it fell on Nisan 16, because on that day the *omer* or first sheaf of barley was offered according to Pharisaic tradition.<sup>15</sup>

This information is important because it disproves the claim that “the weekly Sabbath was never called or referred to as a “high day.” Rabbinical sources seem to indicate that the weekly Sabbath was called a “high day” when it coincided with Passover, because, as well stated by Charles C. Torrey, “its inherent solemnity was greatly heightened by the celebration of the foremost feast of the year.”<sup>16</sup>

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### III. PREPARATION OF THE PASSOVER

The third mistaken assumption is that the term “Preparation” found in John 19:14, “It was the day of Preparation of the Passover” is used as a technical designation for the day before the Passover. It is also assumed that this “Preparation” day fell on a Wednesday because Passover day allegedly fell on a Thursday. On the basis of these assumptions, it is further assumed that all the other five references to the “Preparation” day (Matt 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31, 42) must be interpreted in the light of John 19:14 as meaning Wednesday.

**Friday of the Passover Week.** These assumptions are false on several counts. First of all, because, as Charles C. Torrey explains, “There is no evidence to show that that word [Preparation] was used in the time of the Gospel writers for the ‘eve’ of other festal days than the Sabbath.”<sup>17</sup> Milligan and Moulton emphasize the same point, saying: “It has never been shown that the day before the Passover was called ‘The preparation of the Passover.’”<sup>18</sup> Leon Morris expresses the same view, saying: “The fact must be faced that no example of the use of *paraskeue* is cited for any day other than Friday.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, as J. H. Bernard points out, if “Preparation” meant “*the* Preparation day of the Passover” we would expect a definite article in Greek, which, however, is absent.<sup>20</sup>

An additional indication that John meant “Friday” by the phrase “Preparation of the Passover” (v. 14) is provided by the usage of the same term “*paraskeue*” twice again in the same chapter. In verse 31 John explains that the Jews did not wish the bodies to remain on the Cross “on the Sabbath, because it was Preparation” (literal translation). Here John not only mentions the Sabbath explicitly, but also refers to the preceding day by the technical term “*paraskeue*—Preparation” without the article, thus meaning: “because it was Friday.”

Similarly, in verse 42, John reports that Jesus was placed in a garden tomb near the place of His Crucifixion “because of the Preparation of the Jews.” In this context the term “Preparation” is used again by itself, not in a generic sense, but in a temporal sense as a technical designation for Friday. What John is saying is that Jesus was buried in the garden tomb because it was near and because it was late Friday (Preparation) when the Sabbath was about to start. In the light of the above considerations, the expression “the day of Preparation of the Passover” (John 19:14), simply means, as most scholars acknowledge, “*the Friday of the Passover week.*”

**The Testimony of the Synoptics.** Further support for this conclusion is provided by the Synoptics where the same “Preparation” day mentioned by

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John is unmistakably identified with Friday, the day before the weekly Sabbath (Mark 15:42; Matt 27:62; Luke 23:54).

Any attempt to interpret the Synoptic references to the day of “Preparation” in the light of John 19:14 as meaning “Wednesday,” is unwarranted for at least two reasons. First, because, as shown earlier, the term “Preparation” was never used as a technical designation for the day preceding the Passover. Second, because, even granting that John used the term “Preparation” to mean “Wednesday Passover-eve,” such a meaning cannot be automatically read back in the parallel references found in the Synoptics, because the Matthean, Marcan, and Lucan communities understood this term, not in the light of what John wrote later, but in the light of its context in their respective Gospels and in the light of its prevailing usage.

**Undisputed Tradition.** A final and equally important consideration is the fact that Christian tradition has unanimously held to the Friday-Crucifixion/Sunday-Resurrection chronology. This is all the more surprising in view of the fact that some early Christian writers did place the Last Supper on Tuesday evening rather than Thursday evening. With regard to the Crucifixion, however, no early Christian writer ever disputed or doubted its occurrence on Friday.

The absence of any early Christian polemic regarding the day of Christ’s Crucifixion and Resurrection, offers, in our view, overwhelming proof of the trustworthiness of the traditional chronology of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. If indeed Christ had risen on a Saturday afternoon, seventh-day Sabbathkeepers would have capitalized on this fact to discredit the Resurrection argument frequently used in early Christianity to defend Sundaykeeping. Such an argument, however, never appears in the polemic over the theological superiority of the two days.

**Conclusion.** The foregoing analysis of John 19:14, the second key text of the Wednesday Crucifixion theory, has shown that such a theory is based on human fantasy and not on a Biblical fact. We have submitted abundant evidence indicating that John’s expression “the day of Preparation of the Passover” (John 19:14), simply means, as most scholars acknowledge, “the Friday of the Passover week.” Thus the Crucifixion took place on Friday and not on Wednesday.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. *The Time Element in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ*, published by the Bible Advocate Press of the Church of God (Seventh Day), p. 20.
2. See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1979), s.v. "prosabbaton."
3. See, for example, Mark 1:32, 35; 4:35; 13:24; 14:30; 15:42; 16:2.
4. Charles C. Torrey, "The Date of the Crucifixion according to the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50 (1931): 234-235.
5. *The Writings of Tertullian*, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. III, p. 309.
6. See, for example, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 7, 1.
7. On the origin and adoption of the Planetary week in the Roman world, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 241-251.
8. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 664.
9. *Loc. cit.*
10. W. Moulton and W. F. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (New York, 1928), p. 545.
11. *The Time Element* (n. 1), p. 20.
12. *Loc. cit.*
13. Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* (Cambridge, 1924), vol. II, p. 68.
14. *De Officiis* 13,1.
15. H. L. Strack and P. Billerbec, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (Munich, 1922-1928), vol. 2, pp. 581f. and 847.
16. Charles C. Torrey (n. 4), p. 235.
17. Charles C. Torrey, "In the Fourth Gospel the Last Supper was the Paschal Meal," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 42 (January 1952): 241.

18. W. Milligan and W. F. Moulton, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (Edinburgh, 1898), on John 19:14.
19. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, 1971), p. 777.
20. J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (Edinburgh, 1928), on John 19:14.

# Chapter 4

## THE DAY OF THE RESURRECTION

Is the Easter-Sunday Resurrection a Biblical fact or an ecclesiastical fable? Wednesday Crucifixionists believe that it is a fable fabricated by “the so-called ‘apostolic fathers’ . . . to justify a pagan tradition of the Sunday resurrection of Nimrod, the pagan savior!”<sup>1</sup> In their view Christ’s Resurrection occurred, not early on Sunday morning, but late on Saturday afternoon.

The “clinching proof” for the Saturday afternoon Resurrection of Christ is supposedly found in Matthew 28:1, 5-6. The text reads: “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre . . . And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (KJV).

This text allegedly pinpoints the time of the Resurrection on Saturday afternoon. The reasoning runs as follows: Since Matthew tells us that when the two Marys went to the sepulchre “in the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week,” they discovered that Christ had already risen, this means that His Resurrection occurred in the last part of the Sabbath before the next day began.

To defend this conclusion, the dawning of the first day is interpreted as being the beginning of dusk (evening) rather than of dawn (morning). The reasoning runs as follows: “Since the Sabbath ended at sunset, it would be impossible for ‘*dawn*’ to mean *morning* here, for the sun would not rise until some 12 hours later. It could not be in the end of the Sabbath and morning at the same time.”<sup>2</sup>

**An Apparent Contradiction.** It must be granted that this reasoning represents an ingenious attempt to reconcile what many scholars view as two apparently contradictory statements. The contradiction lies in the fact that the end of the Sabbath at sunset does not mark the dawning of the first day, since the two events are about 12 hours apart.

The above interpretation, though ingenious, cannot be accepted for at least two reasons. First, because the verb “to dawn” (*epiphosko*) literally means not “to become dusk” but “to grow light,” “to dawn.” Second, because a figurative interpretation (i.e. to become dusk) in this instance runs against the explicit statements of the other Gospels which tell us that the women came to the empty tomb at daybreak “when the sun had risen” (Mark 16:2; cf. Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Thus other solutions must be found to this apparent contradiction.

### I. LATE OR AFTER?

A first solution is suggested by the broader meaning of the adverb “*opse*” which is translated in the KJV as “in the end of” but in the RSV and most modern translations as “after.” The two translations reflect the dual meanings of the term, namely “late” or “after.”

**An Approximate Time Reference.** In the New Testament the term *opse* occurs only twice again, in Mark 11:19 and 13:35. In Mark 11:19 (“And when evening [*opse*] came they went out of the city”) it is hard to tell by the context whether *opse* designates the late afternoon of that day or the time after sunset, which, according to the Jewish sunset to sunset reckoning, would be the beginning of the new day.

In Mark 13:35, however, *opse* (“evening”) clearly designates the first watch of the night, from about sunset till about 9 p.m.: “Watch therefore for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening (*opse*) or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning” (Mark 13:35). The fact that “*opse*” could mean not only the late hours of the day, but also the early hours of the new day, suggests the possibility that Matthew may have used the term as an approximate time reference simply to indicate that the Sabbath was over when the women went to the sepulchre.<sup>3</sup>

In the age of quartz watches when even seconds count, we expect the same accuracy from the Bible writers, who had only the sun at their disposal to measure time. The concern of Bible writers, however, seems to have been more with reporting the actual events than with the precise time of their occurrence. Mark, for example, says that Jesus was crucified approximately three hours earlier (“it was the third hour”—Mark 15:25) than John (“it was about the sixth hour”—John 19:16).



Similarly, the visit to the sepulchre occurred “while it was still dark” according to John (20:1) and “when the sun had risen” according to Mark (16:2). The existence of these time approximations in the Gospels suggests the possibility that Matthew also may have used *opse* loosely, simply to indicate that the women went to the sepulchre after the Sabbath was over and as the first day was dawning.

**Late Greek Usage.** The latter conclusion is supported by the usage of *opse* in late Greek writers as meaning “after.” While in the ancient Greek, as A. T. Robertson explains, “*opse* . . . occurs as a preposition with the genitive (Thuc. 4, 93) with the sense of ‘late on,’” later Greek authors, like Philostratus, use the word in “the sense of ‘after,’ like . . . ‘after these things.’”<sup>4</sup>

Edgar J. Goodspeed, another renowned Greek scholar, makes the same observation. He explains that “the adverb *opse* is sometimes used in the sense of ‘late,’ with a genitive of time . . . which would mean ‘late on the Sabbath.’ . . . But *opse* has another sense; it is also used by late Greek writers like Philostratus (second to third century) as a preposition meaning ‘after,’ followed by the genitive, *opse touton*, ‘after these things’ (*Life of Apollonius* vi. 10; cf. 4:18: *opse musterion* ‘after the mysteries’). This is the sense of the word in Matthew 28:1 and at once clears up any difficulty . . . The plain sense of the passage is: ‘After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning.’”<sup>5</sup>

**Standard Greek Lexicons.** The same explanation is given in several standard Greek lexicons of the New Testament. Walter Bauer’s lexicon, for example, points out that *opse* is “used as an improper preposition with genitive [meaning] *after*, (*opse sabbaton*) *after the Sabbath* (Matthew 28:1).”<sup>6</sup> Bauer gives several examples of this usage, including one of Polyaeus where the following phrase occurs: “later (*opse*) than the hour decided upon.”<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately some translations, such as the Revised Version, have ignored the late Greek usage of *opse* and thus they have translated Matthew 28:1 as “now late on the Sabbath day.” This translation would mean that the women came to the tomb late on a Saturday. “This might be the sense of the Greek words used in the classics,” but, as R. C. H. Lenski perceptively points out, “in the koine *opse* is used as a preposition and means ‘after,’ B.-P. 958; B.-D 164; Stellhorn, ‘long after something;’ Zahn, *erst nach*; R. 517. Mark agrees, ‘when the Sabbath was past.’”<sup>8</sup>

The same conclusion is reached by Edward Lohse, though from a different basis. He finds that the phrase *opse sabbaton* of Matthew 28:1, corresponds to the Rabbinic *mosa’e shabbat* “and thus means the night from the Sabbath to the first day of the week.”<sup>9</sup>

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**Toward the Dawn.** Further support for the meaning of *opse sabbaton* as “after the sabbath” rather than “late on the sabbath,” is provided by the second time element given by Matthew to date the visit of the women to the sepulchre, namely, “toward the dawn of the first day of the week” (Matt 28:1).

The Greek verb *epiphosko* literally means “to shine forth,” “to grow light,” “to dawn.” It must be said that this verb is used not only in a literal sense to describe the morning dawning of a new day, but also in a figurative sense to refer to the evening beginning of a day. In Luke 23:54 *epiphosko* is translated “drew on” (KJV) or “beginning” (RSV), in reference to the approach of the Sabbath at sundown.

In Matthew 28:1, however, expositors are generally agreed that the verb *epiphosko* is used in its literal meaning of “to dawn.” This conclusion is based first of all on the parallel statements of the other Gospels, which explicitly place the visit of the women to the tomb “at early dawn” (Luke 24:1; Mark 16:2; John 20:1). There is no hint in any of the Gospels that the women made two visits to the sepulchre, one on Saturday afternoon and one on Sunday morning. Thus we are justified in concluding that the “dawning” in Matthew is literal as in the other Gospels.

**Sabbath’s Travel Restrictions.** A second reason is suggested by the prevailing Jewish restrictions on Sabbath travel (Acts 1:12), which would have precluded any visit to the tomb on Sabbath afternoon from a distance greater than 2/3 of a mile. Since Mary Magdalene lived in Bethany, a distance of 2 miles from Jerusalem (Matt 21:1), and since she presumably spent the Sabbath at home (Luke 23:56), she could hardly have traveled to the tomb before the end of the Sabbath.

The same must be said for the evening after the close of the Sabbath. In the East people in general, let alone women, do not travel in the darkness of the night, particularly to a burial place “to see the sepulchre” (Matt 28:1). It is far more true to life for the women to have traveled from Bethany to Calvary early on Sunday morning, as indicated by the Gospels (Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).

At Passover time the astronomical morning twilight began in the latitude of Jerusalem at about 4:00 a.m. and the sun rose at about 5:30 a.m. This means that if Mary Magdalene arose about the time it began to get light (John 20:1), and walked from Bethany to Christ’s sepulchre, she would have arrived by sunrise (Mark 16:1; John 20:1).

**Other Difficulties.** Several other difficulties arise if the Resurrection and the visit of the women to the tomb are placed “late on the Sabbath day.” The

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many events which are described in Matthew 28:2-15 and attached to the time designated in verse 1 could hardly have taken place “late on a Sabbath day.” For example, it is hard to believe that the risen Christ would tell the women on a late Sabbath afternoon, “Go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee” (Matt 28:10). It would have been against prevailing customs to start out on a trip late on a Sabbath afternoon.

Furthermore, it is difficult to see how the following events could have taken place on a late Sabbath afternoon: the guards going to the city to inform the chief priests about what had happened (v. 11); the chief priests assembling the Council to decide what action should be taken (v. 12); the Council paying the soldiers to fabricate the story of the stealing of Christ’s body by His disciples (vv. 12-13).

More decisive still is the instruction given to the soldiers by the chief priests: “Tell people, ‘His disciples came *by night* and stole him away while we were asleep” (v. 13). In view of the fact that the soldiers had been stationed at the sepulchre during the light hours of the Sabbath day (Matt 27:62-66), they could hardly have told the people on Saturday evening that the disciples stole Christ’s body *by night*, when no night had yet intervened between the beginning of their vigil and the Resurrection.

In the light of the above considerations on the language and context of Matthew 28:1, we conclude that this passage offers no support whatsoever to the view of a late Sabbath afternoon Resurrection and visit of the women to the sepulchre. The indications submitted have amply established that the plain sense of Matthew 28:1 is: “After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week” (NIV).

## II. SUNRISE TO SUNRISE

A second possible solution to the apparent contradiction between the two time references found in Matthew 28:1 is suggested by the possibility that Matthew here used the sunrise-to-sunrise method of day reckoning. If Matthew used this method, for which there seems to be some support both in the Old and New Testament, then any apparent contradiction would be automatically resolved, because the end of the Sabbath would mark the dawning of the first day.

A host of scholars have for many years argued for the existence in Biblical times of two methods of reckoning the day: one from sunset to sunset and the other from sunrise to sunrise. The data evidencing the existence of the two methods will be examined in the following chapter. The study will show that

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the support for the sunrise-to-sunrise day reckoning, though less explicit than that from sunset to sunset, cannot be ignored.

**Summary of Evidences.** Five main types of evidences suggesting the existence of the sunrise reckoning in Bible times are generally presented. Each of these will be considered in the following chapter. At this point we shall briefly state them.

First, there are sacrificial laws which specify that the sacrifice must be eaten on the day upon which it was offered, with nothing left over until the morning. Such statements suggest that the morning marks the end of the previous day and the beginning of the new day.

Second, there is the Passover legislation of Exodus 12 which places both the slaying of the Passover lamb in the afternoon and the eating of it during the following night, on the 14th day of the month (Ex 12:6, 8, 10, 18, 42), thus implying a sunrise reckoning. According to the sunset reckoning the night following the sacrifice of the Passover lamb was no longer the 14th but the 15th day of Nisan (Lev 23:5; Num 28:16). In Exodus 12, however, the events of the night following the slaying of the Passover lamb are placed on the 14th in accordance with the sunrise reckoning.

Third, there are about 50 references in which the “day” is mentioned before the “night,” which suggests a reckoning whereby the day begins and ends at dawn. Fourth, there are several passages in which the night is reckoned with the previous day, which suggests that the day terminated at sunrise. Lastly, there are statements in Josephus and the Talmud which suggest a sunrise to sunrise reckoning.

**Coexistence of Two Reckonings.** The study of these evidences suggests, as we shall see in the next chapter, that the two methods of day reckoning may have coexisted side by side in New Testament times. If that is true, and the available indications make it plausible, then Matthew’s statement that the women came to see the sepulchre “in the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” (Matt 28:1; KJV), makes perfect sense, because the end of the Sabbath would indeed mark the dawning of the first day of the week.

This explanation sheds light also on Mark’s account of the two women who went out to buy spices to anoint Christ “when the Sabbath was past” (Mark 16:1). According to the sunset-to-sunset day reckoning, the women would have gone out to purchase spices on Saturday night after sunset. This may have happened, but it hardly seems true to life because in the East women do not go out to make purchases on Saturday night, in the darkness without street lamps, and when the shops are closed.

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According to the sunrise-to-sunrise reckoning, however, the women could easily have gone out to purchase spices early Sunday morning, because in the East people are up and about their business very early, long before most Americans or Europeans leave home for work. Thus the women could easily have slipped into a neighbor's shop to purchase the spices still needed.

According to Luke, the women had already started to prepare "spices and ointments" on Friday afternoon (Luke 23:56). Thus, it is possible that the women went out very early Sunday morning to buy only those missing ingredients and then they went back home to finish the mixing, before hastening to the tomb. According to Mark "they went to the tomb when the sun had risen" (Mark 16:2). They could hardly have carried out their purpose of anointing Christ's body at the tomb in darkness. These considerations confirm the possibility that Matthew used the sunrise-to-sunrise reckoning and are true to the prevailing customs of the time.

**Conclusion.** The conclusion that emerges from the above examination of Matthew 28:1-6 is that this passage offers no support whatsoever for a Saturday afternoon Resurrection. Four main reasons have led us to this conclusion. First, in the New Testament the term *opse* is used as an approximate time reference which in Matthew could simply mean that the women went to the sepulchre "after" the Sabbath was over and the first day was dawning.

Second, the word *opse* is used by late Greek writers as a preposition meaning "after." Standard Greek lexicons and modern translations recognize that this is the sense in which the word is used in Matthew 28:1.

Third, several details of the context suggest that the visit of the women to the tomb could not have taken place late on a Sabbath afternoon on account of prevailing Sabbath travel restrictions. Furthermore, the latter would contradict the parallel statements of the other Gospels which place such a visit explicitly "at early dawn" (Luke 24:1; Mark 16:2; John 20:1).

Lastly, there is a possibility that Matthew could have used the sunrise-to-sunrise reckoning which seems to have coexisted side by side with the sunset-to-sunset reckoning. In that case, the end of the Sabbath would mark literally the dawn of the first day of the week when Jesus was resurrected (Mark 16:9).

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## CONCLUSION

The analysis conducted in this book of the three key New Testament texts commonly adduced in support of the Wednesday-Crucifixion/Saturday-Resurrection, has shown, it is hoped to the satisfaction of the most critical minds, that these texts offer no probative support for such a view.

In Chapter 2 we have seen that the sign of Jonah found in Matthew 12:40 consists primarily in the *Resurrection event*, rather than in the *time element* of a 72-hour entombment.

We have established that the literal interpretation of the phrase “three days and three nights” is discredited by such factors as the idiomatic use of the phrase “a day and a night” to designate a calendrical day, whether complete or incomplete; the prevalent method of inclusive day reckoning; the identical meaning of the two phrases “after three days” and “on the third day;” Luke’s account of Christ’s appearance on Sunday evening to two disciples (Luke 24:21); and the Gospels’ chronology of the Passion weekend which leave absolutely no room for two Sabbaths to intervene between Crucifixion day and Resurrection day.

In Chapter 3 we have shown that “the day of Preparation of Passover” mentioned in the second key text, John 19:14, was a Friday and not a Wednesday. The main reasons we have cited for this conclusion are: the consistent and exclusive use of the term “Preparation” to designate Friday; the sequence of the days as given in the Synoptics: “Preparation, Sabbath, first day;” the absence of any example of Passover day being ever designated simply as “*sabbaton*—Sabbath;” the absence of any example of Passover day ever being called “High Day” or “High Sabbath” and the presence of such examples where the weekly Sabbath coincided with Passover; and the absence of any early Christian testimony or hint suggesting the Wednesday-Crucifixion/Saturday-Resurrection.

In Chapter 4 we have ascertained that the visit of the women to the tomb mentioned in the third text, Matthew 28:1-6, took place not on a late Saturday afternoon but on an early Sunday morning. We have reached this conclusion on the basis of the following reasons: the use of the word *opse* in late Greek writers as meaning “after;” the contextual details which negate the possibility of a late-Saturday-afternoon Resurrection and visit to the tomb; the possible use by Matthew of the sunrise-to-sunrise day reckoning.

The two following chapters are an appendix to the preceding study. Chapter 5 will examine the possible coexistence of two methods of day reckoning in Bible times, and its implication for the time reference of

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Matthew 28:1. Chapter 6 will address the thorny question of when to begin and end the Sabbath in those parts of the earth where the sun sets very early, or very late, or not at all for a certain period of time.

The conclusion of this investigation, then, is that the attempt to construct a Wednesday-Crucifixion/Saturday-Resurrection theory on the basis of the three texts examined must be regarded as a noble yet groundless effort, because it lacks both Biblical and historical support. The cumulative witness of the Gospels and of history clearly supports the traditional chronology of the Friday-Crucifixion and Sunday-Resurrection of Christ.

Our fervent hope is that the polemic over the time element of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection may not cause some persons to lose sight of the fact that our Christian faith is built not on some esoteric knowledge of the *exact* duration of Christ's entombment, but rather on the *certainty of the fact* that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4).

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Herman L. Hoen, *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday* (Pasadena, California: Ambassador College, 1968), p. 14.
2. *The Time Element in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ*, published by the Bible Advocate Press of the Church of God (Seventh Day), p. 14.
3. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich note in their lexicon that when “*opse*” is “used as an improper preposition with genitive, it means . . . after the Sabbath Matt 28:1” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Chicago, 1979], s.v. “*opse*”).
4. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, 1923), p. 645.
5. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Problems of New Testament Translation* (Chicago, 1945), pp. 43, 45.
6. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1979), s.v. “*opse*,” p. 601. See also F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1964), p. 91; Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, England, 1939), s.v. “*opse*,” vol. II, p. 1282.
7. Walter Bauer, note 6.
8. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Columbus, Ohio, 1943), pp. 1147, 1148.
9. Eduard Lohse, “Sabbaton,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1971), vol. VII, p. 20.



# Chapter 5

## THE RECKONING OF THE DAY IN BIBLE TIMES

How was the day reckoned in Biblical times? Was it from sunset to sunset, from sunrise to sunrise, or both? This question has been examined by a host of scholars in our generation. Three major views have been espoused, which we shall briefly summarize below. For the sake of brevity the sunset-to-sunset method of day reckoning will be denoted as “sunset reckoning” and the other as the “sunrise reckoning.”

### THREE MAJOR VIEWS

A first view expressed by P.J. Heawood<sup>1</sup> and U. Cassuto<sup>2</sup> maintains that the sunrise reckoning was the standard method from creation until the beginning of Christianity. However, U. Cassuto contends that “in regard to the festivals and appointed times, the Torah [Pentateuch] ordains that they shall be observed also on the night of the *preceding* day.”<sup>3</sup>

A second view upheld by S. Zeitlin<sup>4</sup> and R. de Vaux,<sup>5</sup> holds that the sunrise reckoning was used in conjunction with the solar calendar until the Babylonian exile and the sunset reckoning after the exile with the adoption of the lunar-solar calendar. Jacob Z. Lauterbach differs slightly by placing the introduction of the sunset reckoning later on at the beginning of the Greek period.<sup>6</sup>

A variation of both theories has been presented by G. Barrois,<sup>7</sup> G. von Rad<sup>8</sup> and Roger Beckwith,<sup>9</sup> who maintain that both methods of day reckoning coexisted side by side in biblical times.

Before expressing a judgment on the three above mentioned views, it is necessary to review briefly the Biblical evidences generally adduced on behalf of the two methods. For a fuller treatment of this question the reader is referred to the various studies cited in the notes.

**Objectives.** The aim of this chapter is not merely to review the evidences generally marshalled on behalf of the two methods of day reckoning, but primarily to establish whether indeed the sunrise reckoning was used in Biblical times. This verification could help in clarifying the apparent contradiction of Matthew 28:1 discussed in the previous chapter, as well as in formulating a criterion for determining the beginning and the end of the Sabbath in places where the sun sets very early, very late, or not at all.

## I. SUNSET TO SUNSET

The Biblical evidence for the day beginning and ending at sunset is abundant and explicit. Since so much of the evidence is well known, we shall briefly mention only some outstanding examples.

**The Day of Atonement.** The classic text generally cited in support of the sunset reckoning is Leviticus 23:32, where the following instruction is given regarding the observance of the Day of Atonement: “It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves; on the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, *from evening to evening* shall you keep your sabbath.”

This text does provide the most explicit and emphatic evidence of the Biblical method of day reckoning “from evening to evening.” Thus it is not surprising that appeal is generally made to this text to prove the Biblical principle of Sabbathkeeping from sunset to sunset. Such a use is perfectly legitimate. Two important points, however, should be noted regarding this text.

First, the law in this text regards not the observance of the seventh day Sabbath as such, but of the Day of Atonement. While both festivals were undoubtedly observed “from evening to evening,” the manner of their observance was radically different. The Day of Atonement was a day of penance and fasting (“you shall afflict yourselves”—Lev 23:32), whereas the Sabbath was a day of delight and celebration (Is 58:13-14).

**A Definition of the Tenth Day.** Second, Leviticus 23:32 is the concluding statement of instructions given from verses 27 to 32 on how the Day of Atonement was to be observed “on the tenth day of the seventh month” (v. 27). Verse 32, however, explains that this day is to be observed as “a sabbath of solemn rest . . . *on the ninth day* of the month beginning at evening from evening to evening.”

This last verse poses a problem because it changes the date of the Day of Atonement from “*the tenth day*” (v. 27) to “*the ninth day.*” This change has

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led Solomon Zeitlin to conclude that the fasting of the Day of Atonement lasted two days, the 9th and 10th of Tishri.<sup>10</sup> This explanation is unacceptable, however, because several texts speak of the Day of Atonement as being exclusively “one day,” namely, the 10th of Tishri (Ex 30:10; Lev 16:29; 25:9, Num 29:7-11).

**The Reason for the Definition.** The plausible explanation is that verse 32 does not intend to change the date of the Day of Atonement from the 10th to the 9th day of the month, but rather, as Jack Finegan rightly explains, to “simply define what the tenth day of the month was at a time when they day had come to be reckoned as beginning in the evening: the tenth day of the month is the day which begins on the evening of the ninth and continues until the following evening.”<sup>11</sup>

This clarification was apparently needed because, as Finegan points out, “in making the shift from a morning reckoning to an evening reckoning, the ‘day’ was in fact moved back so that it began a half day earlier than had been the case previously.”<sup>12</sup> To avoid any misunderstanding, the verse explains with utmost precision that the tenth day, according to the sunset reckoning, began “on the ninth day of the month beginning at evening” and it was to be kept “from evening to evening” (Lev 23:32).

The conclusion, then, is that Leviticus 23:32 does provide explicit evidence for the sunset reckoning, but it also suggests—by anticipating the beginning of the 10th day to the evening of the 9th—that the sunrise reckoning was also apparently in use.

**The Shutting of the Gates.** Another noteworthy example of sunset reckoning in the Old Testament is found in Nehemiah 13:19, which reads: “When it began to be dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath.”

The shutting of the gates on Friday evening does not require per se a sunset reckoning, since they were routinely shut every night. The verse, however, contains a significant emphasis, namely, that Nehemiah commanded the doors to be shut “*when it began to be dark.*” What this presumably means is that Nehemiah ordered the gates to be closed on Friday earlier than usual.

The gates were generally closed when it was completely dark. This is evidenced by the story of the two spies who entered Jericho in the evening and who, according to Rahab’s response to the king’s guards, left “when the gate was to be closed, at *dark*” (Joshua 2:5). Contrary to the prevailing custom of closing the gates when it was completely dark, Nehemiah ordered the gates to be closed “when it began to be dark (*salal*),” that is, at the beginning of dusk.

The obvious reason for anticipating the shutting of the gates is the fact that, as noted by H. R. Stroes, “the sabbath was drawing near (with the evening!). This text seems to me an almost conclusive indication that the sabbath, at least post-exile, began in the evening.”<sup>13</sup>

**Evening Before Morning.** The sunset reckoning is suggested also by two texts where the evening is mentioned before the morning. In the Bible the morning is generally mentioned before the evening, because this is the order in which they came in the waking and working day. In the law of the continual burnt offering, for example, the morning sacrifice is mentioned before the evening sacrifice (Ex 29:39-41), obviously because the former marked the beginning of the daily priestly ministration at the tabernacle.

An exception to the morning-evening sequence is found in Daniel 8:14, 26, where the interruption of the continual burnt offering is said to extend to “2300 evenings and mornings.” Another exception is found in Psalm 55:17, where the psalmist says that he will utter his prayer “evening and morning and at noon.” In both instances the order is irregular and seems to suggest the hour of the evening sacrifice and prayer, that is, sunset time when the new day began.

**Night Before Day.** Another indication of sunset reckoning can be seen in those passages where the “night” is mentioned before the “day.” This sequence is less frequent in the Old Testament than the sequence in which the “day” is mentioned before the “night.”

The night-day sequence does, however, occur. Esther, for example, sent word to Mordecai to tell the Jews to “neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day” (Esther 4:16). Similarly Solomon prayed at the dedication of the Temple that God’s “eyes may be open night and day toward this house” (1 Kings 8:29).<sup>14</sup>

In the New Testament examples such as these are more numerous and more widely distributed.<sup>15</sup> Since in most instances there is no contextual reason why the night should be mentioned before the day, it seems fair to assume that the order suggests a reckoning where the day begins and ends at nightfall.

**Ceremonial Uncleanness.** The sunset reckoning is implied also in the many passages of the Mosaic Law where the ceremonial uncleanness terminates at evening. For example, Leviticus 22:4-7 states that “whoever touches anything that is unclean through contact with the dead ... shall be unclean until the evening ... when the sun is down he shall be clean.”

The reason for terminating the period of uncleanness at sunset could hardly have been because of reluctance to exclude anyone from camp at night, since in some cases uncleanness lasted seven or more days (Num 19:19). The fact that even in the latter cases the uncleanness ends at sunset, suggests that the day terminated at sunset.

**Sundown Healings.** Perhaps the most explicit evidence of the widespread use of the sunset reckoning at the time of Christ is provided by the fact that the people of Capernaum waited on the Sabbath until sunset to bring their sick persons to Jesus. Luke writes: “Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them” (Luke 4:40; cf. Mark 1:32).

The fact that people would wait for the end of the Sabbath at the setting of the sun to bring their sick persons to Christ provides unmistakable evidence that the common people reckoned the Sabbath from sunset to sunset.

John corroborates the use of the sunset reckoning when he writes, “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark” (John 20:1). The fact that John speaks of the first day when referring to the dark hours before sunrise, clearly indicates that he is reckoning the day from sunset, or less probably, from midnight, according to the official Roman reckoning. In either case, the sunrise reckoning is to be excluded.

**Josephus’ Testimony.** Josephus offers explicit evidence of the prevailing sunset reckoning in New Testament times when he describes how one of the priests stood on an elevated place in Jerusalem, called Pastophoria, and “gave a signal beforehand, with a trumpet, at the beginning of every seventh day, in the evening twilight, as also at the evening when the day was finished, as giving notice to the people when they were to leave off work, and when they were to go to work again.”<sup>16</sup> In this statement Josephus explains with remarkable clarity how the Sabbath began and ended in the evening with priest’s blowing of a trumpet.

The evidences submitted above make it abundantly clear that the sunset reckoning was widely used in Bible times. The question we wish to investigate in the second part of this chapter is whether the sunrise reckoning was also used, though perhaps less widely, side by side with the sunset reckoning.

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## II. SUNRISE TO SUNRISE

The evidence for a sunrise reckoning in Bible times is not as explicit and abundant as that for the sunset reckoning, yet it cannot be ignored. The evidence can be grouped in four different categories, each of which we shall briefly examine.

**Thanksgiving Offering.** One type of evidence for the sunrise reckoning is found in the laws regarding the thanksgiving and votive offerings. The former law prescribes that “the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering; he shall not leave any of it until the morning” (Lev 7:15).

The same law is repeated even more explicitly in Leviticus 22:29-30: “When you sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord ... it shall be eaten on the same day, you shall leave none of it until morning.” The insistence of the eating of the sacrifice “on the same day” before the arrival of the “morning,” implies that the next morning marked the beginning of the next day. This suggests that the day began in the morning, because, as Roland de Vaux points out, “had the day begun in the evening the wording would have ordered the meat to be eaten before the evening.”<sup>17</sup>

This conclusion seems supported also by the legislation regarding the votive offering given immediately after that of the thanksgiving offering. The law says: “But if the sacrifice of his offering is a votive offering or a freewill offering it shall be eaten on the day he offers sacrifice, and on the morrow what remains of it shall be eaten” (Lev 7:16). In this case the flesh of the sacrifice could be eaten both on the day of the sacrifice and “on the morrow.” By virtue of the parallelism with the preceding law, the “morrow” must begin in the morning.

What the two laws are saying is that while the flesh of the thanksgiving sacrifice was to be eaten only on the same day the sacrifice was made, that is, until the morning when the new day began, the flesh of the votive sacrifice could be eaten also “on the morrow,” that is, after the morning which marked the end of the day in which the sacrifice was made. Both laws, then, suggest that the morning marked the end of a day and the beginning of a new day.

**Passover Legislation.** A second type of evidence supporting the sunrise reckoning seems implied also in the Passover legislation of Exodus 12. The law prescribes that the Paschal lamb must be slaughtered on the “fourteenth day of this month ... in the evening” (v. 6) and must be eaten “that night” (v. 8) with “unleavened bread and bitter herbs” (v. 8), leaving none of it “until the morning” (v. 10). Later in the same chapter the night during which the

Passover lamb was eaten with unleavened bread is explicitly designated as “the fourteenth day of the month” (v. 18).

What this means is that in Exodus 12 both the slaying of the Passover lamb, which took place “between the two evenings” (Ex 12:6— that is to say, as Josephus explains, between three and five o’clock in the afternoon),<sup>18</sup> and the eating of the lamb with unleavened bread, which took place on the following night, are placed on the same fourteenth day of the month.

This time reference cannot be harmonized with the sunset reckoning, according to which the night following the sacrifice of the Passover was not the 14th but the 15th day of Nisan. In fact, in several passages which reflect the sunset reckoning, the beginning of the feast of unleavened bread is explicitly placed “on the fifteenth day” (Lev 23:5; Num 28:16).

According to the sunrise reckoning, however, both the slaying of the lamb and the eating of it with unleavened bread would take place on the 14th day, because the night following the slaying of the lamb would still be the 14th day until sunrise. This method, then, seems to be implied in Exodus 12, because, speaking of “the fourteenth day of the month” it explicitly says: “And you shall observe the feast of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt” (v.17; cf. vv. 18, 42, 51).

Jacob Z. Lauterbach rightly observes that “if they came out at night, that is the night following the fourteenth day, and it is said on the very same day, that is on the fourteenth day, they were brought out, it clearly indicates that the night following the fourteenth day is still part of that day.”<sup>19</sup>

The foregoing considerations suggest that in Exodus 12 the sunrise reckoning is used, since the events of the night following the slaying of the Passover Lamb, namely, the eating of the lamb with unleavened bread and the departure from Egypt, are both placed on the same 14th day. Elsewhere these events are explicitly placed “on the fifteenth day of the first month” (Num 33:3; cf. 28:17; Lev 23:5), thus indicating the use of the sunset reckoning.

**Passover in Mark.** The sunrise reckoning of the Passover found in Exodus 12 seems reflected also in Mark 14:12 (cf. Matt 26:16) where the slaying of the Passover lamb and the feast of Unleavened Bread are both placed on the same day: “On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the passover lamb” (v. 12). This statement suggests a sunrise reckoning, according to which, as Jack Finegan explains, “the day when the passover lamb was slain and the day when the unleavened bread was eaten were indeed the same day, as Mark 14:12 states.”<sup>20</sup>

Some commentators explain Mark's identification of "the first day of Unleavened Bread" with the day "when they sacrificed the passover lamb" as a loose temporal designation, because technically, according to the sunset reckoning, the two events occurred on two consecutive days.

To support this explanation, appeal is made to the statement of Josephus' which says: "We keep a feast for eight days, which is called the *feast of unleavened bread*."<sup>21</sup> The reasoning is that Mark, like Josephus, reckoned the two feasts together as beginning on the 14th day of Nisan, presumably because the 14th day was seen as the beginning of the feast of Unleavened Bread, because on that day all leaven was removed from the house in preparation for the feast itself.

While it is true that Josephus speaks loosely of the feast of Unleavened Bread as lasting eight days, presumably because he includes the search and removal of leaven which took place on the 14th day, he clearly differentiates between the two feasts when he describes the time of their celebration. He writes: "on the fourteenth day of the lunar month . . . the law ordained that we should every year slay that sacrifice which . . . was called Passover . . . The feast of Unleavened Bread succeeds that of the Passover, and falls on the fifteenth day of the month, and continues seven days."<sup>22</sup>

In view of the existing distinction between the two days on which the two feasts began, the dating of them on the same day found in Mark 14:12 suggests the possible use of the sunrise reckoning.

**"Day" Mentioned Before "Night."** A third type of evidence for the sunrise reckoning is suggested by the mention of "day" before "night" which occurs in approximately 50 references.<sup>23</sup> For example, speaking of the Jews who were plotting to kill Paul, Acts 9:24 says: "They were watching the gates day and night, to kill him." Similarly, Luke 18:7 says: "And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night?" The same order occurs in Revelation 12:10 where it speaks of Satan "who accuses them [the saints] day and night before our God."

Obviously the order in which "day and night" are given is not necessarily indicative of sunrise reckoning, because the context may supply a reason why the day is mentioned before the night. No contextual reason, however, can be detected in examples such as those given above. It would thus seem plausible to conclude that this order is suggested by the fact that the day was seen as beginning with sunrise. It must be added that the reverse order occurs also, though less frequently. This may suggest the possible coexistence of two methods of day reckoning: sunrise to sunrise and sunset to sunset.



**Night Reckoned with Previous Day.** A fourth type of evidence suggesting a sunrise reckoning is provided by those passages in which the night is reckoned with the previous day. In 1 Samuel 19:11, for example, Michal warns her husband David, after Saul's messengers surrounded their house, saying: "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed" (cf. 1 Sam 28:8, 19, 25). The fact that at night Michal referred to the next morning as "tomorrow" clearly suggests that the new day began in the morning.

In Genesis 19:34, the older daughter of Lot, after sleeping with her father during the night, says to her sister "on the next day . . . 'Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him' . . ." Here, too, the new day seems to begin with the next morning because the night is reckoned with the preceding day.

In the story of the Levite of Ephraim we are told that he stayed four days with his father-in-law. On the fifth day the father-in-law says to him: "Behold, now the day has waned toward evening; pray tarry all night . . . and tomorrow you shall arise early in the morning for your journey, and go home" (Judges 19:9). The fact that the morning following the night is referred to as "tomorrow" suggests that the new day here begins at sunrise.

Another example is provided by the story of the gathering of the quails. Numbers 11:32, says: "And the people rose all that day, and all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quails." This passage is less decisive because the expression "the next day" could simply mean "the next daytime," since in Hebrew the term "day—*yom*" is used also to designate daytime as distinct from nighttime (Gen 1:5).

Other examples occur in the New Testament. Mark 11:11, for example, states that Jesus "entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked round at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve." Verse 12 continues the narrative by telling the "on the following day" Jesus returned from Bethany to Jerusalem. It would seem that here the new day has begun with the morning following the preceding evening.

Acts 4:3 speaks of Peter and John being arrested and put "in custody until the morrow, for it was already evening." In Acts 23:32 the soldiers who marched through the night to bring Paul to Antipatris "on the morrow they returned to the barracks, leaving the horsemen to go on with him." In both instances, the night belongs to the preceding day, suggesting that the day began and ended at daybreak.

**First Day at Sunrise.** The day appears to begin at sunrise also in Mark 16:2 which says: “And very early on the first day of the week they [the two Marys] went to the tomb when the sun had risen.” According to the sunset reckoning the “very early” part of the first day of the week would be the hours immediately following the end of the Sabbath at sunset—what we would call Saturday night. Mark, however, takes pains to explain what he means by “very early on the first day of the week,” namely, not the early hours of the night immediately following the close of the Sabbath at sunset, but “when the sun had risen.”

Mark repeatedly throughout his Gospel defines his time references by a qualifying clause (see, 1:32, 35; 4:35; 13:24; 14:30; 15:42) to be sure to be understood by his Gentile readers. In this instance he must have felt that a clarification was needed because among his Gentile readers there were different systems of day reckoning.

Pliny concisely sums up the different methods of day reckoning existing in New Testament times, saying: “The Babylonians count the period between two sunrises, the Athenians that between two sunsets, the Umbrians from midday to midday, the common people everywhere from dawn to dark, the Roman priests and the authorities who fixed the official day, and also the Egyptians and Hipparchus, the period from midnight to midnight.”<sup>24</sup>

In the light of these various ways of reckoning the day among different people, Mark saw the need to clarify what he meant by “very early on the first day of the week,” namely, “when the sun had risen.” This time reference presupposes a sunrise reckoning because according to the sunset reckoning, by the time the sun had risen it was the middle and not the early part of the first day.

**Various Views on Sunrise Reckoning.** On the basis of the evidence presented above, numerous scholars have argued for the existence in Bible times of a sunrise method of day reckoning. Much of the discussion has centered not on the fact of the existence of such a method but rather on the period of time during which the sunrise reckoning was used.

The three major views which have been espoused have already been summarized at the beginning of this chapter. Briefly stated, the first view places the change from the sunrise to the sunset reckoning at the beginning of Christianity. The second view sets the change earlier, that is, either by the time of the Babylonian exile or at the beginning of the Greek period. The third view holds that both methods existed side by side during Bible time.

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This last view appears the most plausible because, as we have seen, indications for both reckonings are scattered throughout the Old and New Testaments. It must be said that the sunset reckoning has been found to be more clearly and extensively attested than the sunrise reckoning. Yet the evidence for the sunrise reckoning is significant and cannot be ignored. Thus it would appear that the sunrise reckoning coexisted side by side with the sunset reckoning, though its usage was more limited.

### III. COEXISTENCE OF TWO RECKONINGS

The coexistence of two methods of day reckoning in New Testament times can be found in the writings of Josephus. We noted earlier how Josephus explains with remarkable clarity how the Sabbath began and ended at sunset with a priest's blowing of a trumpet.

In other passages, however, Josephus seems to be using the sunrise reckoning. These passages provide a fifth type of evidence for the sunrise reckoning which, as we shall see, seems supported also by Talmudic statements.

**Josephus' Reckoning of the Passover.** In explaining the law concerning the Passover celebration Josephus writes: "On the fourteenth day of the lunar month ... the law ordained that we should every year slay that sacrifice which I before told you we slew when we came out of Egypt, and which was called *Passover*; and so do we celebrate this passover in companies, leaving nothing of what we sacrifice *till the day following*."<sup>25</sup>

In this passage the fourteenth day of the month on which the Paschal lamb was sacrificed between 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. (Lev 23:5), extends through the night during which the lamb was eaten in companies and ends in the morning when for Josephus the fifteenth day began.

While according to the sunset reckoning (see Lev 23:5-6; Num 28:16, 17), the lamb was sacrificed in the afternoon of Nisan 14 and eaten during the night of Nisan 15, because the new day began in the evening, according to Josephus, both the sacrificing and the eating of the Passover lamb took place in Nisan 14, presumably because the new day began in the morning.

**Josephus' Dividing Line.** It is noteworthy that the Biblical injunction "let none of it remain *until the morning*" (Ex 12:10),<sup>26</sup> is rendered by Josephus as "*till the day following*," which clearly suggests that the morning marks the beginning of the new day. This conclusion is substantiated by the very next statement which says: "The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the passover, and falls on the fifteenth day of the month."<sup>27</sup> In this passage

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Josephus places the beginning of the feast of Unleavened Bread immediately after the morning which marks the end of the 14th day, and the beginning of the 15th day.

“It is hardly conceivable,” rightly observed Roger T. Beckwith, “that Josephus was ignorant of the fact that, according to the Pentateuch, the dividing line between the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread, and between the seven days of the latter, falls in the evening” (Ex 12:8, 18; Lev 23:5-6).<sup>28</sup> The fact that Josephus places the dividing line between the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread in the morning rather than in the evening strongly suggests that he is using the sunrise reckoning.

Another example occurs in the following paragraph, where Josephus, in explaining the sacrifices offered by the priests on the day of Pentecost, writes: “They bring two lambs; and when they have only presented them to God, they are made ready for supper for the priests; nor is it permitted to leave anything of them *till the day following*.”<sup>29</sup> Here again the following morning is referred to as “the day following” which suggests that the new day began in the morning.

**The Replacement of the Showbread.** The sunrise reckoning is possibly implied also in the next paragraph where Josephus explains how the priests prepared the loaves of showbread on Friday and placed them in the Temple before the Lord on Sabbath morning. He writes: “They were baked the day before the Sabbath, but were brought into the holy place on the morning of the Sabbath, and set upon the holy table.”<sup>30</sup>

The practice of replacing the showbread on Sabbath morning was presumably introduced at a later period of Jewish history, because we read in 1 Samuel 21:6 that Ahimelech the priest gave to David “the holy bread, for there was no bread there by the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.”

The replacement of the showbread with “*hot bread*” could hardly have been done on Sabbath morning but presumably on Friday afternoon in conjunction with the beginning of the Sabbath. This conclusion is required by two facts. First, it is hard to believe that the priests would bake bread on Sabbath morning, since, as Josephus points out, all the baking was done “the day before the Sabbath.” Second, David and his men could hardly have traveled on a Sabbath day all the way to Nob where Ahimelech lived.

These considerations lead us to conclude that while at the time of David the showbread was replaced by “hot bread” on Friday afternoon before the beginning of the Sabbath, at the time of Josephus, however, the loaves of

showbread “were baked the day before the Sabbath, but were brought into the holy place on the morning of the Sabbath.”<sup>31</sup> The shift in time from Friday afternoon to Sabbath morning may reflect the adoption of a sunrise reckoning in Temple services, according to which Sabbath rituals would begin on Sabbath morning rather than on Friday afternoon.

**Temple Reckoning.** The use of a sunrise reckoning in Temple rituals implied in Josephus’ statements is supported by some Talmudic passages. Jacob Z. Lauterbach explains that “the older system [sunrise to sunrise] continued all through the time of the existence of the second Temple, and there the day was reckoned from morning to morning, or as the Talmud puts it ‘in sacrificial matters the night follows rather than precedes the day.’”<sup>32</sup> The latter statement from the Talmud “simply means,” writes Lauterbach, “that in the sanctuary the conservative priests persistently held on to the older practice [sunrise reckoning] though in all other spheres of life it had been abolished or changed.”<sup>33</sup>

Lauterbach continues pointing out that “according to the Talmud (p. Ned. 8:1 [40d] even among the common people the older system continued and in popular language the day included the following and not the preceding night.”<sup>34</sup> He mentions also some Jewish sects among which the sunrise reckoning “continued and the Sabbath was observed from Saturday morning to Sunday morning.”<sup>35</sup>

**An Explanation for Matthew 28:1.** The foregoing evidence for the sunrise reckoning provides a plausible explanation for the apparent contradiction present in the time references of Matthew 28:1. If Matthew, like Josephus, sometimes used the sunrise to sunrise reckoning, then his statement that the two Marys came to see the sepulchre “in the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” (Matt 28:1; KJV), makes perfect sense, because the end of the Sabbath would indeed mark the dawning of the first day of the week.

**Scholarly Support.** A number of scholars have argued in favor of this explanation. Julian Morgenstern writes regarding Matthew 28:1: “There it is explicitly stated that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb of Jesus late on the Sabbath day, just as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week. Inasmuch as these last moments of the night, just preceding the dawn are called ‘late on the Sabbath day,’ and the first day of the week does not begin until dawn, it is manifest that the day is still reckoned here from dawn to dawn.”<sup>36</sup>

Roger T. Beckwith also concludes that Matthew 28:1 may provide “an explicit endorsement” of the sunrise reckoning. He writes: “According to one

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interpretation, the verse states that the women came to the Lord's tomb 'late on the Sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week.' If this is right (and *opse* with the genitive certainly can mean 'late on ...'), what Josephus says implicitly of the Passover is here said explicitly of the Sabbath, that it ends at daybreak."<sup>37</sup>

Beckwith, however, also finds indications in Matthew for the sunset reckoning, and thus he concludes by suggesting the possibility that "the two reckonings were not in rivalry with each other, but could co-exist harmoniously within the mind of a single writer."<sup>38</sup> This conclusion is corroborated by the indications for the two reckonings which we have found scattered throughout the Bible.

**Reasons for the Coexistence of Two Reckonings.** Some may wonder, how two methods of day reckoning could coexist harmoniously at the same time and within the mind of a single writer. The astonishment is lessened when one considers two facts. First, in a society where the sun is the major point of reference to measure the beginning and ending of the day, sunrise is just as good as sunset to mark the division of the day.

Second, as Roger Beckwith aptly explains, "since the greater part of the night is consumed in sleep, for most practical purposes, it makes little difference whether the night is reckoned with the period of daylight preceding or with the following."<sup>39</sup> The choice between the two may well have been influenced by the events being reported.

Josephus, for example, when he describes how the beginning and the ending of the Sabbath was announced through a priest's blowing of a trumpet "in the evening twilight," would naturally think of the "evening" as the beginning and ending of the Sabbath. However, when he speaks of the Passover whose main event occurred during the night with the eating of the lamb, it would be natural for him to think of the following morning as marking the beginning of the new day, especially since the lamb intimately connected the night to the preceding day during which its slaying and preparation took place.

The intimate connection between the sacrificing and eating of the lamb may also explain why the beginning of the feast of Unleavened Bread, which started on Passover night with the eating of the lamb with unleavened bread, is placed "on the fourteenth day of the month" in Exodus 12:15, 18 and "on the fifteenth day of the month" in Leviticus 23:6.

In the former the night is seen as belonging to the preceding day according to the sunrise to sunrise reckoning, because the emphasis is on the events of

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Passover night which began the preceding afternoon (Ex 12:16-18); in the latter the night is viewed as belonging to the new day according to the sunset reckoning, because the emphasis is on the events of the seven days following Passover (Lev 23:6-8).

By the same token, Matthew could think of the day as ending at sunrise when relating events which occurred at early dawn (Matt 28:1), and as ending at sunset when reporting events which took place on a late afternoon or evening (Matt 8:16; 14:15).

**Conclusion.** The investigation conducted in this chapter on the method of day reckoning in Bible times suggests that two methods of day reckonings, namely, sunset to sunset and sunrise to sunrise, coexisted harmoniously.

We have found that the indications for the sunset reckoning are more abundant and explicit than those for the sunrise reckoning. We have suggested that the choice of one method over the other could have been influenced by whether the events being reported occurred during the day or during the night.

The possible coexistence of the sunset and sunrise methods of day reckoning offers a plausible explanation for the apparent contradiction found in Matthew 28:1. If Matthew was using the sunrise reckoning because he was reporting events which occurred at early dawn, then his statement that the two Marys came to the tomb “in the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” (KJV), makes perfect sense because the end of the Sabbath would coincide with the dawning of the first day of the week.

On the other hand, we have shown in chapter 4 that even if Matthew used the sunset reckoning consistently, it is not necessary to place the Resurrection and the visit of the women to the sepulchre on Saturday afternoon, in order to do justice to Matthew 28:1, since the term *opse* is used in the New Testament and in contemporary Greek literature as meaning not only “late” but also “after.” Thus the translation of the RSV and of most modern translations (“Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week”), is correct and defensible.

The possible coexistence in Bible times of the sunset and sunrise methods of day reckoning has significant implications for the time to begin and end the Sabbath today. This vital question remains to be examined in the following chapter.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. P. J. Heawood, "The Beginning of the Jewish Day," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 36 (April 1945):393-401.
2. U. Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis* (New York, 1961), comment on Genesis 1:5.
3. *Loc. cit.*
4. Solomon Zeitlin, "The Beginning of the Jewish Day During the Second Commonwealth," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 36 (April 1945):403-414.
5. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. by John Mchugh (London, 1961), pp. 180-183.
6. Jacob Z. Lauterback, *Rabbinic Essays* (Cincinnati, 1951), p. 448.
7. G. Barrois, *Manuel d'Archéologie Biblique*, Vol. 2 (Paris, 1953), pp. 183f.
8. G. von Rad, "hemera," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1974), Vol. II, p. 943, where he says: "according to the cultus it officially began in the evening (Ex 12:18; Lev 23:32)." The implication is that there was also an unofficial method of day reckoning.
9. Roger T. Beckwith, "The Day, Its Divisions, and its Limits, in Biblical Thought," *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 43 (October-December 1971):226.
10. Solomon Zeitlin (n. 4), p. 404.
11. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton, 1964), p. 13.
12. *Loc. cit.*
13. H. R. Stroes, "Does the Day Begin in the Evening or Morning?" *Vetus Testamentus* 16 (1966):405.
14. Other examples are found in Deut 1:33; 28:66; 1 Sam 25:16; Ps 91:5; Is 27:3; 34:10; Jer 14:17.
15. See Mark 4:27; 5:5; Luke 2:37; Acts 20:31; 26:7; 2 Cor 11:25; 1 Thess 2:9; 3:10; 2 Thess 3:8; 1 Tim 5:5; 2 Tim 1:3.
16. Josephus, *War of the Jews* 4, 9, 12, in *Josephus Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 543. See also *Antiquities of the Jews* 16, 6, 2.



17. Roland de Vaux (n. 5), p. 187. See also Julian Morgenstern, "The sources of the Creation Story-Genesis 1:1—2-4," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 36 (April 1920):176; and Jacob Z. Lauterback (n. 6), p. 447.
18. Josephus, *War of the Jews* 6, 9, 3.
19. Jacob Z. Lauterback (n. 6), p. 447.
20. Jack Finegan (n. 11), p. 290.
21. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 2, 15, 7 (n. 16), p. 62.
22. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3, 10, 5 (n. 16), p. 79.
23. See, for example, Gen 1:14, 16, 18; 8:22; 31:40; Num 14:14; 2 Sam 21:10; 1 King 8:59; 1 Chron 9:33; Neh 1:6; 4:9; 9:12, 19; Ps 22:2; 42:3,8; 55:10; 74:16; 88:1; 136:7-9; Is 28:19; 38:12; 60:11; 62:6; Jer 9:1; 16:13; 31:35; 33:30,25; 36:30; Lam 2:18; Luke 18:7; Rev 4:8; 7:15; 8:12; 14:11; 20:10.
24. Pliny, *Natural History* 2, 79, 188, cited in Jack Finegan (n. 11), p. 8.
25. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3, 10, 5 (n. 16), p. 79. Emphasis supplied.
26. Emphasis supplied. See also Ex 34:25; Deut 16:4.
27. *Loc. cit.*
28. Roger T. Beckwith (n. 9), p. 225.
29. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3, 10, 6 (n. 16), p. 80.
30. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3, 10, 7 (n. 16), p. 80.
31. *Loc. cit.*
32. Jacob Z. Lauterback (n. 6), p. 449. The reference from the Talmud is *Hul.* 83a.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 449, n. 58.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 449-450, n. 59.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 450.
36. Julian Morgenstern (n. 17), p. 178. See also Jacob Z. Lauterback (n. 6), p. 450.

37. Roger T. Beckwith (n. 9), p. 225.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

39. *Loc. cit.*

# Chapter 6

## THE RECKONING OF THE SABBATH TODAY

What is the time for beginning and ending the Sabbath today? This is not merely an academic question for scholars to debate, but a practical one relevant to many Christians who believe in the validity and value of the principle of seventh-day Sabbathkeeping for today. The problem of when to begin and to end the observance of the Sabbath is particularly acute in those parts of the world where it is difficult, if not impossible, to observe the Sabbath according to the sunset reckoning, because in these places the sun rises or sets very early or very late or not at all during certain periods of the year.

**Objectives.** The question of when to begin and end the observance of the Sabbath was examined at great length by the early Adventist believers. The aim of this chapter is first to summarize briefly the positions they adopted, since these provide a valuable historical perspective in discussing Sabbath reckoning today. Second, this chapter attempts to suggest a guideline for Sabbath reckoning in those parts of the earth where sunset reckoning is difficult and sometimes impossible to follow. The suggested guideline, will be developed out of the implications of the Fourth Commandment as well as out of the conclusions drawn in the previous chapter.

### I. FROM 6 P.M. TO 6 P.M.

**Seventh Day Baptists.** Seventh-day Sabbath-keeping was introduced in America by the Seventh Day Baptists, who organized their first church in Rhode Island in 1671.<sup>1</sup> In the eighteenth century the German Seventh Day Baptists in the Ephrata community of Pennsylvania observed their Sabbath from 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday.

Julius Friedrich Sachse, a historian of German sectarian groups in Pennsylvania, notes that “the Sabbath was ushered in with the first hour of [after] the sixth day (Friday, 6 p.m.) and closed at the end of the twelfth hour of the seventh day (Saturday, 5:59 p.m.) . . . to conform to the very letter of

the law in the New Testament.”<sup>2</sup> This method of Sabbathkeeping from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. was apparently advocated by other Seventh Day Baptist groups, as indicated by the discussion of this issue in *The Sabbath Recorder*, a periodical of the Seventh Day Baptists.<sup>3</sup>

Seventh-day Sabbathkeeping was first introduced to Adventist believers in Washington, New Hampshire, early in 1844 by Rachel Preston Oakes, a Seventh Day Baptist. T. M. Preble was the first Adventist minister to accept and teach the Sabbath.<sup>4</sup> In an article he wrote in 1845, Preble seems to suggest that the Sabbath must be observed from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m.<sup>5</sup>

**Bates’ Position.** During the first 10 years of their history Adventists generally observed the Sabbath from 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday, although some kept it from sunrise to sunrise. The main promoter of the 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. Sabbath reckoning was Joseph Bates, an ex-sea captain and a self-sacrificing crusader for truth who became a pioneer of the early Advent believers and an apostle for the Sabbath. In August 1946 Bates published a 48-page pamphlet entitled *The Seventh-day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign*, which proved to be a mighty instrument in propagating the message of the Sabbath.

The reasoning Bates gives in this pamphlet for beginning and ending the Sabbath at 6 p.m. is that one “cannot regulate the day and night to have what the Savior calls twelve hours in the day [John 11:9] without establishing the time from the centre of the earth, the equator, where at the beginning of the sacred year, the sun rises and sets at 6 o’clock.”<sup>6</sup> Bates continues reasoning that since in the Arctic and Antarctic areas there are times when the sun never sets or never rises, then “the inhabitants of the earth have no other right time to commence their twenty-four hour day, than beginning at 6 o’clock in the evening.”<sup>7</sup>

There is no evidence that Bates was influenced by German Seventh Day Baptists in forming his position on the six o’clock beginning time for the Sabbath. “Rather, he came to these conclusions,” Carl Coffman rightly notes, “as a result of his knowledge of a seaman’s computation of equatorial time.”<sup>8</sup>

**Bates’ Reasons.** In the spring of 1851 Bates defended his 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. position in an article entitled “Time to Begin the Sabbath,” where he appeals to two main Bible texts, namely, Leviticus 23:32 and Matthew 20:1-16.<sup>9</sup> From the first text he derived the principle of keeping the Sabbath “from even unto even,” and from the second he established the time of “even,” namely, 6 p.m.

The fact that in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16) the master paid his laborers at “even” (v. 8), which was the 12th hour of the day, led Bates to the conclusion that the 12 hours of the day were reckoned from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thus 6 p.m. is the “even” which marks the beginning and end of the Sabbath.

To defend this view Bates argued that the Sabbath should be reckoned according to equatorial time, that is, according to the length of the day and night at the equator. At the equator sunrise and sunset occur consistently throughout the year plus/minus 10 minutes at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. respectively.<sup>10</sup>

Bates maintained that the Sabbath should be observed according to the “equatorial day” in all parts of the world. What he meant is that the Sabbath is to be observed longitudinally from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. as it comes to each part of the earth in due time as the earth revolves on its axis.

The majority of the early Adventist believers adopted Bates’ position, especially because he was greatly respected on account of his consistent Christian life and his zeal in proclaiming the distinctive Adventist beliefs. Writing in 1868 James White acknowledges that Bates’ “decided stand upon the question, and respect for his years, and his godly life, might have been among the reasons why this point was not sooner investigated as thoroughly as some other points.”<sup>11</sup> Among those who accepted Bates’ position were James and Ellen White.

**Diversity in Sabbath Reckoning.** For several years most Adventist believers observed the Sabbath according to equatorial time, that is, from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. Many, however, were not satisfied with this method. Thus some observed the Sabbath from sunset to sunset while other from sunrise to sunrise. In reviewing the entire matter several years later (1868) James White wrote: “the six o’clock time was called in question by a portion of believers as early as 1847, some maintaining that the Sabbath commenced at sunrise while others claimed Bible evidence in favor of sunset.”<sup>12</sup>

The existing diversity in the time of Sabbathkeeping was of great concern to Adventist leaders, who feared that unless this question could be clearly settled on Biblical grounds, the continuing divergence might splinter the Advent believers.

This concern led James White to urge first D. P. Hall and later J. N. Andrews to investigate this subject and ascertain what the Bible actually taught regarding Sabbath reckoning.<sup>13</sup> Hall failed to produce an article but Andrews submitted the results of his investigation in the form of a paper which later appeared in article form in the December 4, 1855 issue of the *Review and Herald*.<sup>14</sup>

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## II. FROM SUNSET TO SUNSET

**Andrews' Position.** In his paper Andrews argues convincingly that the New Testament defines "evening" not necessarily as 6 p.m. but rather as "sunset". He appeals especially to texts such as Mark 1:32 where it explicitly says: "That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons" (cf. Luke 4:40; Matt 8:16). Here the evening which marks the end of the Sabbath is clearly linked to sunset. Andrews gave additional references from the Old Testament where "even" is equated with the setting of the sun.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, Andrews argues that it does not necessarily prove that the 12th hour of the day coincided exactly with 6 p.m. He establishes this point by showing that the 12 hours of the day were not 12 sixty-minute periods like ours, but rather 12 equal parts of the daylight time, which would vary somewhat according to season. This conclusion is explicitly supported by John 11:9 where Jesus says: "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of this world."

Support for Andrews' reasoning is found in the Talmud, where there is a discussion of the extent of reasonable error in the estimate of the hour of the day and it is noted that "in the sixth hour the sun stands in the meridian."<sup>16</sup> Thus Andrews rightly concluded that the Jewish hour was not a fixed unit of time but the 12th part of the time between sunrise and sunset at any time of the year. Consequently the parable of the laborers in the vineyard offers no valid justification for a 6 p.m. to a 6 p.m. method of beginning and ending the Sabbath.

**Two Major Reasons.** Andrews presented two major reasons for ruling out the 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. method of Sabbathkeeping. First, such a method is dependent upon clocks or watches, which did not exist in Bible times. This would mean that in those days God's people would have been at a loss to know when to begin and end the Sabbath. Second, "the Bible, by several plain statements, establishes the fact that evening is at sunset."<sup>17</sup>

The conclusions reached by Andrews are based on a sound analysis of the Biblical data. At the same time it should be noted that the difference between the position of Andrews and that of Bates is relative as far as Palestine is concerned, because in that country the difference between the earliest sunset in December (about 6 p.m.) and the latest sunset in July (about 8:00 p.m.) is about two hours.<sup>18</sup> The problem arises, however, in those parts of the earth farthest away from the equator where sunset time varies during the course of the year as much as ten or more hours.

**1855 Sabbath Conference.** Andrews' paper was presented and discussed at a conference held in Battle Creek on Sabbath, November 17, 1855. The convincing and comprehensive analysis of Andrews was accepted by all, with the exception of a small minority.<sup>19</sup> Two days later on November 19, 1855, Ellen White had a vision which confirmed the sunset reckoning.<sup>20</sup>

Following the Sabbath conference of 1855, the sunset reckoning became widely accepted by practically all Adventist believers. Writing in the *Review* in 1864, Uriah Smith, the editor, says: "Harmony now reigns where there might have been discord and division."<sup>21</sup> The only major problem that arose after the official acceptance of the sunset reckoning in 1855 was the application of this method in those regions of the earth where the sun sets very early, or very late, or, as in the Arctic and Antarctic, not at all for a period of time. The solutions adopted for these regions will be briefly summarized below.

### III. SABBATH RECKONING IN THE ARCTIC

The observance of the Sabbath according to the sunset reckoning in the Arctic regions becomes practically impossible during part of the summer, when the sun never sets below the horizon, and during part of the winter, when the sun never rises above the horizon. In these areas the common difficulties resulting from observing the seventh-day Sabbath, in a society where most working schedules are built around Sunday as the day of rest, are compounded by the problem of knowing when to begin and close the Sabbath during those weeks when the sun does not rise or set.

**The Problem.** The problem of observing the Sabbath in the Arctic region exists not only during the time when the sun does not set or rise above the horizon, but also during the time just before the sun's disappearance for a certain period in winter and immediately following its reappearance. At this time of the year the sun sets by noon time; thus half of the Sabbath falls within the civil time of Friday. This means that according to the sunset reckoning, for several weeks every year, half of the Sabbaths falls during the civil time of Friday and half during that of Saturday.

Under these conditions the observance of the Sabbath according to the sunset reckoning becomes a real problem, because it requires the interruption of work on Friday by noon and the resumption of work on Saturday after the noon hour. This is not an imaginary problem but a real one which Seventh-day Sabbathkeepers face, for example, in the northern part of Norway and to a lesser degree in all Scandinavian countries and Alaska. No easy solution can be offered on how to observe the Sabbath according to the sunset reckoning when the above conditions prevail.

**Prevailing Guidelines.** Several recommendations have been offered by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to believers living in the Arctic regions. The preferred recommended practice is that “during the winter period when there are no sunsets, the Sabbath be begun and ended at the same time it was begun and ended when the last sunset occurred.”<sup>22</sup>

Other acceptable alternatives are “(a) that during the winter when there are no sunsets, the end of the twilight, or in other words the beginning of darkness, as indicated by astronomical tables, be looked upon as the beginning of the Sabbath, or (b) that it be kept according to astronomical computations for the moment when the sun is closest to the horizon, or at its zenith, on Friday until it returns to this point on Saturday, or (c) that the Sabbath be begun and ended during the winter period when there are no sunsets north of the Arctic Circle at the same time as indicated on sunset calendars just south of the Arctic Circle.”<sup>23</sup>

These recommendations were endorsed by a study committee appointed by the Northern European Division of Seventh-day Adventists to study the “borderlines of the Sabbath.” However, this study group, which met at Skoodsborg, Denmark, from February 28 to March 1, 1980, came up with a broader interpretation of the term “evening.” They concluded that “the biblical material may offer a basis for a flexible definition of ‘evening’ in areas where the diminishing of light rather than the setting of the sun is the observable natural phenomenon. Such a definition of ‘evening’ would nevertheless remain in close touch with the sunset criterion.”<sup>24</sup>

Summing up the historical position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the time for beginning and ending the Sabbath, we can say that the sunset reckoning has been accepted as the normative Biblical method since 1855. This method has also been the basis for formulating recommendation for those regions where the sun does not set or rise for a certain period of the year.

#### **IV. SABBATH RECKONING TODAY**

The foregoing brief historical survey has served to establish two major facts: (1) Seventh-day Adventists have since 1855 regarded the sunset reckoning as the normative Biblical method for beginning and ending the Sabbath. (2) The difficulty of following the sunset reckoning in the Arctic regions, where the sun for a certain period of time does not set or rise above the horizon, has been met by broadening the meaning of “sunset” to include, for example, “the end of the twilight,” “the diminishing of light,” and “the moment when the sun is closest to the horizon.”



**A Note of Commendation.** Recognition must be given to the early Adventist pioneers, especially to J. N. Andrews, for establishing from the Scriptures the sunset to sunset method for beginning and ending the Sabbath. Commendation must also be given to Adventist leaders and believers living in and near the Arctic regions, for observing the Sabbath as closely as possible to the sunset reckoning, even if it means facing the problem of having to obtain exemption from work not only for Saturday but also for much of the civil time of Friday.

The following considerations are not intended to downplay the noble effort which has been made to establish from the Scripture the sunset to sunset method of Sabbathkeeping and to implement such a method even in the midst of the most adverse circumstances. Anyone who is willing to pay the price for what he or she believes to be the will of God deserves our commendation and not condemnation.

My intent rather is to ascertain on the basis of the Biblical material if a more satisfactory guideline can be proposed to determine the beginning and end of the Sabbath in those regions of the earth where the sunset at certain times of the year does not provide a rational division between the day and the night. It is my fervent hope that the guideline to be proposed will contribute to the solution and not to the complications of an already complex problem.

**The Sabbath Commandment.** Any attempt to ascertain the Biblical teaching on the *time* for beginning and ending the Sabbath ought to start from a study of the Fourth Commandment itself as found in Exodus 20:8-11. After all, the manner and the time of Sabbathkeeping ought to be reflective of the principles enunciated in the commandment itself.

It may be surprising to some to note that no specific instructions are given in the Fourth Commandment on the manner and time of Sabbathkeeping. The only injunction given is to “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” by doing all one’s work in six days and by resting the seventh day “to the Lord your God.”

Regarding the *manner*, the commandment does not offer, for example, any injunction to attend religious services on the Sabbath. Why? The reason may be found in the divine awareness of the plight of those believers who through the centuries have been prevented by sickness or circumstances from participating in a corporate religious service.

**No Time Specifications.** Similarly the absence of any instruction in the Fourth Commandment regarding the *time* to begin and end the observance of the Sabbath may reflect divine awareness of the predicament of those

believers who would be called to live in regions of the earth where sometimes it would be impossible to observe the Sabbath from sunset to sunset.

If the Fourth Commandment had spelled out that the seventh-day Sabbath is to be observed everywhere on earth from sunset to sunset, then those believers who live in those northern regions, where at least for a time there is no sunset, would have felt guilty for beginning and ending the Sabbath according to a different criterion.

The absence, then, in the Fourth Commandment of specific instructions on the exact manner and time of Sabbathkeeping is indicative of divine wisdom in formulating a principle whose application could be adapted to different cultures and geographical locations. It is thus important to note at the outset that the method of observing the Sabbath from sunset to sunset is dictated not by the Fourth Commandment itself, but by the method of sunset reckoning which became normative in Jewish history.

**Validity of Sunset Reckoning.** Several reasons have contributed to make the sunset reckoning normative for the observance of the annual feasts in general and of the weekly Sabbath in particular. A first reason is suggested by the legislation regarding the Day of Atonement, which, as noted in the previous chapter, implies that the beginning of the fast was anticipated from the morning of the 10th day to the evening of the 9th day (Lev 23:27-32), presumably to help people better to prepare themselves for the solemn services that began the following morning.

Similarly the beginning of the observance of the Sabbath on Friday evening at sunset could have been dictated by the necessity to help believers to be better prepared and predisposed to enter into the daylight celebration of the Sabbath.

**End of Working Day.** A second reason is suggested by the fact that in Bible times for all practical purposes sunset marked the end of the working day. This fact is clearly illustrated in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard where the owner in the “evening” calls the laborers to pay them their wages (Matt 20:8). Being the end of a working day, the “evening” represented in a sense the end of the day itself and thus the beginning of a new day.

A third reason, which is closely related to the second, is implied in the injunction: “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is the sabbath to the Lord your God” (Ex 20:9-10). The implication here is that the observance of the seventh day begins at the completion of the sixth day of work. Since in Bible times the sixth day of work, as just noted, ended

in the “evening” (Matt 20:8), the same “evening” could naturally function as the beginning of the rest and sanctification of the seventh day.

**Ideal Psychological and Social Time.** A last reason is suggested by the psychological and social function of sunset. Psychologically the setting of the sun marks the end of our working day and the beginning of the new cycle of rest and work of another day. Thus sunset offers an ideal psychological beginning for the celebration of the Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and service unto the Lord.

Socially, the setting of the sun has the effect of bringing the family members back together. The work of the day scatters the family in different directions, but the setting of the sun brings the family members back together for the evening supper and fellowship. Thus sunset offers an ideal sociological moment, when the family members are together again at the end of a working day, to begin together the celebration of the Sabbath day.

It is no wonder that in the course of Jewish history a very rich and meaningful ritual was developed to mark the arrival and the departure of the Sabbath at sunset. After all, the Sabbath was a family celebration, which in Bible times included all dependent workers (Ex 20:10). Thus, by rallying the family members together, sunset time provided an ideal moment for beginning and ending the Sabbath.

**Normative Method of Sabbathkeeping.** It is also no wonder that while, in the previous chapter we saw indications of the existence in Bible times of a sunrise method of day reckoning, no explicit indications were found suggesting that such a method was ever used for reckoning the beginning and end of the Sabbath.

All the passages in the Old and New Testament which refer to the time element of Sabbathkeeping clearly suggest a sunset reckoning. Luke, for example, explicitly designates the late Friday afternoon when Jesus’ body was taken from the cross as “the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning” (Luke 23:54). Similarly Mark explains that the people waited until the “evening at sunset” (Mark 1:32; cf. Luke 4:40) to bring to Christ the sick and demon-possessed. Passages such as these clearly indicate that the Sabbath was observed by the Jewish people in general from sunset to sunset.

In the light of the foregoing considerations we conclude that the sunset reckoning for beginning and ending the Sabbath—though it is not dictated directly by the Fourth Commandment—became the normative method in Jewish history.

**Sunset Reckoning Valid Today.** In my view the sunset reckoning is still valid and valuable today, wherever the sunset does provide, as in Palestine, a logical termination of the working day and a balanced division between daytime and nighttime. My conviction rests on the fact that the reasons mentioned above which made the sunset reckoning normative for Sabbathkeeping in Bible times, are reasons still valid and relevant today.

As in Bible times, the beginning of the Sabbath on Friday evening at sunset enables believers today to be better prepared to enter into the daylight celebration of the Sabbath. As in Bible times, in most countries today sunset marks the end of the sixth working day and the beginning of the rest and sanctification of the seventh day.

As in Bible times, in most countries today, sunset can bring the family together at the end of the sixth working day to begin together the celebration of the Sabbath day. The sunset reckoning, then, is still a valid and valuable method for beginning and ending Sabbath wherever sunset provides a balanced division between daytime and nighttime, as in Bible lands.

## **V. EQUATORIAL SUNSET TIME FOR THE ARCTIC**

The use of the sunset reckoning becomes problematic especially in Arctic regions of the earth where at certain times of the year the sun sets as early as noon, or as late as midnight or not at all. The crucial question is: should the beginning and the end of the Sabbath be determined in these regions on the basis of the sunset reckoning?

**Broader Meaning of Sunset.** As noted earlier, Seventh-day Adventists, historically, have endeavored to follow the principles of sunset reckoning even in the Arctic regions by broadening the meaning of “sunset” to include, for example, the end of twilight, the diminishing of light, and the moment when the sun is closest to the horizon.

Past attempts to extrapolate from the sunset reckoning some broader criteria to determine the beginning and end of the Sabbath for the Arctic regions are indicative of the conviction that the sunset reckoning is the normative Biblical method for determining the beginning and end of the Sabbath everywhere, irrespective of geographic location.

**Sunset Reckoning not Dictated by Commandment.** Personally I respect this conviction, but I have difficulty in accepting it as the only valid

Biblical option for at least four reasons. In the first place, the sunset reckoning is not dictated by the Fourth Commandment where, as noted earlier, no instruction is given regarding the time to begin and end the observance of the Sabbath. We concluded that the absence of such instruction may be indicative of divine wisdom in formulating a principle adaptable to different geographical locations.

The Fourth Commandment establishes the principle of believers keeping the Sabbath holy by working six days and resting on the seventh day unto the Lord. The application of this principle is dependent upon what constitutes the end of the working day in any given geographical area of the world.

**Completion of Six Days of Work.** Second, the application of the sunset reckoning in the Arctic regions when, for example, the sun sets by noon, makes it impossible to observe the first part of the Fourth Commandment which enjoins: “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work” (Ex 20:9).

To stop any gainful employment on Friday sometime before noon in order to be ready to begin the observance of the Sabbath at noon-sunset, means to reduce the working time of the sixth day, which in Biblical thought consists of approximately 12 hours from sunrise to sunset (John 11:9; Matt 20:1-8), to only the first two or three hours of the morning.

Moreover, to resume work on Saturday after the noon-sunset means to fulfill the working time of the sixth day, half during the “daytime” of the sixth day and half during the “daytime” of the seventh day. By the same token to begin the celebration of the Sabbath on Friday at noon-sunset and to end it on Saturday at the noon-sunset, means to observe the Sabbath half during the “daytime” of Friday and half during the “daytime” of Saturday. Such a practice can hardly reflect the intent of the Fourth Commandment, which explicitly enjoins completing one’s work in six days and then resting unto the Lord on the seventh day.

**Daytime Defined by the Clock.** A third reason why the sunset reckoning is not suitable in or near the Arctic regions for determining the beginning and end of the Sabbath is simply because in these areas daytime is defined by the clock and not by the sun.

While in Bible lands the time between sunrise and sunset ranges constantly between 12 and 14 hours during the course of the year, in the Arctic regions the range can be from less than 3 hours in December to more than 18 hours in July. This means that while in Bible lands sunrise and sunset provide a logical and balanced division between daytime and nighttime, or working time and resting time, in the Arctic regions this division must be defined, not by sunrise and sunset, but by the clock.

To insist on using the sunset reckoning in the Arctic regions for determining the end of the sixth day and thus the beginning of the seventh day means to disrupt the balance established by God between the daytime for work and the nighttime for rest. If, as Christ said, there are “twelve hours in the day” (John 11:9), then in those places where the sunset reckoning would reduce the daytime to 6 hours or less, the end of the daytime and the beginning of the Sabbath must of necessity be determined not by the sun but by the clock.

**Coexistence of Two Day Reckonings.** A final reason for favoring a different method from the sunset reckoning in or near the Arctic regions is the apparent coexistence of two methods of day reckoning in Bible times: sunrise to sunrise and sunset to sunset. In the previous chapter we established that these two methods apparently coexisted side by side.

If this conclusion is correct, and in my view the evidence favors it, then the Bible provides a justification for adopting a different method of day reckoning in those Arctic regions where the sunset reckoning is difficult and even impossible to use for certain periods. What method should then be used in the Arctic regions for determining the beginning and the end of the Sabbath?

**Equatorial Sunset Time.** In the light of the foregoing discussion, the most suitable method of Sabbath reckoning in the Arctic regions is, in my view, according to the equatorial sunset time, that is from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. This method, as noted earlier in this chapter, was first introduced by Joseph Bates and was used by the early Adventist believers during the first 10 years of their history.

**Integrity of Sixth Day of Work.** My reasons for favoring the equatorial sunset time for the Arctic regions are essentially three. First, the observance of the Sabbath in the Arctic regions from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. would preserve the integrity of the working time of the sixth day which is presupposed in the first part of the Fourth Commandment: “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work” (Ex 20:9).

An important point often ignored is that the Fourth Commandment ordains not only rest on the seventh day unto the Lord, but also work on six days to endeavor to complete one’s work by the end of the sixth day. In fact, it is the fulfillment of the latter which makes the former possible. The sunset reckoning in Arctic regions, by shortening the working time of the sixth day at certain periods of the year to half a day or less, undermines the integrity of the working time of the sixth day, and thus makes it more difficult to complete one’s work in preparation for the Sabbath.

To respect the integrity of the working time of the sixth day, however, does not imply that one ought to be engaged in gainful employment until the very end of the day. On the contrary, Friday was rightly called the “Day of Preparation” because part of the work done on that day was in preparation for the Sabbath.

Emperor Caesar Augustus himself acknowledged the right of the Jews to be released from civil obligations earlier on Friday by legislating that Jews “be not obliged to go before any judge on the day of preparation after the ninth hour,”<sup>25</sup> that is, after about 3 p.m. The obvious reason for this legislation was to enable the Jews to have adequate time to prepare themselves for the arrival of the Sabbath.

**Compatible with Palestinian Sunset Time.** A second reason for favoring the equatorial sunset time for the Arctic regions, is the fact that it is quite compatible with the sunset time of the Bible lands.

A comparison between the sunset tables at the latitude of Palestine with those at the equator reveals that on the average there is less than one hour of difference between the two during the course of the year. Thus the equatorial sunset time comes very close to that of Bible lands while providing at the same time a consistent method of day reckoning.

**Compatible with Working Schedule.** A third reason is suggested by the fact that equatorial sunset time is compatible with the working schedule of most people living in the Arctic regions.

Compatibility with the equatorial or Palestinian sunset time per se is not a determining factor. Nowhere does the Bible or even common sense suggest that the sunset time of Palestine or of the equator must be the normative time for determining the end of the day and the beginning of a new day in all the regions of the earth. What makes this compatibility recommendable, however, is the fact that the sunset time of Palestine, like the one of the equator, does respect the working schedule of most people living in such northern lands as Alaska, Norway, Sweden, Finland.

In these northern lands, as in most industrialized nations, the working day of most people terminates between 5 and 6 p.m. This hour of the day is rightly known as the “rush hour” because it is the hour when most people are rushing home at the end of their working day.

The equatorial sunset time, then, by being compatible with the termination of the working day of most people living in the Arctic regions, offers a rational method for observing the Sabbath from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. Furthermore, we have seen that this method is compatible with the Palestinian sunset

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time, besides preserving the integrity of the sixth day of work (Ex 20:9), which is presupposed by the Fourth Commandment.

**Conclusion.** Three major conclusions can be drawn from the investigation conducted in this chapter. First, the absence of any specific instruction in the Fourth Commandment regarding the time for beginning and ending the Sabbath suggests that divine wisdom has chosen to leave the determination of the time factor open to accommodate differing geographical situations.

Second, the reasons which made the sunset reckoning normative in Bible times for beginning and ending the Sabbath, are reasons which are still valid and valuable today. This is true wherever sunset respects to a large degree the integrity of the sixth working day by providing a balanced division between daytime and nighttime as in Bible lands.

Lastly, in the Arctic regions where the sun sets very early, very late, or not at all, it is advisable in my view to observe the Sabbath from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m., according to the equatorial sunset time. This method, we have seen, preserves the integrity of the sixth working day, is compatible with the sunset time of Bible lands, and respects the working schedule of most people living in the Arctic regions.

The intent of this last recommendation is not to make an already difficult situation worse by suggesting a different method of reckoning the Sabbath. Rather, it is my fervent hope that this study with its resulting recommendation, will contribute to the resolution of the complex problem of Sabbath reckoning in the Arctic regions and not to its intensification.

If differing views should persist on the time for beginning and ending the Sabbath in the Arctic regions, it is my hope that the spirit of mutual respect, compassion, and charity will prevail. May we never forget that Sabbathkeeping expresses obedience to God and, as Ellen White perceptively writes, “The Lord accepts all the obedience of every creature He has made, according to the circumstances of time in the sun-rising and sun-setting world.”<sup>26</sup>



## NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. *Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America* (Plainfield, New Jersey, 1910), vol. I, p. 122; Benson Y. Landis, ed., *Yearbook of American Churches* (New York, 1961), p. 24.
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4. James White, *Life Incidents* (Battle Creek, 1868), p. 268.
5. See J. H. Waggoner, "T. M. Preble on the True Sabbath," *Review and Herald*, 34 (December 21, 1869):203.
6. Joseph Bates, *The Seventh Day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign, from the Beginning, to the Entering into the Gates of the Holy City, According to the Commandment* (New Bedford, 1946), p. 31.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
8. Carl Coffman, "The Practice of Beginning the Sabbath in America," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 3 (January 1965):13.
9. Joseph Bates, "Time to Begin the Sabbath," *Review and Herald* 1 (April 21, 1851):70f.
10. See the sunrise/sunset tables in *The Astronomical Almanac for the Year 1985*, issued by the National Almanac Office, United States Naval Observatory (Washington, D.C., 1985), pp. A14-A21.
11. James White, "Time to Commence the Sabbath," *Review and Herald* 31 (February 25, 1868):168.
12. *Loc cit.*
13. James White, "Time of the Sabbath," *Review and Herald* 7 (December 4, 1855):78.
14. J. N. Andrews, "Time for Commencing the Sabbath," *Review and Herald*, 7 (December 4, 1855):78f.
15. Deut 16:6; Lev 20:6,7; Deut 23:11; 24:13,15; Joshua 8:29; 10:26-27; 2 Chron 18:34.

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16. *Pasahim* 11b-12b. See discussion in Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton, 1964), p. 13.
  17. J. N. Andrews (n. 14), p. 78.
  18. *The Astronomical Almanac* (n. 10), pp. A18-A20.
  19. (No author), "The Conference," *Review and Herald* 7 (December 4, 1855):75.
  20. E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, California, 1948), vol. I, p. 116 and appendix, p. 713.
  21. Uriah Smith, "Not Satisfactory," *Review and Herald* (August 30, 1864):108.
  22. "Time for Beginning the Biblical Seventh-day Sabbath," manuscript produced by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (July 7, 1977), p. 8.
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
  24. "Findings and Recommendations of the NEWAD Study Committee on the 'Borderlines of the Sabbath,'" Meeting at Skodsborg, Denmark, February 28-March 1, 1980, p. 2.
  25. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 16, 6,2.
  26. Ellen White, Letters 167, March 23, 1900.