

# Three Days and Three Nights

AS JONAH, SO ISRAEL, SO THE SON OF MAN

“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17).

“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly [*lit.*, ‘the huge fish’s belly’]; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40).

The Book of Jonah forms a dual type, foreshadowing, through Jonah’s experiences, different aspects of the experiences of both of God’s firstborn Sons — *Christ* and *Israel* (*cf.* Ex. 4:22; Heb. 1:6).

The book though is more specifically about one son, about *Israel*, with the time which both Sons would spend in the place of death seen in the time which Jonah spent in the place of death.

Thus, the book, in a larger scope, is about both Sons — much like Hos. 11:1, a reference to Israel under Moses used as a reference to Christ in Matt. 2:15.

This time spent in the place of death is expressed in Jonah (1:17) and referenced in Matthew (12:40) as “three days and three nights.”

And a mistake, having major negative ramifications in Biblical interpretation, is often made through seeking to understand this expression in a Western mind-set rather than through comparing Scripture with Scripture, allowing Scripture to interpret the expression.

The expression “three days and three nights” is often understood as *a period of time comprised of three twenty-four-hour periods — three full days and nights, i.e., seventy-two hours.*

Or, other individuals take a slightly different approach, not contending for *three full twenty-four-hour periods BUT contending for at least parts of three literal days and three literal nights.*

And to follow either of the preceding, or any other similar form of the preceding, is where mayhem in Biblical interpretation enters into the matter, *NOT ONLY in HOW Scripture deals with the expression itself BUT WHAT this DOES to numerous passages of Scripture, including the overall scope of the manner in which the whole of Scripture is structured.*

*Thus, it is NO small matter concerning whether this expression is interpreted and understood within MAN’S Western mind-set (man’s finite wisdom and understanding) or whether SCRIPTURE is allowed to interpret and explain the matter for us (through God’s infinite wisdom and knowledge, the Author of this expression).*

## **Facts that One Must Face**

*Christ* was raised from the dead *after two days, on the third day* (Luke 24:7); and He was also raised *after three days* (Mark 8:31). *BOTH are true and BOTH MUST be understood NOT ONLY in the light of one another BUT the remainder of Scripture as well.*

(Relative to the timing of Christ’s resurrection, the expression, “after three days,” is only used two times in the N.T. [KJV, Matt. 27:63; Mark 8:31].

On the other hand, the expression, “the third day,” is used twelve times in the N.T. [KJV]. In five of the references there is some manuscript support for the rendering, “after three days” [Matt. 16:21; 17:23; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22].

However, for the remaining seven [Matt. 20:19; 27:64; Luke 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46; I Cor. 15:4], no such support exists. All existing manuscripts read the same way — “the third day,” *leaving NO room to question how the text should read.*

And it should go without saying that Christ’s resurrection *on the third day, ALONE*, would preclude understanding the expression, “three days and three nights,” as referencing a full seventy-two-hour period. Christ was raised *on the third day, NOT* at the end of or following the third day [which a full seventy-two hours would require].

Also, note the expressions, “within three days” and “in three days,” in Mark 14:58 and John 2:19, 20.)

*Israel*, seen in the place of death today (note both the sign of Jonah in the O.T. and the sign of Lazarus in John 11), will be raised *after two days, on the third day* (Hosea 5:13-6:3), *i.e.*, after 2,000 years, in the third 1,000-year period.

And, as was stated concerning Christ, it can also be said of Israel that the nation will be raised up *after three days* (after 3,000 years). And, as with Christ, these statements *MUST* be reconciled, one with the other.

Then there is the matter of *Jonah*. *EXACTLY the same thing MUST be said of him* (because of both the typology involved and the way Scripture uses the expression, “three days and three nights”).

That is to say, Jonah was raised from the dead *after two days, on the third day* (note that Jonah died in the belly of the fish; he is seen crying out from *Sheol* [Jonah 2:2], the place of the dead). As well, Jonah was raised *after three days*.

*And, EXACTLY as in the two antitypes* (Christ and Israel), *these statements MUST be understood NOT ONLY in the light of one another BUT also in the light of the remainder of Scripture.*

As well, the preceding is perfectly in line with the septenary structure of Scripture, which *MUST* be the case with any part of Scripture.

This septenary structure is set forth in the opening two chapters of Genesis, beginning the Old Testament; and it is also set forth in the opening two chapters of John, beginning the New Testament.

(Note that John's gospel should be the beginning book in the N.T., not Matthew's gospel. See Chapter I in the author's book, *Moses and John*, where this is dealt with and explained.)

The whole of Scripture is built upon this septenary structure, which is seen through the manner in which each Testament opens.

And this structure is dealt with after different fashions numerous places throughout Scripture (*e.g.*, the Sabbath given to Israel, pointing to that coming seventh day of rest, the millennial day; or, it can be seen in the subject at hand — the raising of Jonah in the type, then Christ and Israel [yet future] in the antitype).

(Refer to the author's book, *End of the Days*, for additional information on the preceding.)

### **Problems that Are Encountered, If...**

If a person follows the approach numerous individuals have taken when dealing with the expression, "three days and three nights," in relation to the timing of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection — attempting to understand this period of time as either a full seventy-two hours or a time encompassing at least parts of three literal days and three literal nights — that person will encounter *insurmountable problems with either position, along with committing mayhem in numerous facets of Biblical interpretation.*

(Those individuals contending for three full twenty-four-hour periods believe in a Wednesday crucifixion in order to allow for what they see as a full three days and three nights — seventy-two hours — between Christ's crucifixion and His resurrection on Sunday [the day Scripture states that He was raised, the first day of the week, the day following the Sabbath, on the feast of First Fruits]. Any day other than Wednesday for the crucifixion would not allow the full seventy-two hours that they believe are needed.

Those individuals contending for parts of three literal days and three literal nights believe in a Thursday crucifixion. This allows for part and/or all of three literal days and three literal nights, though not the full seventy-two hours.

And, as will be shown and dealt with later, the preceding way of viewing matters [seeing a Thursday crucifixion] is usually followed in an effort to allow for a resurrection on the third day.)

Note several *insurmountable problems* one encounters with either of the preceding views. Then it will be shown, as well, how holding to either view causes a person *to commit mayhem in numerous facets of Biblical interpretation.*

### 1) *Insurmountable Problems*

Holding to a Wednesday crucifixion, *NOTHING fits, NOT even the "three days and three nights," the supposed seventy-two-hour period.*

Note that Christ died in the middle of the afternoon. This is when His soul descended into *Sheol/Hades*. His body was then taken down from the cross, prepared for burial, and placed in the tomb shortly before the beginning of the next day (sometime before sunset).

Then He was raised sometime after the beginning of the day following the Sabbath (sometime after sunset ending the Sabbath, on the first day of the week).

If He was crucified on Wednesday, nothing short of time extending to at least about seventy-five hours could possibly exist (time beginning when He died, 3 P.M.).

Then, if one attempts to begin the *supposed* seventy-two hours of Jonah 1:17 and Matt. 12:40 at the time His body was placed in the tomb (shortly before sundown), that won't work either. Raising Christ exactly seventy-two hours from that point would put the resurrection occurring shortly before sundown on the Sabbath.

Then there is the matter of Christ being raised on the third day. Sunday is the fifth day from Wednesday, not the third day. "After three days," as used in Matt. 27:63 and Mark 8:31 would seemingly fit, but not so. This expression must be harmonized with, "on the third day," and has reference to *THIS* day. *Scripture MUST be compared with Scripture.*

Then there is the matter of the day following the crucifixion being "a high ['great'] day," i.e., contextually, *a high (great) Sabbath* (John 19:31). Though the day following the Passover was the beginning day of the feast of Unleavened Bread (a Sabbath day), *this day, standing alone, could not be referred to as a high (great) Sabbath.*

The *ONLY WAY* one could have *a high (great) Sabbath* in the camp of Israel was *for one of the feast days in Leviticus chapter twenty-three to fall on the regular weekly Sabbath* (Alfred Edersheim would be one well-known authority calling attention to this fact).

Thus, a Wednesday crucifixion fails at this point as well.

And different things from the preceding could be said about those contending for a Thursday crucifixion in order to fit at least parts of three literal days and nights into the matter. Suffice it to say though, contending for a handling of the expression "three days and three nights" in this manner (necessitating at least parts of three literal days and nights) is, as will be shown, as fallacious as the prior position (con-

tending for a Wednesday crucifixion), *for it, as well, is NOT the way Scripture handles the matter at all, introducing even additional error into the matter.*

## 2) *Mayhem in Biblical Interpretation*

Contending for a seventy-two-hour period between Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, dealt with through a supposed Wednesday crucifixion, throws the complete latter part of the septenary structure of Scripture into disarray.

*And EXACTLY the same problem* would confront those holding to a Thursday crucifixion. Contending for a Thursday crucifixion, *EXACTLY* as contending for a Wednesday crucifixion, would run counter to Scripture's septenary structure as well.

(There is seemingly a way that those contending for a Thursday crucifixion can show a Sunday resurrection occurring on the third day, but it is a way arrived at through humanistic reasoning, completely out of line with the way that Scripture handles different things about the matter.

Accordingly, the day of Christ's resurrection through this means is not a third day at all, but a fourth day following the crucifixion.

The Biblical day ends at sundown, with a new day beginning at that time [which the Jews have followed down through the years (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31)]. Individuals following a Thursday crucifixion ideology, referencing Jonah 1:17 or Matt. 12:40, take part of the day preceding sundown Thursday and all of the day preceding sundown both Friday and Saturday, giving them three days. Then they take all of the night following sundown both Thursday and Friday [which would be the beginning part of the next two days from the previous two days], along with part of the night following sundown on Saturday [which would be the beginning part of the next day from the previous day]. And, with Christ raised sometime following "the end of the Sabbath"

[Matt. 28:1; *lit.*, ‘the end of the Sabbaths’ (the Passover, the feast of Unleavened Bread, and the regular weekly Sabbath — three Sabbath days together)], during the night period of Sunday, before daybreak [which Scripture attests to], Christ is seemingly raised on the third day, and the supposed requirement seen for part or all of three actual days and three actual nights has been met.

The preceding, held by a number of Bible students, may sound good on the surface, but it is shot through and through with the same problems that confront those holding to a Wednesday crucifixion, with an extra problem added.

Suffice it to say, as will be shown later in this article, this is not the way Scripture handles the matter at all. The whole of the matter, as seen in holding to a Wednesday crucifixion, is little more than substituting humanistic reasoning for comparing Scripture with Scripture, and not allowing Scripture to interpret and handle the matter.

With a Thursday crucifixion, *the time before sundown* Thursday, Friday, and Saturday is, in each case, connected with *the time following sundown* on each of the subsequent three days. In each case, this has to do with taking part of one day, then part of the next day, and viewing these parts of two different days as one day, something alien to how Scripture views “days.” Scripture, as established in the opening chapter of Genesis, views *the time following sundown to the time following the next sundown as forming “a day”* [evening, morning, in that order, not morning, evening, as required by those holding to a Thursday crucifixion].

“Three days and three nights,” in Scripture, *can ONLY be understood as synonymous with “three days,” with each day including its corresponding evening and morning* (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). “A day” simply CANNOT be understood as a combination of parts of two separate days, which the Thursday crucifixion ideology necessitates [in this case, even mixing two parts of the weekly Sabbath with parts of two non-Sabbath days — Friday and Sunday].)



As *Christ* was raised after two days, on the third day, He, as well, will be raised up after 2,000 years, in the third 1,000-year period (the Messianic Era).

And *Israel*, in like manner, after two days, after 2,000 years, will be raised up to live in God's sight on the third day, in the third 1,000-year period (the Messianic Era).

Note what attempting to see a full seventy-two-hour period in the expression "three days and three nights" does to the preceding, to the last three days in God's septenary structure of Scripture. Or note what attempting to see at least parts of three literal days and nights in this expression, because of how it is done, does to the septenary structure of Scripture *after EXACTLY the same fashion*.

The former has Christ's resurrection, Israel's as well (yet future), occurring *on the fifth day*; and the latter has these resurrections occurring *on the fourth day*. But Scripture has these, and any other resurrections at the end of Man's Day, occurring *on the third day*.

And, as previously stated, properly understanding the timing of Christ's crucifixion should not be thought of as something minor in Biblical interpretation, making no real difference what one believes.

Rather the opposite is true. This is something *MAJOR, VERY MAJOR*. It makes *A GREAT DEAL OF DIFFERENCE what one believes about the timing of the crucifixion*.

*The timing of the crucifixion, followed by Christ's resurrection, is inseparably tied to how God has structured His Word — a septenary structure set forth at the beginning (Gen. 1:1-2:3), with resurrection seen on THE THIRD DAY within this septenary structure, set forth at the beginning (Gen. 1:9-13), something which CAN NEVER CHANGE throughout Scripture.*

Thus, not understanding how God has structured His Word in this respect — revealed at the outset in Genesis and revealed at the outset in John's gospel as well (John

2:1ff), beginning the N.T. — is no small matter in Biblical interpretation.

### **No Problems Are Encountered, *IF*...**

*IF* a person interprets Scripture in the light of Scripture when dealing with the expression, “three days and three nights,” the previously existing problems, or any other similar problems, *will NOT exist; and everything, in turn, will fit into its proper place.*

And no one is then left attempting to explain the inexplicable, *for Scripture will have been allowed to explain the whole of the matter itself, through its own built-in interpretation.*

#### *1) “Three Days and Three Nights” in the O.T.*

There are two other places in the Old Testament where the same or a similar expression to that seen in Jonah 1:17 is used (I Sam. 30:1, 11-13; Esther 4:16-5:1). And in both of these places, along with several other companion places (Gen. 40:12-20; 42:17-20; II Chron. 10:5, 12; Matt. 27:62-64), *Scripture relates EXACTLY how Jonah 1:17 and Matt. 12:40 are to be understood, leaving NO room for questions in anyone’s mind about HOW this expression is to be understood WHEN Scripture is allowed to interpret itself.*

“And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire...

And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water;

And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins; and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him: for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, *three days and three nights.*

And David said unto him, to whom belongest thou? and whence art thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because *three days ago* I fell sick" (I Sam. 30:1, 11-13).

"Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink *three days, night or day*: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

Now it came to pass *on the third day*, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house..." (Esther 4:16-5:1a).

*The Old Testament views any part of a day as covering the whole of that day, with the day's corresponding night period as well* (Gen. 40:12-20; 42:17-20; II Chron. 10:5, 12; Matt. 27:62-64; cf. Matt. 4:2; Mark 1:13).

*A twenty-four-hour period is NOT involved at all.*

*NOR can non-corresponding parts of different literal days and nights (parts of two different days of the week seen forming a day) be involved in the expression, "three days and three nights."*

That's evident six different places in the opening chapter of Genesis, where a day and night ("evening" and "morning", in that order [Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31]) are dealt with together as a unit, referred to as "a day."

And this initial order establishes how any twenty-four hour period is to be viewed throughout all subsequent Scripture, even if "day," used with "night," as in Jonah 1:17, is mentioned first (cf. Esther 4:16, where "night" is mentioned first).

Exactly the same thing can be seen in both of the previously quoted verses — I Sam. 30:1, 11-13 and Esther 4:16-5:1 — where either the same or a similar expression can be found to the expression in Jonah 1:17 and Matt. 12:38-40.

*In both places, as in the opening chapter of Genesis, a day and night are dealt with together, as a unit, referred to as "a day."*

And this *MUST* be true of any Scriptures beyond the opening chapter of Genesis which deal with the subject, *for this is the manner in which the matter has been unchangeably established at the outset.*

Thus, viewed *SOLELY* from a Scriptural standpoint, *ANY part of Friday, ALL of Saturday, and ANY part of Sunday would be "three days and three nights."*

As well, the expression, "after three days" in Matt. 27:63 and Mark 8:31 is *NOT* referring to events occurring on a fourth day (a day following three days, allowing for a Thursday crucifixion), *OR* even a fifth day (allowing for a Wednesday crucifixion), *BUT is referring to events occurring on the third of the three days in view.*

Note how this expression in Matt. 27:63 is understood in Matt. 27:64. Or, note the sequence of days in Acts 10:3, 7-9, 17, 23, 24, 30.

## 2) *The High (Great) Sabbath, the Third Day*

Then there is the matter of a *high (great) Sabbath* occurring the day following the crucifixion, which can be fulfilled *ONLY by a Friday crucifixion* (allowing a feast day from Lev. 23 to fall on the regular weekly Sabbath; refer to previous comments on p. 6).

And, as previously seen, a Friday crucifixion is *THE ONLY DAY* which would allow the resurrection on Sunday to have occurred *on the third day* (on the feast of First Fruits [cf. Mark 16:9; I Cor. 15:20, 23]).

In reality, all one has to do to ascertain the day of the crucifixion is to count back three days from Sunday, which takes one to Friday. The matter is really that simple if one remains within Scriptural guidelines and allows Scripture to interpret itself.

As well, remaining completely within the way Scripture handles the matter, this likewise allows one *to remain completely in line with the septenary structure of Scripture.*

*And the preceding could ONLY be the case, for Scripture does NOT run counter to itself.*

*That's left solely for man to do, which he too often does, something which he seems to excel in when it comes to Biblical interpretation.*

