

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE CRUCIFIXION

A COMPARISON OF THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS

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Introduction

The pages that follow comprise an Excursus found in my *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Vol. 2, pp. 463–94, TorahResource, 2008). Apart from these opening comments and a few additional comments added at the end of the Excursus, these pages are identical with the Commentary pages. I have simply extracted them into this short study in order to make them accessible to those who do not have the commentary.

The extended study on the Passion Chronology in the Matthew Commentary was considered necessary in light of Matthew 12:40, the only time in the Gospels where Yeshua is recorded as comparing His time in the tomb with that of Jonah in the belly of the fish:

for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

This saying of Yeshua has been taken by many to be the cornerstone upon which the chronology of the crucifixion must be built. Some have automatically presumed that “three days and three nights” mandates 72 hours in the tomb. They have therefore sought to fit the chronological notices of the Gospels into this time frame. More liberal commentators simply dismiss the saying as unauthentic and as a later insertion. Others, as I note below, find various ways of interpreting the text to yield less than 72 hours, and thus to fit it into the chronologies of the Gospels.

In the study that follows, I have not a decisive answer to the chronological problems of the crucifixion and resurrection. What I hope to have done is to open the investigation yet once more and to have shown some of those things upon which all of the Gospel writers agree.

If there is any conclusion to which I have come, it is this: the crucifixion did take place on a Friday. I know that some will shake their heads and wonder how I could be so far off the mark, but to these I simply ask that they show me where I have erred. Believe me when I say that I am simply trying to take the Gospel texts at face value and if I have misunderstood them or have misinterpreted them, then I am very ready and even anxious to be corrected. In fact, this is one of the primary reasons I have made the study available: I hope to receive greater insight into this chronological problem by those who might respond.

What this study clearly has not done is give an adequate answer to the perplexing problem of Matthew 12:40 and the comparison of Yeshua’s entombment to Jonah’s being three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. I cannot find, in the Gospel records themselves, 72 hours between the time Yeshua is put into the tomb and His resurrection. I cannot help but think that there are pieces to this puzzle that we have not yet seen.

In the end, like the Gospel writers themselves, the primary matter (which is without dispute) is that Yeshua was crucified, laid in the tomb, and that He rose again on the third day. In seeking to unravel the puzzle of the chronology of these events, we should never let this enterprise eclipse, for even a moment, the wonder and majesty of our Lord’s death and resurrection as the means by which we have been brought near to God and granted eternal life. Ultimately what matters the most is that we serve a risen Savior!

*The Chronology of the Crucifixion
in the Gospels*

The chronology of the Passion is mired in problems. But these problems consist primarily of a lack of clear information. While the Gospel writers are not entirely disinterested in chronological aspects of Yeshua's final week, they seem to be less concerned with them than was the emerging Christian Church, in which days were memorialized with a fervor. The split between the "fourteeners" (Quartadecimans) and the Roman Church characterizes the importance of this issue for the Anti-Nicean Church.¹ The Quartadecimans celebrated the fast of Easter in accordance with the Jewish calendar, i.e., on the 14th day of Nisan, regardless upon which day of the week this might fall. The Roman Church, however, celebrated the fast always on Friday (thus "Good Friday"), and considered the alternative practice errant, especially as the emerging Church withdrew more and more from her Jewish roots.

But the question that is specific to our Matthew text is whether by Yeshua's words we are to understand that "three days and three nights" constitute a 72 hour period, and whether He is categorically saying (in a prophetic way) that He would be in the tomb for that length of time. Those who suggest that a 72 hours period is not required usually appeal to three arguments: 1) that in a Jewish reckoning of the day, any part of a day can be counted as a whole, 2) the Gospel narratives seem to suggest a period less than 72 hours for Yeshua's time in the tomb, and 3) the repeated reference to Yeshua's resurrection "on the third day" (not *after* the third day) would appear to make a period less than 72 hours necessary.

Any Part of a Day Constitutes a Whole Day

This argument is based upon two sources: the Tanach and rabbinic literature. From the Tanach we seem to have an indication that "full days" (24 hours) were not always required when counting days. In other words, part of a day suffices to count a full day. The following texts are those most commonly put forward:

- (1) In Genesis, Joseph incarcerates his brothers "for three days," but on the third day appears to release them.

So he put them all together in prison for three days. Now Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die." And they did so. (Gen 42:17-20)

- (2) In 1 Kings, Israel and Syria camped opposite each other for seven days, and on the seventh day they began to battle. (Did they camp for a full seven days?)

1 See Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, 2.§62, "The Paschal Controversies."

So they camped one over against the other seven days. And on the seventh day the battle was joined, and the sons of Israel killed of the Arameans 100,000 foot soldiers in one day. (1Kings 20:29)

- (3) Esther asks the Jews not to eat or drink for “three days, night or day,” after which she would go into the king. Yet Esther 5:1 indicates she went in “on the third day”. (Did they fast for a full 3 days?)

Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish. (Esther 4:16)

Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace in front of the king’s rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace. (Esther 5:1)

- (4) In 1 Sam 30:12 an abandoned Egyptian servant is labelled as having not eaten for “three days or three nights”, yet in v. 13 he tells David that he was abandoned “three days ago” (apparently 3 daytimes and 2 nights fulfill the “three days and three nights” terminology of the former verse.)

They gave him a piece of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate; then his spirit revived. For he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. David said to him, “To whom do you belong? And where are you from?” And he said, “I am a young man of Egypt, a servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind when I fell sick three days ago.” (1Sam 30:12–13)

When compared to the statement of Matthew 12:40, that Yeshua would be in the “heart of the earth three days and three nights” yet would be resurrected “on the third day” (cf. Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 46; Acts 10:40; 1Cor 15:4), the parallel seems obvious.

The Reckoning of a “Day” in Rabbinic Literature

According to Jastrow,¹ an עֲוֹנָה (*‘onah*) is:

a period of twelve astronomical hours, one half of the natural day and of the natural night, or (at solstice) natural day, or natural night.

We may note the following:

How long is an ‘onah? — R. Hiyya b. Abba said in the name of R. Johanan: Either a day or a night. R. Hana-She’ina — according to another version, R. Hana b. She’inah — reported that Rabbah b. Bar Hanah said in the name of R. Johanan: Half a day and half a night. R. Samuel b. Isaac said: There is no contradiction [in the two definitions], the former referring to the time of the spring and autumn equinox [when day and night are equal, i.e., 12 hours each] and the latter

¹ *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Mi-drashic Literature* (הורב, n.d.), 1054.

to the summer and winter solstice [At such times of the year it is not correct to say either a day or a night since they are unequal. We then have to say half a day and half a night, i.e., twelve hours.]. (b.*Avodah Zara* 75a, cp. b.*Niddah* 65b; t.*Tohorot* 11.16)

According to y.*Berachot* 9b [cf. m.*Berachot* 1.1], which is discussing the sacrifices which must be eaten on a single day, the day consists of the daylight in which the offering is made and the night which follows. Thus, one may eat the meat of such a sacrifice throughout the night until the dawn appears. But the Sages, in order to make a safe-guard, ruled that such meat should not be eaten after midnight. Still, if one did eat past midnight, he did not violate a biblical commandment but only a rabbinical one:

From what time may they recite the Shema in the evening? From the hour that the priests enter [their homes] to eat their heave offering, “until the end of the first watch”—the words of R. Eliezer. But sages say, “Until midnight.” Rabban Gamaliel says, “Until the rise of dawn.” His [Gamaliel’s] sons returned from a banquet hall [after midnight]. They said to him, “We did not [yet] recite the Shema.” He said to them, “If the dawn has not yet risen, you are obligated to recite [the Shema]. “And [this applies] not only [in] this [case]. Rather, [as regards] all [commandments] which sages said [may be performed] ‘Until midnight’ the obligation [to perform them persists] until the rise of dawn.” [For example,] the offering of the fats and entrails—their obligation [persists] until the rise of dawn [see Lev. 1:9; 3:3-5]. And all [sacrifices] which must be eaten within one day, the obligation [to eat them persists] until the rise of dawn. If so why did sages say [that these actions may be performed only] until midnight? In order to protect man from sin. (m.*Berachot* 1.1)

Similarly, with respect to all those sacrifices that may be eaten for only one day etc. [i.e., the time of their mitzvah actually extends until the light of dawn arises]. The Gemara clarifies the meaning of “all”: “All” those sacrifices that may be eaten for only one day includes even the *kodashim kalim* that have a one-day limit on consumption. The Gemara cites the final clause of the Mishnah: If so, why did the Sages say, etc. [regarding these mitzvot that they may be performed only until midnight? In order to distance a person from sin]. The Gemara elaborates: If you would say that one may eat the aforementioned offerings until the light of dawn arises, as Biblical law permits, one who has such an offering might think that the light of dawn has not yet risen, when in fact it has risen, and as a result, he will eat the offering in violation of Biblical law and incur liability. Since you tell him that he may eat it only until midnight—even if he errs and eats it after midnight he will not incur liability, for he will have violated only a Rabbinical decree. (y.*Berachot* 9b, cp. 13b, 15).

From this, it appears obvious that in some cases the Sages reckoned the end of the day at the rising of the sun rather than at its setting. But this involves a sacrifice that is offered during the daylight. Thus, if it is permitted to be consumed only for one day, that day is reckoned from sunrise to sunrise, not by counting a full 24 hours. Moreover, since this is found in the Mishnah, and since Rabban Gamaliel is cited, we may presume that this *halalchah* is early, extending back into the 1st Century CE.

“On the Third Day”

Another argument for taking the “three days and three nights” of Matt 12:40 as being less the 72 hours is that the biblical text repeatedly speaks of Yeshua’s resurrection “on the third day” (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 46; Acts 10:40; 1Cor 15:4). In nearly all of these references, “on the third day” is represented by the dative: τῆ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ. In Lk 18:33 and 1Cor 15:4, the phrase is τῆ ἡμέρᾳ τῆ τρίτῃ, with the adjective also in attributive position. In Acts 10:40, an interesting variant occurs in D* and it^{d,67}, which have μετὰ τὴν τρίτην ἡμέραν, “after the third day.” But the majority of the manuscripts have either τῆ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, “on the third day,” while a few manuscripts have the variant [ἐν] τῆ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, where the addition of ἐν, *en*, “in” or “on” may well have been either dittography from the preceding ἤγειρεν, “He arose” or simply a stylistic measure to complement the dative.

The common dative expression can offer no other meaning than “on the third day” or even “in the third day.” This expression would seem, then, to be a significant obstacle to those who seek to interpret Yeshua’s “sign of Jonah” as prophesying a full 72 hours in the tomb. For if He arose “on the third day,” and if the “third day” is the final of “three days and three nights,” then it would seem to open the door to His being in the tomb less than 72 hours.

Evaluation of these Three Arguments

How should we assess the weight of these three arguments? Are they as strong as they first appear? My suggestion is that there needs to be further considerations.

First, the texts from the Tanach that seem to indicate that any part of a day or a night may constitute the whole may need further examination. When Joseph incarcerates his brothers, the text (Gen 42:17–20) could easily be understood to mean that he indicated to them they would remain in prison for three days. The fact that he came on the third day could simply mean that he decided to shorten their sentence.

As far as 1Kings 20:29 is concerned, where Israel camps “for seven days” and then begins battle “on the seventh day,” this only means that they continued to station their camp in that location while they were fighting. Surely they did not “pack up” prior to engaging in battle.

The Esther text, in which she decrees a fast for “three days and three nights” and then goes into the king “on the third day” may also have another explanation. If they began their fast just prior to a sunset, i.e., the beginning of the day from a Jewish reckoning, then if Esther went in at the end of the third day, i.e., before sunset, the fast would indeed have lasted “three days and three nights.” Or if the fast began on a morning, and if Esther went into the king at the end of the third day, just before the sunset, then once again, the fast would have lasted three days and three nights.

Finally, the story of the abandoned Egyptian servant may be explained quite simply. One speaks of “three days ago,” not as necessarily denoting 72 hours prior, but as a general designation of time. For instance, if a person went to the market on Monday, he or she could say on Wednesday, “I went to the market three days ago.” This is common reckoning of time. So to say he had not eaten for three days, and then to receive food on the third day would be a natural way of relating the story.

This brings up another interesting expression in relationship to the Shabbat. The first notice of the Shabbat is in Gen 2:

וַיְכַלֵּהוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם: 2 וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכַל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. (Gen 2:1–2, ESV)

How is it that the text speaks of God ceasing from all of His work “on the seventh day”? Note that the NASB, NIV, NET, have “by the seventh day,” seeking to overcome the obvious ambiguity of the more literal translation. Surely the Hebrew preposition ב can sustain the meaning “by,” but it would clearly correspond to the dative of the Greek, like what we see in the phrase “on the third day” in the Apostolic Scriptures. In fact, the Lxx felt the problem of the Hebrew in Gen 2:2 and made a “correction”–

καὶ συνετέλεσεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἕκτῃ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ἃ ἐποίησεν καὶ κατέπαυσεν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ ὧν ἐποίησεν

And God finish on the sixth day the work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all of His work which He had done.

Now clearly, God finished His work before the beginning of the seventh day, but the Hebrew text leaves this a bit ambiguous. The fact that the Lxx translators found it necessary to change “seventh day” to “sixth day” shows how uncomfortable they were with the Hebrew as it stood. Does this mean, perhaps, that the manner in which the language of Scripture portrays the reckoning of days is a bit more fluid than we might want to admit? Or to say it another way, does the language of Scripture expect that context and not lexicography be the determining factor in understanding how time is recorded?

With regard to the few examples given from the rabbinic literature, these too are not such a strong witness as they may first appear. In the determination of an *’onah*, that is, the period of light and dark that comprise a day, it is clear that the Sages required a 24 hour period, even if this period shifted in its *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* due to the seasons. Moreover, the issue of when sacrifices could be consumed, which then offered the paradigm for when prayers were to be said, was governed as much by rabbinic fences as by the clock. Still, in the example of sacrificial meat that must be consumed in “one day,” the Sages used a common method of reckoning a day—one offered the sacrifice during the daylight, consumed it the rest of the daylight and throughout the night, stopping by the time of the next daylight. Thus, the “daylight” and “darkness” together constituted one day. In a society where the sun and moon were the primary time-pieces, one couldn’t imagine a more reasonable way to mark the time restraints of such *mitzvot*.

What Does this Mean for Yeshua's "Sign of Jonah" Prophecy?

So how does all of this apply to understanding Yeshua's claim that "the Son of Man would be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights"? It would seem to me that the best course to follow is first to see if three days and three nights, in their completion, are possible in light of the passion narrative. Right away, however, we can see that the phrase "on the third day" does not immediately undermine a 72 hour reckoning for the time Yeshua was in the tomb. Consider this scenario: if He was taken from the cross and put into the tomb before sunset (as all of the Gospels indicate), then 72 hours later would also be "before sunset," that is, "on the third day." So the idea that the phrase "on the third day" is a sure and decisive argument against a 72 hour period does not necessarily obtain.

The Chronology of the Passion

The problems of the chronology of Yeshua's death, burial, and resurrection are notorious. Through the centuries, scholars have offered a wide variety of explanations for the apparent contradictions contained in the Gospel accounts, but there remains no consensus as to the chronology of the final days of Yeshua's life, His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. A cursory reading of the texts leaves one with the impression that Yeshua was crucified on a Friday and arose sometime after the Shabbat, either late Saturday night or early Sunday morning. This, of course, is the view of the traditional Christian Church, and most accept it without much thought. But as our previous discussion has shown, Yeshua's statement that He would be in the tomb ("heart of the earth") for three days and three nights should not be brushed aside as merely noting some vague parallel to Jonah, nor can it be easily shortened to accommodate 36 hours.

We may approach the issue of the Passion chronology by centering attention upon a number of key questions:

1. Did Yeshua and His Disciples Eat a Pesach Seder?

This question is obviously important, because if Yeshua and His disciples did eat a Pesach seder, this means that He was crucified on the 15th of Nisan, not on the 14th. This is because a Pesach seder would have required the roasted Pesach lamb, and according to Ex 12:6, the Pesach lamb was slaughtered on the 14th at twilight (בֵּין הָעֶרְבָיִם), literally "between the evenings." According to the Mishnah, the Pesach lamb was sacrificed in the early afternoon on the 14th of Nisan:

The daily whole offering [of the afternoon] [generally] was slaughtered at half after the eighth hour [after dawn, about 2:30 P.M.] and offered up at half after the ninth hour [about 3:30 P.M.]. On the eve of Passover, [the daily whole offering] was slaughtered at half after the seventh hour [1:30 P.M.] and offered up at half after the eighth hour [2:30 P.M.] whether on an ordinary day or on the Sabbath. [If, however,] the eve of Passover coincided with the eve of the Sabbath [Friday], it was slaughtered at half after the sixth hour [12:30 P.M.] and offered up at half after the seventh hour [1:30 P.M.], and [then] the Passover offering [was slaughtered] after it. (m.*Pesachim* 5.1)

All of the synoptics begin the Passion narrative on the first day of Unleavened Bread, which Mark and Luke further define as the day on which the Pesach lambs were sacrificed:

Matthew 26:17	Mark 14:12	Luke 22:7
Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Yeshua and asked, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?"	On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?"	Then came the <i>first</i> day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

Here, the "first day of Unleavened Bread" (Matt: Τῇ δὲ πρώτῃ τῶν ἀζύμων; Mk: Καὶ τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν ἀζύμων; Lk: Ἦλθεν δὲ ἡ ἡμέρα τῶν ἀζύμων) is clearly the 14th of Nisan, since it is the day on which the Pesach lambs were sacrificed. That the 14th of Nisan is referred to as the "first day of Unleavened Bread" is not unusual, since by noon on the 14th, all leaven was to be removed from homes and burned.¹ Moreover, in the 1st Century the terms "Feast of Unleavened Bread" (*chag haMatzot*) and "Passover" were used interchangeably (cf. Lk 22:1, "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching"). Thus, the first day of Unleavened Bread was the day of Pesach, when the Pesach lamb was slaughtered and eaten.

According to the Synoptics, the disciples of Yeshua went, on the first day of Unleavened Bread (14th of Nisan), to prepare the Pesach meal.

Matthew 26:18–19	Mark 14:13–16	Luke 22:8–13
And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'" The disciples did as Yeshua had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.	And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"'" "And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there." The disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover.	And Yeshua sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it." They said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare it?" And He said to them, "When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. And you shall say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"'" "And he will show you a large, furnished upper room; prepare it there." And they left and found everything just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

1 m.Pesachim 1.4.

In Matthew’s retelling, Yeshua states “I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples” (πρὸς σὲ ποιῶ τὸ πάσχα μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν μου). The fact that the provided room was “furnished” (ἔστρωμένον, Lk 22:12¹) means that the disciples simply had to secure the necessary food and wine for the celebration. Moreover, in all three of the synoptics, the texts state that “they prepared the Passover” (ἠτοίμασαν τὸ πάσχα). This means that they prepared to eat the seder meal, not some other “fellowship supper,” and they did so on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan.

The next statement of Matthew (26:20) indicates that it was that very evening that Yeshua and His disciples sat together to eat the Pesach seder.

Matthew 26:20	Mark 14:17–18	Luke 22:14
Now when evening came, Yeshua was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples.	When it was evening He came with the twelve. As they were reclining at the table and eating...	When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him.

Since all of this took place on the 14th, it is clear that the Synoptics have Yeshua and His disciples eating the Pesach seder, which no doubt included meat from the roasted Pesach sacrifice. The fact that the Pesach lamb or meat eaten from it is not mentioned in the ensuing narrative of the Synoptics should not be considered significant. Bitter herbs, which are commanded to be part of the Pesach seder (Ex 12:8) are not mentioned either. It is apparent that the Synoptic authors were focusing more on the bread (matzah) and wine since it was through these symbols of the seder that Yeshua emphasize His own death as the Pesach lamb. Nor should it be thought necessary that Yeshua be crucified at the same time as the slaughter of the lambs in order for Him to fulfill the symbology of the Pesach sacrifice. Quite clearly Yeshua also fulfilled the type presented in the Yom Kippur offerings, though these occurred at an entirely different time of the year than His own passion.

In the story as told by the Synoptics, the reader is alerted to the fact that Judas had made a deal with the high priests to betray Yeshua, that is, to alert them when He would be in a secluded place and could therefore be apprehended without upsetting the festival crowds (cf. Matt 26:14–16; Mk 14:10–11; Lk 22:3–6). It was not until they were eating, however, that Yeshua announces the presence of one at the table who would betray Him:

Matthew 26:21–25	Mark 14:18–21	Luke 22:21–23
As they were eating, He said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.” Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, “Surely not I, Lord?” And He answered, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” Yeshua said to him, “You have said it yourself.”	As they were reclining at the table and eating, Yeshua said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me.” They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, “Surely not I?” And He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”	“But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing.

1 Note that *BDAG* suggests this means that the room was already set up for the Pesach seder, with cushions and tables, etc.

Interestingly, only Matthew has Yeshua specifying that the betrayer was Judas, and this apparently was something spoken directly to Judas which the others did not hear, since in Luke, the disciples continue to discuss who among them would act in such a manner. What is more, none of the Synoptic accounts contain the notice, found only in John, that Yeshua identified the betrayer by handing him a piece of matzah dipped in something (olive oil?). Likewise, only John gives further explanation, that when Judas was pointed out as the betrayer, he left immediately, and that the other disciples thought he was leaving to buy food “for the feast” or else to give money to the poor (Jn 13:28–30). If one were to read only the account of the Synoptics, one would have the distinct impression that Judas remained with the rest throughout the remainder of the seder.

In Luke’s account, he mentions two cups, one during the meal (22:17) and one after the meal (22:20). Matthew and Mark only mention the cup after the meal (Matt 26:27–28; Mk 14:23–24). And only Matthew and Mark mention that they “sang a hymn” (most likely from the Hallel Psalms) before they left the upper room to go to the Mount of Olives (Matt 26:30; Mk 14:26).

If Yeshua and His disciples followed what appears to be the prevailing *halachah*, they finished their meal by midnight (m.*Pesachim* 10.9, “The Pass-over offering after midnight [when it may not be eaten any longer] imparts uncleanness to hands”). When they arrived at the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36; Mk 14:32; Lk 22:39 has simply “Mount of Olives”), Yeshua went to pray taking with Him Peter, James, and John (only in Matt and Mk), whom He instruct to pray and watch. He then went a bit further to pray privately, but returned several times only to find the three sleeping. Since Luke does not mention that Yeshua singled out Peter, James, and John, his retelling of the story makes it appear that all of the disciples were admonished to pray and that all of them were found sleeping by their Master.

It was at this time, i.e., now the 15th of Nisan and the Sabbath of the first day of *Chag HaMatzot*, when Yeshua and His disciples were on the Mount of Olives, that Judas came with a “great crowd” from the chief priests, scribes, and elders (Mk 14:43; Matt 26:47 mentions only chief priests and elders). According to Matthew and Mark, they were carrying swords and clubs. John writes that they were also carrying “lanterns and torches and weapons,” which would indicate that it was still dark when they arrived. After the altercation between Peter and the servant of the high priest, the disciples fled, leaving Yeshua to be taken by the mob.

All of the Synoptics indicate that they took Yeshua to the high priest, but only Matthew mentions that it was Caiaphas (26:57). John (18:13) says that they first took Yeshua to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, and Luke indicates that they took Him to the “high priest’s house,” which most likely means the place where the high priest conducted his civil duties. The Synoptics all mention that Peter followed at a distance (Matt 26:58; Mk 14:54; Lk 22:54) but only John notes that a second disciple accompanied Peter (Jn 18:15f). This “other disciple” (which was no doubt John himself) had entrance into the high priest’s quarters because he “was known to the high priest.” Once inside, he went back out to retrieve Peter, and the maid who attended the door questioned Peter about his association with Yeshua, which brought about Peter’s denial (Matt 26:69–74; Mk 14:66–72; Lk 22:54–60). Interestingly, all of the Synoptics mention that there was a fire in the courtyard by which the guards were warming themselves. Luke says that they “kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard” (περιαψάντων δὲ πῦρ ἐν μέσῳ

τῆς ἀλλῆς) where the Greek περιάπτω (*periapto*) could mean to kindle a new fire, but could just as easily mean to “add fuel” to an existing fire. This Greek word is found only once in the Lxx (3Mac 3.7) and here it is used metaphorically. It is not the word used by the Lxx to translate the Hebrew בָּעַר, *ba’ar*, “to kindle” in the Shabbat prohibition of the Torah (Ex 35:3). Here the Lxx has καίω, *kaio*. Thus, the presence of a fire in the courtyard of the high priest does not necessarily mean that the observance of the Festival Sabbath had been disregarded. It may have been that the fire was kindled before the Sabbath and had burned throughout the night. Our English translations, which use the term “kindle,” are interpretive.

Peter’s denial is recorded in all of the Gospels as is the notice that after he had denied that he was an associate of Yeshua, the rooster crowed:

Matthew 26:73–75	Mark 14:69–72	Luke 22:59–61	John 18:26–27
<p>A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away.” Then he began to curse and swear, “I do not know the man!” And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Yeshua had said, “Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.</p>	<p>The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, “This is one of them!” But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too.” But he began to curse and swear, “I do not know this man you are talking about!” Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Yeshua had made the remark to him, “Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.” And he began to weep.</p>	<p>After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, “Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, “Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.”</p>	<p>One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, *said, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?” Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.</p>

While all of the Gospels mention the crowing rooster as a fulfillment of Yeshua’s words, that Peter would deny Him, the stories are somewhat different. In the accounts of Matthew and Luke, Yeshua told Peter that “before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” Mark, however, has Peter denying Yeshua three times before the rooster crows twice.

In the rabbinic literature, the cockcrow is used as a general marking of time. But it is also interesting that at least some of the Sages interpreted the “cockcrow” to mean the voice of the Temple officer who summoned all priests, Levites, and Israelites to their respective duties. This is because the Hebrew גִּבּוֹר, *geber*, was used idiomatically to mean a “rooster” in addition to its most common meaning of “man, strong man.”

R. Kahana raised an objection: EVERY DAY ONE WOULD REMOVE THE ASHES FROM THE ALTAR AT COCKCROW OR ABOUT THAT TIME, EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER. BUT ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT AT MIDNIGHT AND ON THE FEASTS AT THE FIRST WATCH: Now if the thought should arise in you that midnight is a time fixed by the Torah, how could it be anticipated [or postponed]? — Rather said R. Johanan: By mere logical conclusion from the text ‘All the night’ would I not know that it means until the

morning, why then the teaching ‘until the morning’? Add another morning to the ‘morning of the night’ [i.e., daylight]. Hence every day one would remove the ashes at cockcrow, either before or after being ample [time]. On the Day of Atonement, when the high priest is weak, we do it about midnight and on the Feasts when many Israelites are present and many sacrifices are offered we do it from the first watch, as indeed the reason therefore is indicated: BEFORE THE COCKCROW [*keri’ath ha-geber*] APPROACHED, THE TEMPLE COURT WAS FULL OF ISRAELITES. What does ‘keri’ath ha-geber’ mean? — Rab said: The call of a man, R. Shila: The call of the cock. Rab came to the place of R. Shila, when there happened to be no interpreter to stand next to R. Shila, so Rab took the stand next to him and interpreted ‘keri’ath ha-geber’ as ‘the call of the man’. R. Shila said to him: Would you, Sir, interpret it as: Cockcrow! Rab replied: ‘A flute is musical to nobles, but give it to weavers, they will not accept it’. When I stood before R. Hiyya and interpreted ‘keri’ath ha-geber’ as the ‘call of the man’ he did not object to it and you say to me: Say, perhaps, the cock’s crow! He said: Sir, you are Rab, would you sit down, Sir! He replied: People say: If you have hired yourself away [to someone] pull his wool! Some say: Thus did he reply to him: One may promote a man in holy things, but not demote him. There is a teaching in accordance with Rab, and there is also a teaching in accord with R. Shila. There is a teaching in accord with Rab: What does Gebini the Temple crier call out: Arise, ye priests for your service, Levites for your platform, Israel for your post! And his voice was audible for three parasangs [1 parasang = 2.68 miles]. It happened that King Agrippa who came along travelling, heard his voice from three parasangs, and as he came home, he sent gifts to him. Nevertheless, the high priest is more excellent than even he, for the Master said: It has happened already that when he prayed ‘Oh Lord’ that his voice was heard in Jericho, and Rabbah b. Bar Hana said in the name of R. Johanan: From Jerusalem to Jericho is a distance of ten parasangs. (b.Yoma 20b; cf. also b.Tamid 26a)

But in some places it appears that by the term “cockcrow,” the Rabbis simply meant a time that was just prior to the rising of the sun:

Our Rabbis taught: Until when may one eat and drink [on the night preceding a fast]? Until the rise of dawn; this is the opinion of Rabbi. R. Eliezer b. Simeon says: Until cockcrow. Abaye said: This only holds good where a man had not yet finished his meal, but if he had finished his meal he may not eat again. (b.Ta’anit 12a)

What might these data mean for understanding the prophetic statement given to Peter, that he would deny Yeshua three times before the rooster crowed? If, in fact, the Temple officer’s calling out to the priests, Levites, and Israelites was understood idiomatically as the “call of the rooster,” then perhaps the point was that Peter’s denial of Yeshua would occur before the night was over, i.e., before the sunrise of the day. And if this were the case, then perhaps the initial call of the officer to those who would remove the ashes was the first “crowing,” and the call for those who begin the preparation for the morning sacrifices was the second one, as Luke has it. But even if the “rooster crow” is taken literally, the quote from b.Ta’anit 12a would still indicate that this had become a normal way of describing early morning before the rise of the dawn.

Given these data, it seems clear that Yeshua was taken from the garden by the handlers of the scribes and high priests before the sun had arisen on the 15th of Nisan. It was in the early morning hours of this Festival Shabbat that He was brought to Caiaphas and when Peter denied Him. As we shall see, the narrative of the Synoptics makes it clear that Yeshua was crucified on this same day, i.e., the 15th of Nisan. Thus, from this perspective of the Synoptic Gospels, it is clear that Yeshua and His disciples ate a Pesach seder, beginning before sunset on the 14th of Nisan. The sunset marked the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th of Nisan. They finished their Seder meal before midnight on the 15th and went across the Kidron valley to the Mount of Olives. During the night hours, before the sunrise, Yeshua was taken by force from the garden to the quarters of the high priest, Caiaphas, where He was first questioned. Peter and “another disciple” (i.e., John) followed, with John going into the building. It was here, in the hours before sunrise, that Peter denied Yeshua and the “cock crow,” perhaps the loud summons made by the Temple office, was sounded, fulfilling the previous word of Yeshua to Peter.

2. *What was the Time of Yeshua’s Crucifixion?*

Following the interrogation in the “house” of Caiaphas, the chief priests and elders decided to take Yeshua to Pilate. It seems most likely that they did so because their false witnesses were in place to charge Yeshua with actions that would have fomented a riot, i.e., His alleged plot to destroy the Temple (which could have been understood to mean deposing the current priesthood). Since it was the charge of Roman governors to squelch any potential riot of the Jews, the chief priests and elders had found a way to get rid of Yeshua indirectly, i.e., via Rome’s political power, rather than incurring the wrath of people against them directly.

Matthew 27:1–2	Mark 15:1	Luke 22:66–23:1	John 18:28
Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Yeshua to put Him to death; and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.	Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Yeshua, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate.	When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying... Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate.	Then they led Yeshua from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

In Matthew, the word *πρωία* (*proia*), “morning,” most often refers to early morning, or just as the sun is rising. This is corroborated by Mark’s “early in the morning” (*εὐθὺς πρωῒ*). Luke simply has “when it was day” (*καὶ ὡς ἐγένετο ἡμέρα*), using the word “day” to mean “daylight.” John uses the same term, *proia*, which the NASB simply translates as “it was early.” We may also note Mk 13:35 as possibly indicating four watches of the night, with *proia* being the final watch, ending with dawn:

Stay alert, then, because you do not know when the owner of the house will return—whether during evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or at dawn—

γρηγορεῖτε οὖν· οὐκ οἴδατε γὰρ πότε ὁ κύριος τῆς οἰκίας ἔρχεται, ἢ ὅψε ἢ μεσονύκτιον ἢ ἄλεκτοροφωνίας ἢ πρωί,

John makes it clear that they took Yeshua from the meeting place of the Sanhedrin, which was in the Chamber of Hewn Stones,¹ to the Praetorium, the head quarters of the *praefectus praetorii*, a Roman official who resided as the supreme administrator and judge of a region. The praetorium was usually (though not always) the residence of the prefect or governor.² Several locations have been historically suggested for the Praetorium in Jerusalem during the early 1st Century. One is the Antonia Fortress, built on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount. Another is the palace built by Herod, referred to as the “Upper Palace,” which was located in the area of today’s Citadel (near the Jaffa Gate). An early Christian tradition held that the Praetorium was on the west slope of the Tyropoean Valley, just opposite the southwest corner of the Temple enclosure. But for our current study, the point to be made is that it would have taken only a short time to move from the normal meeting place of the Sanhedrin to the Praetorium.

More important for our purposes is the notice given by John, namely, that the chief priests did not enter the Praetorium for fear that they would contract ritual impurity, “so that they might eat the Passover” (φάγωσιν τὸ πάσχα). This would indicate that as far as John is concerned, the sacrifice and eating of the Pesach lamb had not yet occurred, meaning that he describes these events as taking place on the 14th of Nisan, not the 15th. If this is the case, then John’s “Last Supper” was not a Pesach seder, for it would have occurred the evening before the Pesach lambs were slaughtered in the Temple. Moreover, the term τὸ πάσχα, “the Pesach” could only refer to the Pesach lamb and not to the Chagigah or Festival sacrifices offered in the Temple on the seven days of *Chag HaMatzot* (cf. Num 28:16f), for the simple reason that the Chagigot were whole-burnt offerings (חֹלֶבֶת, *olah*), no part of which were eaten by the priests or the people. This would make it appear that John could not have been saying that they stayed out of the Praetorium because they wanted to eat from the Festival sacrifices. (But see further comments below.)

All of the Gospels give evidence of Yeshua’s trial before Pilate, but John is the most expansive (cf. Matt 27:11–14; Mk 15:2–5; Lk 23:2–5; Jn 18:29–38). Only Luke, however, includes the notice that Pilate, after examining Yeshua and finding no crime for which He should be punished, learned that He was a Galilean, and therefore under Herod’s rule. Hoping to shift the responsibility to Herod, or perhaps to win some favor with him, Pilate therefore sent Yeshua to be examined by him, since Herod was in Jerusalem at the time (Lk 23:7). But Herod found nothing of substance, and after mocking Yeshua, sent Him back to Pilate having arrayed Yeshua in “gorgeous apparel” (Lk 23:11).

Back in the Praetorium, Pilate announced that he could fine no crime worthy of death by which to charge Yeshua, and that he would therefore administer flogging and release Him. But the chief priests and elders, along with others who had gathered, protested such an arrangement. As a result, Pilate resorted to a second tactic: the custom of releasing a prisoner at Pesach.³ Matthew, Mark, and John relate this scene, while Luke has Pilate

1 cf. b.*Rosh HaShanah* 31a.

2 Bargil Pixner, “Praetorium” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5.447–49.

3 The whole question of the historicity of such a tradition will be dealt with in the commentary on 27:15f.

making the offer without explaining the custom (Lk 23:17 was added by later scribes to help make sense of the ongoing narrative in Luke¹).

A known criminal, Barabbas, was apparently scheduled for execution, and perhaps was already expected to be released at the festival. Pilate offers to release Yeshua instead, but the chief priests and elders had already persuaded the people to request the release of Barabbas and to insist on the execution of Yeshua. And this is what took place: the crowd clamored for the execution of Yeshua.

John alone notes that previously Pilate had become concerned because the people had charged Yeshua with the religious crime of calling Himself the “Son of God” (Jn 19:7). For Rome to execute a Jewish person for religious crimes could certainly foment a riot. After all, Rome had given the Jews the right to worship according to their ancestral traditions, and therefore crimes relating to religious issues were in the hands of Israel’s leaders, not Roman authorities. But the chief priests and elders, along with the people were accusing Yeshua of tyranny against Rome, since they said He had proclaimed Himself king in the place of Caesar. Wanting to get to the bottom of the issue, Pilate took Yeshua for further questioning. John alone gives us this account (Jn 19:13f) and offers this chronological note:

Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Yeshua out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour... (Jn 19:14–15)

The phrase “it was the day of preparation for the Passover” translates the Greek ἡ δὲ παρασκευὴ τοῦ πάσχα, where παρασκευὴ (*paraskeue*) means either a preparation day for a festival, or the preparation day for the weekly Sabbath.² This would be the day before the first day of a festival, or Friday of each week. Josephus used *paraskeue* with this meaning:

...it seemed good to me and my counsellors, according to the sentence and oath of the people of Rome, that the Jews have liberty to make use of their own customs, according to the law of their forefathers, as they made use of them under Hyrcanus, the high priest of Almighty God; and that their sacred money be not touched, but be sent to Jerusalem, and that it be committed to the care of the receivers at Jerusalem; and that they be not obliged to go before any judge on the Sabbath day, nor on the day of the preparation to it (ἡ τῆ πρὸ αὐτῆς παρασκευῆ ἀπὸ ὥρας ἐνάτης), after the ninth hour (i.e., 3:00pm); (*Ant.* 16.163)

The Greek term *paraskeue* is found six times in the Apostolic Scriptures (Matt 27:62; Mk 15:42; Lk 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42), all in connection with the Passion of Yeshua. The three times the word is found in the Lxx, its meaning is merely “preparation” but without reference to a day (Judith 2:17; 4:5; 2Mac 15:21). In Modern Greek, *paraskeue* is the common word for “Friday,” a usage which doubtlessly derived from early Christianity. In John 19:15, the “preparation day” is specifically said to be for the Passover, which most likely

1 See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (UBS, 1971), 179–80.

2 So BDAG, “παρασκευή”.

means the day before the Festival Sabbath, i.e., the first day of Unleavened Bread, or the 14th of Nisan. This would coincide with the earlier notice in John that those who took Yeshua to the Praetorium remained outside so as not to become defiled, for they wanted to eat the Pesach. John further notes that the final interrogation by Pilate was conducted at the sixth hour, that is 12:00 noon.

Pilate then sought to release Yeshua another time, but the crowds would have nothing of the sort. Consigned to the will of the crowd, Pilate ceremonially washed his hands as a public denial of any wrong doing in the matter (only in Matt 27:24), released Barabbas, and gave Yeshua over to be crucified (Matt 27:25–26; Mk 15:15; Lk 23:24–25; Jn 19:16).

Having consigned Yeshua to be crucified, He was scourged (the exact timing of the scourging is not certain), then the soldiers of the Praetorian guard had Him arrayed with a purple robe and crown of thorns, put a reed in His hand as a mock of His kingship, and began beating Him. They then stripped Him of the mock royal garments, put His own clothes back on Him, and led Him forth to be crucified.

The story of Simon of Cyrene, who was conscripted to carry the cross, is found in all of the Synoptics but missing in John (Matt 27:31–32; Mk 15:20–21; Lk 23:26–32). Only Luke (23:26–32) gives an account of the conversation between Yeshua and the crowd who followed Him on His way to Golgatha. All the Gospels recount that two criminals were crucified at the same time, that lots were cast for His garments, and that an inscription was placed over Him identifying Him as the “King of the Jews” (Matt 27:33–38; Mk 15:22–27; Lk 23:33–34; Jn 19:17b–27). Only Mark, however, gives notice of the hour of crucifixion: “And it was the third hour (9:00am), when they crucified Him.” This is obviously at variance with John’s account, for already we have seen that John puts the trial of Yeshua at the sixth hour (12:00 noon, cf. Jn 19:14). The following parallel table gives the notices of “hours” in the Gospel accounts, showing the consistency of the Synoptics and the variance of John:

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
	15:25 It was the third hour (9 am) when they crucified Him.		
27:45 Now from the sixth hour (noon) darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour (3 pm).	15:33 When the sixth hour (noon) came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour (3 pm).	23:44 It was now about the sixth hour (noon), and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour (3 pm),	19:14 Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour (noon). And he said to the Jews, “Behold, your King!”
27:46 About the ninth hour Yeshua cried out with a loud voice, saying, “ELI, ELI, LAMA SABAC - THANI?” that is, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”	15:34 At the ninth hour Yeshua cried out with a loud voice, “ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” which is translated, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”		

Interestingly, and as one would expect, there are variants in the Greek manuscripts which suggest the attempts of scribes to reconcile the discrepancies in timing. For instance, a number of manuscripts (ⲛ² D⁵ L Δ Ψ l 844 pc) have John

19:14 read "...it was about the third hour." Likewise, a few manuscripts have a variant in Mk 15:25, changing "third hour" to "sixth hour" (Θ *pc sy^{hmg}*). But the vast majority of manuscripts have Mark using "third hour" and John, "sixth hour," and these readings are clearly to be preferred as original.¹ Therefore, not only do the Synoptics and John differ as to which day the crucifixion occurred, they are also at variance as to the time of the day.

All of the Gospels record a final cry by Yeshua before He died, but only Luke and John tell us what He said. Luke records Him saying, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Lk 23:46) while in John His final words are "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). None of the Gospels record the exact time of day when Yeshua expired. The Synoptics record the Temple curtain being torn, while Matthew alone makes mention of the earthquake that occurred at Yeshua's final breath and the resurrection of many who had died (Matt 27:51–53; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45). All three of the Synoptics include the confession of the Centurion (Matt 27:54; Mk 15:39; Lk 23:47).

Only John tells us about attempts of the soldiers to hasten the death of those being crucified in order to remove them before the Shabbat, but Mark also notes that it was the preparation day for the Shabbat:

Mark	John
When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Yeshua. (15:42–43)	Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; but coming to Yeshua, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. (19:31–34)

What are we to understand by John's note that the Sabbath was a "high day"? The Greek is ἦν γὰρ μεγάλη ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνου τοῦ σαββάτου, literally, "for great was that day of Sabbath (or week)." Nearly all commentators understand this to mean that the first day of Passover, i.e., the Feast of Unleavened Bread, fell on the weekly Shabbat, so that it was considered doubly holy, or at least there was a heightened urgency to have the bodies removed.² Godet mentions some who attempt to reconcile John with the Synoptics by arguing that the Sabbath referred to here was actually the second day of the Festival (i.e., the 16th of Nisan) when the Sheaf ceremony was conducted, an interpretation which Godet himself considers highly suspect.³ Given the fact that John has already noted the day on which Yeshua was taken before Pilate

1 See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (UBS, 1971), 252–53.

2 See, for example, Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols in *The Anchor Bible Commentary* (Doubleday, 1970), 2.934.

3 F. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2 vols. (Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), 2.390.

to be “the day of preparation for the Passover” (19:14), it is understandable why nearly all commentators interpret the phrase “great (or high) Sabbath” to be the weekly Sabbath on which the opening day of the Festival (also a Sabbath) happened to fall that year. This, of course, undergirds the general consensus of Christian commentators that the crucifixion occurred on a Friday, which was itself the preparation day for both the weekly Shabbat as well as the Festival Shabbat. There is nothing, as far as I know, however, that parallels this expression in the rabbinic literature, i.e., that when a Festival Shabbat falls on a weekly Shabbat, that day is referred to as the “great Shabbat” or “high Shabbat.”

All of the Gospels include the story of Joseph of Arimathea, who seeks permission from Pilate to remove the body of Yeshua (Matt 27:57–61; Mk 15:42–47; Lk 23:50–56; Jn 19:38–42). Matthew and Mark both note that he came “when it was evening,” that is, in the later afternoon before sunset, to take the body of Yeshua. Mark 15:46 indicates that Joseph “bought a linen shroud and took down the body” (καὶ ἀγοράσας σινδόνα καθελὼν αὐτόν). The Greek verb “to buy” here is an aorist participle, and could just as easily be translated “having purchased a linen shroud....” The verb itself does not necessarily tell us when he purchased, only that he did so prior to coming to retrieve the body of Yeshua.

John, however, includes the notice of Nicodemus’ involvement with Joseph. There (19:39f) we discover that Nicodemus came with about 100 lbs of spices and they actually wrapped the body of Yeshua in linen, adding the spices as well. They then put the body in the new tomb, which belonged to Joseph, and rolled the rock to cover the tomb entrance (Matt 27:60f; Mk 15:42f; Lk 23:50f; Jn 19:38f). Luke reminds us that it was “the preparation day, and the Sabbath was beginning” (Lk 23:54). John gives the location of the tomb as being “in the garden” which was next to Golgatha (Jn 19:41) and also reminds us that it was “the Jewish day of Preparation” (ἐκεῖ οὖν διὰ τὴν παρασκευὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων), or literally, “the preparation day of the Jews.”

The Synoptics inform us that some of the women who had followed Yeshua had waited to see where His body would be laid to rest. Matthew (27:61) and Mark (15:47) specifically name Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” (whom Mark identifies as “the mother of Joses”). Luke simply refers to “women who had followed Yeshua” (Lk 23:55). Their purpose was to prepare spices and oils for anointing the body (Lk 23:56). Apparently they were unaware of the fact that Nicodemus and Joseph had already taken care of that. Regardless, they left the tomb to prepare the spices, and then waited until after the Shabbat (weekly, Festival, or weekly/Festival) to return to the tomb to use them in regard to a proper burial of Yeshua’s body.

Only Matthew contains the notice that the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate with their concern that Yeshua’s disciples might attempt to steal His body and “fake” the resurrection of which He had formerly spoken:

Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, “Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I am to rise again.’ Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.” Pilate said

to them, “You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how.” And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone. (Matt 27:62–66)

The use of the “three days” motif is interesting in this text. Yeshua’s adversaries claim to remember that He said “after three days I am to rise again” (μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἐγείρομαι). Then they make this request: “give order for the grave to be made secure until the third day” (ἕως τῆς τρίτης ἡμέρας). The use of “after” (μετά, *meta*) and “until” (ἕως, *heos*) seems strange. It appears as though their request to guard the tomb would end at the close of the second day, i.e., *until* the third day. But they claim to have heard Yeshua say that He would rise *after* the third day. Does this hearken back to our original text in Matthew (12:40), that like Jonah, Yeshua would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth?

3. *What was the time of Yeshua’s Resurrection?*

As noted above, only Matthew (27:62–66) records the request of the Pharisees and chief priests to Pilate, that the tomb in which Yeshua was placed be guarded. But the other Synoptics include the notice of the women observing the place of burial, and that they prepared spices to make a proper burial for their Master.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid. (Mark 15:47)

Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. (Luke 23:55–56)

This final notice in Luke, that “...on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment” is paralleled in John by the notice that they did not want the bodies to remain on the cross during the Shabbat (19:31f). The fact that the Shabbat was quickly approaching is noted by John as one of the reasons the garden tomb was used—its close proximity afforded a quick burial for the body of Yeshua:

Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Yeshua there. (John 19:42)

There is, of course, an ambiguity in the terms “preparation day” and “Shabbat,” for if the first day of the Festival (the 15th of Nisan) fell on a day other than the weekly Shabbat, then two Shabbats and possibly two preparation days would have occurred in close proximity to each other.

The following tables display the various possibilities, depending upon whether the 14th of Nisan fell on a Tuesday, a Wednesday, a Thursday, or a Friday.

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Nisan 14	Nisan 15	Nisan 16	Nisan 17	Nisan 18
Preparation day	Festival Shabbat		Preparation day	Shabbat

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Nisan 14	Nisan 15	Nisan 16	Nisan 17
	preparation day	Festival Shabbat	preparation day	Shabbat

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		Nisan 14	Nisan 15	Nisan 16
		preparation day	Festival Shabbat preparation day	Shabbat

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			Nisan 14	Nisan 15
			double preparation day	double Shabbat

All of the Gospel accounts indicate that the day of Yeshua's crucifixion was a preparation day, though the manner in which this is reported is not uniform:

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
<p>And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave. Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate... (27:59–62)</p>	<p>When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Yeshua. (15:42–43)</p>	<p>And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Yeshua. And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. (23:50–54)</p>	<p>Therefore when Yeshua had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.... So they took the body of Yeshua and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Yeshua there. (19:30–31; 40–42)</p>

Note that in each case, the authors feel the need to define the day with additional phrases. Matthew cannot simply say “on the next day” but feels compelled to add “the day after the preparation.” Mark is not content with simply saying “it was the preparation day.” He adds further explanation: “that is, the day before the Sabbath.” Is he adding this for readers who are entirely unfamiliar with the fact that a preparation day always precedes a Sabbath (whether a Festival or weekly Sabbath)? Luke also feels a necessity to inform us not only that “the Sabbath was about to begin,” but also that “it was the preparation day.” If the Sabbath was about to begin, is it not self-evident that it was the preparation day? John likewise adds an interesting comment. He refers to the preparation day as “the Jewish day of preparation” (διὰ τὴν παρασκευὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων), which clearly sounds as though he is writing to a non-Jewish readership. Or might these additional comments indicate that the Gospel writers themselves recognized the ambiguity that adheres in the terms “preparation day” and “Sabbath” when dealing with Festivals that fall close to, or in connection with, the weekly Sabbath?

Another curious issue arises in Matthew’s account: he alone mentions that the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate to request that the tomb be guarded. Yet this audience with Pilate is clearly said to be “on the next day, the day after the preparation.” This means that as far as Matthew is concerned, the request as well as stationing of the guard and sealing of the tomb all occurred on a Shabbat, either the Festival Shabbat or the weekly, or both (if the Festival Shabbat fell on the weekly Shabbat). But would not the chief priests have been busy with the Temple rituals, especially during a Festival like Pesach? Does it seem likely that they would have forfeited their involvement in the Temple rituals in order to secure Yeshua’s tomb? It certainly is possible, but it does raise questions.

The Gospels all include notice of the women approaching the tomb after Sabbath, and each one specifies that it was on the first day of the week:

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. (28:1)	When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. (16:1–2)	But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. (24:1)	Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. (20:1)

But though there is unanimity among all of the Gospel accounts as to the day, i.e., the first day of the week, at first reading there appears to be conflict over the time of the day. Some of this may be resolved by paying closer attention to the Greek that stands behind our English translations. For instance, in Matt 28:1, the phrase “as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” (τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων) corresponds quite closely to the terminology used in the Mishnah to describe the beginning of the day, after sunset:

On the night preceding the fourteenth [of Nisan] they seek out leaven by the light of a candle.

אור לארבעה עשר בודקין את החמץ לאור הנר

Note that the Hebrew reads “the light (אור, *’or*) of the fourteenth they seek out leaven by the light of a candle.” Thus, the “light of the fourteenth” means “the beginning of the fourteenth.” If this corresponds to Matthew’s words, then when he writes “as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week,” he means “as the first day of the week was just beginning,” which, from a Jewish perspective, would have been just after sunset at the end of the Shabbat.

Mark indicates that they came to the tomb “when the sun had risen” (ἀνατείλαντος τοῦ ἡλίου). The majority of manuscripts have the Greek word “risen” as an aorist participle, which would suggest that the sun had already risen before the women arrived at the tomb. A few manuscripts, however, have a present participle (ἀνατελλόντος), which would give the sense of “as the sun was rising.” This could have been a way of expressing the Hebrew “the light of the first day” (as in the Mishnah above), and thus corresponding in a broad sense to Matthew’s “as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” (meaning “as the day was first beginning, i.e., immediately following sunset).

Luke’s terminology (24:1) is altogether different. He uses ὄρθρου βαθέως (*orthrou batheos*). The Greek *orthro* means “very early,” or “dawn,” while *batheos* means “deep” or “extreme.” Thus, the common English translations have “very early in the morning” or “at early dawn.” Once again, this could be general language reflecting “as the day began to dawn,” that is, at the very beginning of the day (following sunset). It would appear possible, however, that the Hebrew idiom (“the light of such-and-such a day” = the beginning of the day, following sunset) was not sufficiently conveyed to Gentile readers by the language employed by the Gospel writers, and that this gave rise to the early tradition that Yeshua arose in the early hours following sunrise on the first day of the week. It is interesting that the only explicit statement to the effect that Yeshua arose on the first day of the week is in the longer ending of Mark (16:9), itself suspect on textual grounds. This, among many other things, strengthens the suspicion that this longer ending of Mark is the product of the later emerging Church rather than from the hand of Mark himself.

But the most significant point to be made, and upon which, once again, all of the Gospels agree, is that when the women do reach the tomb, it is empty. Thus, Yeshua’s resurrection clearly takes place before the women arrive at the tomb. Or to say it another way: the time at which the women arrive at the tomb gives us no firm indication of the exact time of Yeshua’s resurrection. Moreover, if they did arrive at the tomb shortly after the first day of the week had begun, that is, in the darkness that follows sunset, then it is entirely possible that Yeshua actually arose at the end of the Shabbat.

One obvious question is why the women did not encounter any of the Temple guards who were supposedly commissioned to keep watch over the tomb. If, as all of the Gospels suggest, Yeshua was put into the tomb at the close of the “preparation day,” then according to any reckoning, the following two days (at a minimum) would have been considered to fall within the scope of the “three days” prophecy that had prompted the need for a guard in the first place. Matthew alone gives us an answer: an earthquake had accompanied the descent of an “angel of the Lord” (ἄγγελος κυρίου) at the location of the tomb. This caused the guards to “become like dead men” (Matt 28:1–4), which might indicate that they fled the area.

When the women do arrive at the tomb, the Gospels give various re-

ports about their conversation with the angel (Matt), the young man (Mark) or two men (Luke). In each case, however, the women are instructed to go and tell the disciples what they have seen, i.e., that Yeshua had risen. In the accounts of both Luke and John, the message of Yeshua's resurrection is first given to Peter (Luke) or to Peter and John (John), and they run to the tomb to verify what they had heard (Lk 24:9–12; Jn 20:2–10).

In the Gospel narratives of this pericope, we see only one notice that pertains to our questions of chronology. In Luke's account of the conversation between the women and the two men, we read:

He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." (Lk 24:6–7)

Note the phrase "and the third day rise again" (καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστῆναι). Here, as in every other place in Matthew and Luke where the "third day" is used in reference to the resurrection of Yeshua, the simple dative is used without a preposition.¹ Mark, however, has "after three days" (μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας, 9:31; 10:34). The dative of time simply references a point of time relative to the action of the main verb.² While we might normally understand this to be "on or during the third day," it could mean "in reference to the third day," meaning at its close or after its completion.

We find the "third day" language twice in Luke's recounting of the Road to Emmaus story. Two disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a village about seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. Luke informs us that this happened on "that very day," which is presumably a reference to the earlier narrative in which it is stated that the women came to the tomb "on the first day of the week." Thus, the most natural reading is that the conversation between these two disciples and Yeshua occurred on the first day of the week.

Yeshua had hidden His identity from the two (24:16) and so engaged in conversation with them as a stranger. As they talked to each other, Yeshua asked about the substance of their conversation. One of them, named Cleopas, explained their disappointment at what had taken place in regard to "Yeshua the Nazarene," how He was a prophet, mighty in word and deed, yet how He had been delivered up for crucifixion by chief priests and rulers. Then he makes this statement (v. 21):

But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened (καὶ σὺν πᾶσι τοῦτοις τρίτην ταύτην ἡμέραν ἄγει ἀφ' οὗ ταῦτα ἐγένετο.)

Taken at face value, this seems clearly to indicate that the first day of the week was reckoned by these two disciples as the "third day." What is more, their despondency seems to be linked to the fact that, being the third day,

1 cf. Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 46.

2 See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan, 1996), 155–57; cf. Blass-DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Univ of Chicago, 1961), 107–8, §200–201.

they should have already witnessed His resurrection and had not. They were apparently leaving the city of Jerusalem bewildered that Yeshua had been unable to keep His promise regarding His own resurrection. Did they understand the “third day” resurrection promise to mean “by the third day,” in the same sense that we understand בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, *bayom hash’vi’i*, “on [=by] the seventh day” of Gen 2:2, “And God finished by the seventh day His work which He had done”? In other words, did they expect that Yeshua should have arisen from the grave *before* the third day commenced, just as God ceased from His labors *before* the onset of the seventh day? It would seem that this is at least a possibility given the language they use to describe their deep disappointment. If this is the case, then their words may well reflect a misunderstanding of the third day prophecy, as well as (apparently) either being unaware of the Jonah sign, or else interpreting it differently than requiring a 72 hour span of time for Yeshua to be in the tomb.

In the end, we cannot be certain, based upon the data given to us in the Gospels, of the exact time of Yeshua’s resurrection. Clearly He is alive on the first day of the week. But the best we can say is that when the women arrived at the tomb, early on the first day of the week (perhaps just after the close of the weekly Shabbat), He had already risen. That could place His resurrection either at the end of the Shabbat, or in the first hours of the first day of the week. Whatever else may be said about the chronology of Yeshua’s death and resurrection, the very ending of the weekly Shabbat or the early hours of the first day of the week clearly form the *terminus ad quem* of Yeshua’s time in the tomb.

4. Is John’s account irreconcilable with the account of the Synoptics?

Setting aside, for now, the issue of just how long Yeshua was in the tomb, we would do well to reassess the long-standing contention that John cannot be reconciled with the Synoptics in terms of the chronology of the passion week. Generally, this presumption is based upon the fact that 1) John has the “Last Supper” a day earlier than when the Passover seder would have been held, and 2) that his statement regarding the chief priests, that they would not enter the Praetorium because they did not want to risk becoming ritually unclean, since they wanted to “eat the Passover,” seems clearly to indicate that the Passover meal (seder) had not yet been eaten.

With regard to the first issue, some would contend that Yeshua, as the Messiah, had the authority to change the timing of the Pesach meal and to hold it a day earlier. That, of course, is based upon the *mistaken* notion that Yeshua disregarded or otherwise considered the Torah to be obsolete in light of His having brought the Kingdom. Others simply suggest that Yeshua did not celebrate the Pesach seder, but rather had a “fellowship meal” with His disciples in anticipation of His own sacrifice which would be the fulfillment of the Pesach sacrifice and of the entire celebration of Pesach. But there are telling issues against this. First, the fact that the meal is eaten in Jerusalem despite the large crowds and not in Bethany (Jn 18:1, cp. 12:1f) is telling. If the “Last Supper” is merely a fellowship meal, why go to all of the trouble to have it in Jerusalem?

Second, the fact that the meal goes well into the night marks it as different from other meals, and as clearly reminiscent of a Pesach seder. Third, John’s account indicates that Yeshua and His disciples reclined rather than sat for the meal (cf. Jn 13:12, 23, 25). That is the posture prescribed for the

seder, not for ordinary meals. Given these data, it still seems far more probable that John is, in fact, describing a Pesach seder as the “Last Supper” Yeshua ate with His disciples.

Third, the fact that Yeshua tells Judas to do what he was about to do and to “do it quickly” is more understandable if they were beginning their meal on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan rather than on the 13th. For if the morsel he received from Yeshua was the bitter herbs, this could have occurred early in the seder, before the sun had set and the 15th of Nisan had entered in. Therefore, when the disciples heard the admonition “go quickly,” it is understandable why they would have thought Yeshua was telling Judas to buy things quickly, before the Shabbat arrived. If it had been the evening of the 13th, there would have been no reason to do things quickly. The Festival Shabbat would have been a day away, and even the Mishnah tells us that it was the common practice to engage in commerce up until noon on the 14th of Nisan.¹ Thus, if the disciples heard Yeshua’s command to act “quickly,” and this in turn sparked the idea in their minds that Yeshua had sent Judas for a last-minute purchase regarding the Festival, the need for such haste would only make sense if the Festival Shabbat was near at hand.

The second issue that is taken to indicate John understands the Last Supper to be on the evening of the 13th rather than the 14th of Nisan, is his statement regarding the chief priests: “...and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover” (Jn 18:28). At first reading, it appears that the trial of Yeshua is being held on the day before the Pesach seders would take place. But is the phrase “eat the Passover” (φάγωσιν τὸ πάσχα) restricted in reference to the Pesach lamb, or does it include eating the festival offerings that worshippers would bring?

The language of Deut 16:1–4 may help us in answering this question:

Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover to Adonai your God, for in the month of Abib Adonai your God brought you out of Egypt by night. You shall sacrifice the Passover to Adonai your God from the flock and the herd, in the place where Adonai chooses to establish His name. You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt. For seven days no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh which you sacrifice on the evening of the first day shall remain overnight until morning.

שְׁמֹר אֶת־חֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב וְעָשִׂיתָ פֶּסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב הוֹצִיאֲךָ יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לַיְלָה: וְזָבַחְתָּ פֶּסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ צֹאן וּבָקָר בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה
לְשֹׁפֵן שְׁמוֹ שֵׁם: לֹא־תֹאכַל עָלָיו חֶמֶץ שְׁבַע־יָמִים תֹּאכַל־עָלָיו מִצּוֹת לֶחֶם עֲנִי כִּי
בְּחֹפְזוֹן יֵצְאָתָּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יוֹם יֵצִאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:
וְלֹא־יֵרָאֶה לְךָ שָׂאֵר בְּכָל־גְּבֻלְךָ שְׁבַע־יָמִים וְלֹא־יֵלִין מִן־הַבָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר תִּזְבַּח בְּעֶרְבַּ בַּיּוֹם
הָרִאשׁוֹן לַבֹּקֶר:

First, we may note the manner in which the term פֶּסַח, *pesach*, is being used in this paragraph. The text states that “you shall sacrifice the Passover (פֶּסַח) to Adonai your God *from the flock and the herd*....” The fact that the Pesach

¹ m.Pesachim 4.1, 5.

is said to be from the flock *and from the herd* means that the term פֶּסַח is used here to mean more than just the Pesach lamb which is sacrificed at the beginning of the Festival.

Second, the text goes to say: “You shall not eat leavened bread *with it* (עִלְיִי); seven days you shall eat *with it* (עִלְיִי) unleavened bread.” The clear antecedent of עִלְיִי is the previously mentioned פֶּסַח, meaning that the *pesach* is here envisioned as being eaten all seven days. Yet it is equally clear that the sacrifice offered on the first day, i.e., the Pesach lamb, the meat of which is eaten at the Pesach seder, is not to be eaten after the morning of the next day. Given these data, it is clear that the term פֶּסַח is used to cover not only the initial sacrifice of the Pesach lamb, but also all of the peace offerings and whole burnt offerings brought to the Festival by the throngs.¹ According to Ex 23:14–17 and Deut 16:16–17, those who came to Jerusalem for the three pilgrimage festivals (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot) were not to come “empty-handed,” meaning they were to bring sacrifices. These sacrifices included peace offerings (שְׁלָמִים, *sh’lamim*), which meant that the meat from such sacrifices was eaten both by the priests as well as the common people. Apparently the language of Deut 16:2-3 includes these festival offerings under the general heading of “the Passover” (פֶּסַח).

This may have a direct bearing, therefore, upon the text in John 18:28. For when John reports that the chief priests did not enter the Praetorium because they wanted to remain clean in order to “eat the Passover,” he could be referring to the *sh’lamim* offerings that would have been offered throughout the seven day festival and not just to the Pesach lamb slaughtered on the 14th of Nisan. For by the words of the Torah itself, the festival *sh’lamim* sacrifices are referred to as “the Passover.”

5. The perspective of each of the Gospel writers

It remains for us, then, to take each of the Gospel writers separately, and to discern from each of their narratives how the chronology of the Passion week is presented. This is done in the following tables.

1 cf. m.Betza 2.4.

Matthew			
14 Nisan (Thur)	15 Nisan (Fri) (begins sunset on Thur)	16 Nisan (Sat) (begins sunset Fri)	17 Nisan (Sun) (begins sunset Sat)
<p>26:17 - First day of unleavened bread – disciples prepare the Passover 26:20 - “when evening came... Y’shua reclined at table with His disciples</p>	<p>26:30 – “After singing a hymn they went to the Mt of Olives 26:47f – Judas arrives with crowd; betrays Yeshua; Yeshua seized. 26:57 – Yeshua taken to “house” of Caiaphas – Peter follows, stays in courtyard 26:74f – Peter denies Yeshua; rooster crows 27:1f – “when morning had come...” Yeshua taken to Pilate & trial before Pilate 27:26 – Pilate releases Barabas and hands over Yeshua to be crucified 27:35 – Yeshua crucified on Golgatha 27:45 – sixth hour (noon) to ninth hour (3:00pm) there was darkness 27:46 – at the ninth hour (3:00pm) Yeshua cries out Ps 22:1 27:50 – cries out again and yields up His spirit 27:57 – when evening had come, Joseph takes Yeshua’s body and puts it into the tomb</p>	<p>27:62f – “Now on the next day, <u>the day after the preparation...</u>”¹ Chief priests & Pharisees go to Pilate to ask for the tomb to be guarded; guard is put in place and tomb is sealed</p>	<p>28:1f – “After the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week...” – women come to the tomb 28:2f – women meet angel; Yeshua has risen 28:8 – women leave tomb to tell the disciples 28:9f – Yeshua meets them on their way; they worship Him; He instructs them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee 28:11f - guards report to chief priests what had happened; conspiracy that disciples stole the body 28:16f – disciples meet Yeshua on the designated mountain; given “Great Commission.”</p>

¹ Since the next day is specifically said to be “the day after the preparation,” this means that the 15th of Nisan was a preparation day. This could only be the case if the 15th of Nisan fell on a Friday, the preparation day for the weekly Shabbat.

Mark			
14 Nisan (Thur)	15 Nisan (Fri) (begins sunset Thur)	16 Nisan (Sat) (begins sunset Fri)	17 Nisan (Sun) (begins sunset Sat)
<p>14:12f – On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, “Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?”</p> <p>• disciples prepare Passover</p> <p>14:17f “When it was evening He came with the Twelve ...</p>	<p>14:26 – After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mt of Olives</p> <p>14:32 – “They came to the place called Gethsemane...”</p> <p>14:43f – Judas comes with crowd; betrays Yeshua; Yeshua taken to high priest, etc.; Peter follows</p> <p>14:55f – trial before Council; Peter denies Yeshua; rooster crows once; Peter denies again; rooster crows a second time</p> <p>15:1f – “early in the morning” they take Yeshua to Pilate; Pilate interrogates Yeshua; releases Barabbas; hands Yeshua over to be crucified.</p> <p>15:16f – Yeshua taken into the Praetorium.</p> <p>15:22f – brought Yeshua to Golgatha</p> <p>15:25 – “It was the third hour (9:00am) when they crucified Him.”¹</p> <p>15:33 – “When the sixth hour (noon) came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour (3:00pm).”</p> <p>15:34 – At the ninth hour (3:00pm) Yeshua cried out Ps 22:1.</p> <p>15:42f – “When evening had already come, because <u>it was the preparation day</u>,² that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph...” secures Yeshua’s body, takes it from the cross, puts it into the tomb.</p>		<p>16:1f – “When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.”</p> <p>16:5 – they see a young man; he informs them that Yeshua has risen; instructs them to go tell the disciples</p> <p>[long ending of Mark is not included]</p>

¹ This could be understood to mean “it was the third hour *when they sentenced Him to be crucified*” or “it was the third hour *when they began the process of crucifying Him*” (i.e., scourging, preparing the cross, etc.).

² Since the day is clearly the one following the day on which the Passover lamb was being sacrificed (14:12), and since it is designated here as “the preparation day, that is the day before the Sabbath,” this could only be the case if the day was Friday.

Luke			
14 Nisan (Thur)	15 Nisan (Fri) (begins sunset Thur)	16 Nisan (Sat) (begins sunset Fri)	17 Nisan (Sun) (begins sunset Sat)
<p>22:7 – Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.</p> <p>22:8f – Peter, John, & disciples prepare the Passover</p> <p>22:14–15 “When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;</p> <p>22:17f – meal, cup / bread / cup;</p>	<p>22:39 – “And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him.”</p> <p>22:47f – Judas, with crowd arrives; they seize Yeshua; take Him to the “house” of the high priest; Peter follows; denies Yeshua; rooster crows</p> <p>22:66f – “When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber...”; they interrogate Yeshua</p> <p>23:1f – they take Yeshua to Pilate; Pilate sends Him to Herod; Herod sends Him back to Pilate; releases Barabbas; sentences Yeshua to death;</p> <p>23:33f – brought Him to the place of the Skull; crucified Him there</p> <p>23:44 – It was now about the sixth hour (noon), and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour (3:00pm)</p> <p>23:50 – Joseph takes the body of Yeshua, laid Him in the tomb</p> <p>23:54 “<u>It was the preparation day,</u>¹ and the Sabbath was about to begin.”</p> <p>23:55–56 “Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes.”</p>	<p>23:56 – “And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.”</p>	<p>24:1 – But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.</p> <p>24:2f – they find the stone rolled away; two men in dazzling clothing; Yeshua has risen; they go and inform the disciples</p> <p>24:12 – Peter goes to the tomb to investigate it himself</p> <p>24:13 – two on the road to Emmaus; Yeshua hides Himself; converses with them;</p> <p>24:21 – “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened.”</p> <p>24:29 – “Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over.”</p>

¹ Since the day is clearly the one following the day on which the Passover lamb was being sacrificed (22:7), and since it is designated here as “the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin,” this could only be the case if the day was Friday.

John			
14 Nisan (Thur)	15 Nisan (Fri) (begins sunset Thur)	16 Nisan (Sat) (begins sunset Fri)	17 Nisan (Sun) (begins sunset Sat)
<p>13:1 – “Now before the feast of the Pass-over ...” 13:2 – “During supper ... 13:21 – “one of you will betray Me” 13:26 – Yeshua gives morsel to Judas 13:27 – “what you are about to do, do quickly” 13:29 – disciples presume Yeshua has told Judas to buy something for the festival, or to give money to the poor¹ 13:30 So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.</p>	<p>18:1 When Yeshua had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. 18:3 Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. 18:12f – they take Yeshua to Annas first, father-in-law of Caiaphas; Peter follows; Annas sends Yeshua to Caiaphas; Peter denies Yeshua; rooster crows 18:28 Then they led Yeshua from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.² 19:1f - Pilate has Yeshua whipped; interrogates Him; takes Him to The Pavement; 19:14 “Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover;³ it was about the sixth hour (noon). And he said to the Jews, “Behold, your King!” 19:17f – they lead Yeshua to The Skull; crucify Him; 19:31 “Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.” 19:38f – Joseph & Nicodemus take Yeshua’s body, wrap with linen & spices 19:42 Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Yeshua there.</p>		<p>20:1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. 20:2 – she tells disciples; Peter & John come to the tomb; find linen wrappings, etc.; Yeshua talks with Mary; 20:19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Yeshua came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.”</p>

¹ The need for haste (from the perspective of the other disciples who overheard the conversation) is best explained by the fact that the Festival Shabbat was about to begin.

² This could refer to the *sh’lamim* offerings given by those who had come to Jerusalem for the Festival.

³ I have marked this verse with a gray highlight because it is the only statement in John’s account that makes it necessary for everything to be happening a day earlier than this chart indicates. The preparation day for the Passover is Nisan 14, not Nisan 15. Also, in the Synoptics, Yeshua is on the cross when darkness comes from the sixth hour to the ninth hour on “the preparation day.” As noted above, a few manuscripts of John have “third hour” in this verse rather than “sixth hour,” indicating (presumably) that some scribes were aware of the conflict.

As can be seen, the Synoptics all agree with regard to the general timing and day of Yeshua's crucifixion, i.e., that it occurred on a preparation day, that Yeshua was on the cross by the sixth hour (noon), when darkness occurred until the ninth hour (3:00pm). Moreover, the Synoptics are in harmony in stating that Yeshua and His disciples ate a Passover meal, which would have necessitated the slaughter of the Passover lamb, roasting it, and eating the meat from it in the Passover meal (seder). Since the Passover lambs, by all accounts (including the Torah, Ex 12:6) were slaughtered on the 14th of Nisan (and not on the 13th), the Synoptics clearly place the seder meal of Yeshua and His disciples on the 14th. This means that the crucifixion occurred on the 15th. And since the day of crucifixion was also a preparation day, this means that the Synoptics all agree that the day of week on which Yeshua was crucified was a Friday, the day before the weekly Shabbat. Therefore, from the standpoint of the Synoptics, there is insufficient time for Yeshua to have been in the tomb for 72 hours, given the fact that all of them record the coming of the women to the empty tomb on the first day of the week.

John's account can be reconciled to the Synoptics except for the notice in 19:14, which designates the preparation day on which Yeshua was crucified as "the preparation for the Passover" (ἡν δὲ παρασκευὴ τοῦ πάσκα). It is possible, however, to interpret this phrase as meaning "the preparation day of the Passover Festival," i.e., the Friday that occurs in the week of Passover (cf. Deut 16:2–3 where *pesach*, *pesach*, is used of the sacrifices throughout the week of Unleavened Bread). This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that twice in the same context (Jn 19:31, 42), *παρασκευή*, "preparation day" is used to mean the day before the weekly Shabbat.

We should also consider the fact that if, as the Synoptics seem clearly to indicate, the 16th of Nisan fell on the weekly Shabbat, the issue of cutting, reaping, and waving the sheaf of the omer (Lev 23:9–14) caused questions regarding whether these commandments superseded the weekly Shabbat or not:

R. Hiyya b. Abba said in R. Johanan's name: Not in respect of everything did R. Eliezer rule that the preliminary preparations of a precept supersede the Sabbath, for lo! the two loaves [of Shavuot, Lev 23:17] are an obligation of the day, yet R. Eliezer did not learn them [the baking of the loaves] from aught but a *gezerah shavah*. For it was taught, R. Eliezer said: Whence do we know that the preliminaries of the two loaves supersede the Sabbath? 'Bringing' is stated in connection with the 'omer,' and 'bringing' is stated in connection with the two loaves (Lev 23:15, 17): just as with the 'bringing' stated in connection with the 'omer, its preliminaries supersede the Sabbath, so with the 'bringing' stated in connection with the two loaves their preliminaries supersede the Sabbath. These must be free, for if they are not free one can refute [this analogy]: as for the 'omer,' [its preliminaries supersede the Sabbath] because if one finds it [already] cut, he must cut [other sheaves]; will you [then] say [the same] in the case of the two loaves, seeing that if one finds [the wheat therefore] cut he does not cut [any more]? in truth they are indeed free. [For] consider: it is written, then ye shall bring the sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest unto the priest (Lev 23:10): what is the purpose of 'from the day that ye brought'? Infer from it that it is in order to be free. Yet it is still free on one side only, while we know R. Eliezer to hold that where it is free on one side [only], we deduce, but refute? — 'Ye shall bring' is an extension. (b.*Shabbat* 131a; cp. b.*Menachot* 72a)

John refers to the weekly Shabbat as a “great Sabbath,” ἦν γὰρ μεγάλη ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνου τοῦ σαββάτου (19:31, translated “a high day” by NASB, ESV, KJV; NIV has “a special Sabbath”). Conventionally, this phrase has been interpreted to mean that the Shabbat of the Festival (the 15th of Nisan) fell on the weekly Shabbat, thus making it a doubly solemn Shabbat. But like the Gospels’ use of the term “preparation day” for which there is no rabbinic parallel, so the designation “great Sabbath” is not used by the rabbis to identify a time when a Festival Shabbat falls on the weekly Shabbat. It seems at least possible that by calling the Sabbath a “great Sabbath,” John may be referring to the day when, according to the Pharisaic reckoning, the Sheaf was cut and waved and the beginning of the count to Shavuot began. What could have made this day stand out even more in John’s mind is the fact that the controversy between at least one sect of the Sadducees (the Boethusians) and the Pharisees over when the Sheaf was to be waved would have meant that the ceremony was made as public as possible:

How did they do it? Agents of the court go forth on the eve of [the afternoon before] the festival [of Passover]. And they make it into sheaves while it is still attached to the ground, so that it will be easy to reap. And all the villagers nearby gather together there [on the night after the first day of Passover], so that it will be reaped with great pomp. Once it gets dark [on the night of the sixteenth of Nisan], he says to them, “Has the sun set?” They say, “Yes.” “Has the sun set?” They say, “Yes.” “[With] this sickle?” They say, “Yes.” “[With] this sickle?” They say, “Yes.” “[With] this basket?” They say, “Yes.” “[With] this basket?” They say, “Yes.” On the Sabbath, he says to them, “[Shall I reap on] this Sabbath?” They say, “Yes.” “[Shall I reap on] this Sabbath?” They say, “Yes.” “Shall I reap?” They say, “Reap.” “Shall I reap?” They say, “Reap”— three times for each and every matter. And they say to him, “Yes, yes, yes.” All of this [pomp] for what purpose? Because of the Boethusians, for they maintain, “The reaping of the [barley for] the omer is not [done] at the conclusion of the festival.” (m.*Menachot* 10.3)

If these suggestions have merit, then it is possible to have all four Gospels agree about the timing of the crucifixion, that it was on the 15th of Nisan, which fell on the sixth day of the week (Friday), the day before the weekly Shabbat.

This leaves us, then, with no satisfying explanation for the saying of Yeshua in Matt 12:40, that like Jonah, He would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” The Gospels simply do not write the story with sufficient time for Yeshua to have been in the tomb 72 hours. And even if we were to postulate some “time gaps” that are accorded together in the narratives, the fact that the day of crucifixion is consistently labeled as a “preparation day” leaves no such possible time gaps between the day of crucifixion and the time of Yeshua’s resurrection.

I personally am not comfortable with the explanation that the “sign of Jonah” in Matthew (that it refers to the burial and resurrection of Yeshua) is a later editorial comment.¹ Granted, Luke considers the preaching of Jonah,

¹ Besides the quotes from Christian commentators given in the Matthew Commentary (2.462–63), see David Flusser, “Jesus and the Sign of the Son of Man” in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Magnus, 1988), 526–534.

and thus the preaching of Yeshua, to be the sign. But apart from the fact that the “three days and three nights” as found in Matthew’s record of “the sign” do not fit the chronology of the passion as the Gospels appear to have it, Matthew’s retelling would seem in every way to contain the words of Yeshua, not some later gloss or editorial comment reinforcing the miracle of the resurrection. We are left, then, with wondering exactly how to interpret the “sign of Jonah” in our Matthew text and if an alternative interpretation might fit with the chronology we have outlined. But this must be left to a later study.

This study of the Chronology of the Crucifixion obviously raises as many questions as it gives answers. However, based upon the study and data provided, the following conclusions can be reached:

1. All of the Gospels say that the crucifixion took place on a “preparation day,” meaning the day before a Sabbath (either a Festival Sabbath or the Weekly Sabbath). Mark, Luke, and John all emphasize that there was a concern to remove Yeshua’s body from the cross and put it into the tomb before the Sabbath began.
2. The Gospels present the scenario that the women, who had seen where Yeshua was entombed before the Sabbath began, waited until the Sabbath was completed before returning to the tomb.
3. Matthew tells us that the women returned to the tomb “as it was dawning toward the first day of the week,” meaning they went after the *weekly* Sabbath was completed. Only a Friday crucifixion would fit this scenario.
4. That Yeshua was alive on the first day of the week is confirmed by the fact that He walks with the disciples toward Emmaus on the first day of the week. The repeated language of the Gospels, that Yeshua would raise “on the third day” seems to coincide with the words of the disciples traveling to Emmaus: “it is the third day since these things happened” (Lk 24:21).
5. While various statements in John’s Gospel appear to place his chronology of the Passion at variance with the chronology presented in the Synoptics, actually only one verse (Jn 19:14) is clearly at variance, and part of this verse may be explained by taking the word “Passover” (πάσχα, *pascha*) to include the peace offerings brought by the people during the Festival of Unleavened Bread (based upon the use of פֶּסַח, *pesach*) in Deut 16:1–4. John’s notice that the trial of Yeshua was still ongoing at the sixth hour remains at variance with the Synoptics, but there are some textual variants that read “the third hour.”
6. Clearly, a Friday crucifixion does not allow a period of 72 hours in the tomb, and therefore seems to be at variance with those who interpret the saying of Yeshua in Matt 12:40 (the parallel to Jonah) to require a 72 hour entombment. Is it possible that Yeshua’s comparison of His own entombment with that of Jonah’s time in the fish was not given as a chronological statement but has a different import?