

## 3 Days + 3 Nights = 1 False Doctrine

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Is knowing the precise number of hours Jesus Christ's dead body lay in the tomb of any great significance? Worldwide Church of God (WCG) founder Herbert W. Armstrong (1892–1986) would have had you believe it is. The WCG published *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*<sup>1</sup> and *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday*.<sup>2</sup> Both of these booklets—the first written by Armstrong and the second by Armstrong's disciple, Herman L. Hoeh (1928–2004)—cover this subject.

Armstrong asserted, "Jesus staked his claim to being your Saviour and mine upon remaining three days and three nights in the tomb."<sup>3</sup> By "three days and three nights" Armstrong meant precisely 72 hours.<sup>4</sup> This amazing claim is the reason I decided to cover this topic on this website. There can hardly be anything more vital than whether Jesus Christ is our Savior. Before examining any relationship between the amount of time Jesus was in the tomb and His being our Savior, I will first ask, How long was Jesus in the tomb?

### **Three Days and Three Nights**

The key scripture upon which the Worldwide Church of God bases its teaching on this subject is Matthew 12:39-40: "But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Herbert W. Armstrong and his current-day followers say that for Jesus to have been in the "heart of the earth"—the tomb—for three days and three nights, He could not possibly have been crucified and buried on Friday and then rise on Sunday morning. This, they say, would be only two nights—Friday night and Saturday night—and one day—Saturday.<sup>5</sup> Instead, Armstrongism teaches a Wednesday crucifixion: that Jesus died late Wednesday and rose from death late Saturday afternoon.<sup>6</sup> Notice that according to Armstrong, Jesus rose on the seventh-day Sabbath as opposed to the teaching of orthodox Christianity that Jesus rose on the first day of the week.

What Armstrong says on this matter has the sound of being reasonable. After all, 72 hours prior to a Sunday morning resurrection would mean Jesus had to have died Thursday morning. But Jesus could not have died in the morning because the three synoptic Gospels say that Jesus died about the "ninth hour" (Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37, and Luke 23:44-46), meaning about three o'clock in the afternoon. This does not, however, mean that Armstrong is correct. In fact, he makes a major error in taking "three days and three nights" to mean 72 hours.

"Three days and three nights" is a Hebrew idiom that the Greek of Matthew 12:40 follows. Concerning this idiom, a near contemporary of Jesus, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah (circa A.D. 100), said, "A day and a night make an *'onah* [a twenty-four hour period], and the portion of an *'onah* is reckoned as a complete *'onah*."<sup>7</sup> In Hebrew, then, a portion of a day could be counted as a complete day. As R. T. France writes, "Three days and three nights was a Jewish idiom appropriate to a period covering only two nights."<sup>8</sup> Numerous commentators support this position. Although written in Greek, Matthew 12:40 expresses the Hebrew idiom—"three days and three nights"—that was understood by the Jews listening to Jesus to mean one full day and portions of two others with the intervening nights.

Flying in the face of this evidence, Armstrong appeals to some anonymous "higher critics" who supposedly "admit that in the Hebrew language, in which the book of Jonah was written, the expression 'three days and three nights' means a period of 72 hours—three 12-hour days and three 12-hour nights."<sup>9</sup> The scripture in question in Jonah is, "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).

Now notice what C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch write concerning Jonah 1:17 in their *Commentary on the Old Testament*: "The three days and three nights are not to be regarded as fully three times twenty-four hours, but are to be interpreted according to Hebrew usage, as signifying that Jonah was vomited up again on the third day after he had been swallowed."<sup>10</sup> George L. Robinson writes, "The statement that Jonah was in the belly of the fish 'three days and three nights,' is an oriental way of expressing the fact that he was in the fish so long that apart from God's sustaining power, he was dead and beyond the possibility of human resuscitation."<sup>11</sup>

Besides agreeing that "three days and three nights" was a Hebrew idiom, H. L. Ellison adds this practical note:

Once Jonah was on dry land again, he could make some kind of estimate of how long he had been in the fish. Yet, to make any exact measure of the number of hours would have been impossible for him. Roused suddenly from a deep slumber, stupefied by the violence of the storm, and in all probability seasick, Jonah would have been in no position to know at what hour he was thrown overboard. Furthermore, on reaching the shore he would have needed time to collect his wits. Clearly, then, the term "three days and three nights" is intended as an approximation, not a precise period of seventy-two hours.<sup>12</sup>

Further evidence that Jesus was using a Hebrew idiom may be found in Luke 11:29-32: "And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."

Notice that Luke completely leaves out any reference to "three days and three nights." Why? Luke was a Gentile. As such, he left out the Hebrew idiom. Instead, in Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46; and Acts 10:40, Luke uses the much clearer and more direct "the third day." Luke's omission of "three days and three nights" will prove significant later when we examine the nature of the sign of Jonah.

Is there anywhere else in the Bible that contains further evidence that "three days and three nights" is not to be understood literally? Yes. Esther 4:15-16 reads, "Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, 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."

Esther says she and her maids are not going to eat or drink for "three days, night or day." Only when she is finished fasting will she go in unto the king. This is made a little clearer in the *Revised Standard Version* (and many other translations), which says, "I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king...." In other words, Esther is saying that she is going to fast, and then—after the fast—she will go to the king. If "three days, night or day" is to be taken literally, it would mean 72 hours. Esther's fast would last 72 hours, and she would not be able to go to the king until after 72 hours. This would be the fourth day at the earliest. Is this what the Bible says? No.

Esther 5:1 states: "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, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house." Esther did not wait until the fourth day to go to the king. She went on the third day. The fast that was to last for "three days, night or day" was, by the third day, already completed.

Completely ignoring that Esther said she would fast and then go to see the king, the Worldwide Church of God's Herman Hoeh, in an attempt to say that Esther fasted for a full 72 hours, writes, "Which day was this? The third day of the fast. Suppose Queen Esther had requested the Jews late Friday evening, shortly before sunset, to fast. The first day of their fast would have been Saturday, the second day would have been Sunday, and the third day, Monday, the queen would have entered the king's palace. Isn't that plain? The Jews did not fast parts of three days, but three days, night and day."<sup>13</sup>

This makes no sense unless Esther was still fasting when she went to see the king. But she said she would fast and then go to see the king. Need further proof that Esther's fast of "three days, night or day" was completed by the third day? Read Esther 5:4: "And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him." The day called "this day" in this verse is the very same day that is called "the third day" in verse 1. In verse 6 we read, "And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed." The *Revised Standard* and other modern versions render the first part of this verse as, "And as they were drinking wine." So on the third day Esther was drinking wine at a banquet, even though she said she would not eat or drink for "three days, night or day." "Three

days, night or day" must mean a period of less than 72 hours. The Bible itself proves that Herbert Armstrong's explanation is flawed.

### **After Three Days**

What about other scriptures that mention the time Jesus would be in the grave? By far, the majority of references to Jesus' resurrection refer to it as occurring on "the third day." Besides Luke's use of "the third day," Matthew (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64) and Paul (I Corinthians 15:4) also use it. The King James Version also uses "the third day" in Mark 9:31 and 10:34. Other versions do not contain "the third day" in these verses of Mark. Instead, they use "after three days," "three days later," "three days after," etc., depending on the version.

"After three days" is also found in Mark 8:31. But how can "after three days" mean the same time period as "the third day"? "After three days" in English means after 72 hours—that is, at least the fourth day. But now read what the Pharisees tell Pilot in Matthew 27:63-64: "Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first."

Notice that although the Pharisees told Pilot that Jesus said He would rise again "after three days," they asked Pilot to secure the tomb only until "the third day." If "after three days" was to be understood literally, the securing of the tomb would have ended too soon. But, as with "three days and three nights," "after three days" is not to be taken literally. The Pharisees considered "after three days" as ending on "the third day."

Nevertheless, the Armstrong position appeals to verses 5 and 12 of 2 Chronicles 10 as supposed evidence that "after three days" means after 72 hours. Verses 5 and 12 read: "And he [king Rehoboam] said unto them [Jeroboam and the people], Come again unto me after three days. And the people departed.... So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king bade, saying, Come again to me on the third day." It should be evident that since the king told the people to come "after three days" and the people came "on the third day" according to the king's command ("Come again to me on the third day") that "after three days" and "on the third

day" amount to the same thing. But this is not evident to the followers of Herbert Armstrong.

Herman Hoeh, in *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday*, gives this explanation:

Let us suppose they had first met the king sometime on Friday. As they were ordered to return at the end of three days, they would not have returned before the same time of day the following Monday. Now was Monday 'the third day' from the day they had originally met with the king? The first day from Friday was Saturday, the second day from the Friday was Sunday and the third day was Monday—exactly the time the king expected them to return. Monday, not Sunday, was the third day from Friday.<sup>14</sup>

The above explanation has somehow made Monday seem to be both 72 hours after Friday—thus, "after three days"—and "the third day." But how? By switching methods used for counting! A careful analysis will reveal the conjuring.

This booklet assumes the people "would not have returned before the same time of day the following Monday." If so, they would have to wait until after 72 hours had passed. For example, suppose they met with Rehoboam at noon on Friday. Noon Friday to noon Saturday is one day. Noon Saturday to noon Sunday is two days and noon Sunday to noon Monday is three days. The 72 hours are completed at noon on Monday. Continuing to assume that the people had to wait until after 72 hours, they could have met with Rehoboam at 1 pm on Monday. This would literally be after three days from the time they first met with Rehoboam. After three days (literally) is the fourth day. So 1 pm on Monday would be the fourth day. But Dr. Hoeh says it is the third day. He does this by ignoring all of Friday from the time the people met with Rehoboam until the end of the day. In our example, this would be from noon until evening. Notice this booklet says, "the first day from that Friday." It counts Saturday as the first day, Sunday as the second day and Monday as the third day. By counting the days two different ways—one that includes Friday and one that counts from Friday—Dr. Hoeh has made Monday at 1 pm (in our example) both "after three days" and "the third day." Such equivocal methods for counting are completely unacceptable.

The only reason the people were able to meet with the king "after three days" but "on the third day" is because "after three days" is an idiom that points to "the third day." By the way, most modern-language versions of the Bible have replaced "after three days" in this Scripture with "in three days." In English, "in three days" is more easily understood as terminating on "the third day."

"In three days" is found in a scripture that refers to Jesus' resurrection. In John 2:19, Jesus answers the Jews' request for a miraculous sign by saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "In three days" does not mean a full 72 hours must be completed, especially in light of so many other scriptures that point to Jesus' resurrection on "the third day."

The argument of those who follow Herbert Armstrong is fatally flawed because they insist on counting the time between Jesus' death and His resurrection with a stopwatch. None of the evidence Armstrong presents to prove the length of a day (for example, his appeals to John 11:9-10 and Genesis 1:4-13<sup>15</sup>) is relevant because the words the Gospel writers and Jesus Himself used to refer to the time between Jesus' death and His resurrection were casual and idiomatic. But what about the Scriptures that describe the sequence of events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection? Do they require Jesus to have been in the tomb for 72 hours?

### **Thursday**

In refuting the sequence of events taught by Armstrong, I will present an alternative sequence of events. I realize that this is not the only possible alternative, but I believe it to be a very credible one.

Herbert Armstrong taught, and his followers still teach, that Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples on the evening that began the 14th of Abib (also called Nisan), that this was a Tuesday evening, and that this was 24 hours earlier than the Jews normally ate the Passover. As I proceed, it will help you to know that the terms "Passover" and "Feast of Unleavened Bread" were, by New Testament times, often used interchangeably for certain aspects of these feasts.<sup>16</sup> Armstrong appears to agree with this.<sup>17</sup>

There are scriptures, however, that show Armstrong's position on when Jesus ate His last Passover to be in error. Mark 14:12 reads: "And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare

that thou mayest eat the passover?" On the day that the Passover lambs were killed, Jesus had not yet eaten the Passover with His disciples. Exodus 12:6 clearly says this day is the 14th of Abib and that day is called "the passover" in Numbers 28:16. It is also called the "first day of unleavened bread" in Mark 14:12 because Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread had come to be somewhat synonymous.

K. J. Stavriniades, in two articles he wrote for the Worldwide Church of God, asserts that Jesus' disciples asked Him about preparations for the Passover on the night that began the 14th and that they later ate the Passover that same night.<sup>18</sup> This is completely unacceptable because this does not give the disciples enough time to prepare the Passover before they were to eat it (on the night beginning the 14th according Armstrong tradition). One does not ask about preparations at the same time the event is to take place.

Stavriniades' explanation is forced and unnatural. The natural explanation of Mark 14:12 is that, on the day the Passover lambs were killed—the 14th—the disciples understandably asked about preparing for the Passover which would occur that coming night—the beginning of the 15th, the night when they as Jews would naturally have expected to eat the Passover meal. Jesus did not tell His disciples to prepare for a Passover that they were to celebrate one day early—something that would have been so extraordinary we would expect the disciples to have questioned it. Jesus' disciples were to prepare for a Passover meal that was to be eaten on the night that began the 15th.

Luke 22:7-8 contains an even clearer account: "Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat." On the day the Passover lambs were being killed, Jesus' disciples were preparing for the Passover meal. That meal was eaten on the night of the 15th of Abib. As I will show from additional evidence, this was a Thursday night.

### **Friday and Saturday**

John 18:28 is an important scripture in regard to this topic. The events in this verse take place after Jesus had eaten the Passover with His disciples and had been arrested: "Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they

might eat the passover." Does this scripture mean, as Armstrong taught, that Jesus ate the Passover one day earlier than the Jews?

A Gentile was considered unclean. For the strict Jew, coming in contact with a Gentile or anything in a Gentile's house was like coming in contact with an unclean animal, and the Jew who came into contact with an unclean animal was unclean until evening (Leviticus 11:25). A. T. Robertson points out, "Since this remark was made early in the morning, how could that affect the eating of the [Passover] supper in the evening? For whatever impurities one had during the day passed away at evening. Hence this uncleanness must belong to the same day on which it was incurred."<sup>19</sup> If, as according to Armstrong teaching, these Jews were concerned with eating the Passover meal that coming night, entering the Roman governor's palace in the morning would not be a problem to them because their uncleanness would pass away with the coming of evening (see Leviticus 11:24-25; 27; 31; etc.). What then is the answer?

As I have already mentioned, "Passover" had come to be used to refer to the Feast of Unleavened Bread and vice versa. The apostle John uses the word "Passover" in nine other places in the Bible besides John 18:28. In none of these places does he use it to specifically refer to the Passover meal or the Passover lamb. And there is no reason to assume he is using it to refer to the Passover meal or the Passover lamb in John 18:28. These Jews wanted to participate in the offerings and special meals that would take place that day, the 15th of Abib, the first Holy Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They had already eaten the Passover lamb the evening before (the evening that began the 15th, the same evening that Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover lamb). When John said that the Jews wanted to eat the Passover, he meant special festival meals taking place during the daylight portion of the 15th. This brings us to the morning of the 15th of Abib, Friday morning.

Pilate, the governor, sent Jesus to Herod who then sent Him back to Pilate (see Luke 23:6-15). In John 19:14, John writes, "And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!" Churches in the Armstrong tradition would like you to believe this was the preparation day for the Passover; that is, the 14th of Abib. But there is no reason to believe this.

"The afternoon before the Passover was used as a preparation," writes A. T. Robertson, "but it was not technically so called. This phrase

'Preparation' was really the name of a day in the week, the day before the Sabbath, our Friday."<sup>20</sup> Of this same day, Mark and Luke write, "And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath" (Mark 15:42), and "And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on" (Luke 23:54). Notice that they do not say that the Sabbath to follow was the first annual Sabbath of the festival or the day on which the Passover lamb was to be eaten. As I have explained, that day had already come. The Gospel writers intended their readers to understand that this Preparation Day was Friday. It was the Friday of the Passover feast.

John also writes, of the time later that same day after Jesus' death on the cross, "The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away" (John 19:31).

In John 19:31, this Sabbath is described as "an high day." "Just what is a 'high day'?" asks Herbert W. Armstrong. "Ask any Jew! He will tell you it is one of the annual holy days, or feast days. The Israelites were commanded to observe seven of these every year—every one called a Sabbath! Annual Sabbaths fall on certain annual calendar dates, and on different days of the week in different years, just like the Roman holidays now observed."<sup>21</sup>

Armstrong's definition of a "high day" is not acceptable. To the modern Jew, the "high days"—more correctly the High Holy Days or High Holidays—are Rosh Hashanah (the Feast of Trumpets) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) with a season of about two months surrounding these days.<sup>22</sup> The High Holy Days have nothing to do with the Passover festival. Therefore, John's use of "high day" has no relationship to modern Jewish usage.

Armstrong presents no convincing evidence to support his belief that the Sabbath of John 19:31 was an annual Sabbath. The other Gospel writers refer to it only as the Sabbath. Why, then, did John write that this particular "sabbath day was an high day"? The most natural explanation, in light of other evidence supporting the view that this was the seventh-day of the week, is that this seventh-day Sabbath was the weekly Sabbath that occurred during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Every day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—also called the Passover in the New Testament—is a feast day. Two of the feast days are annual Sabbaths.

But there is also a third Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is the weekly seventh-day Sabbath that happens to fall within the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Because this seventh-day Sabbath falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it is a feast day and therefore is special. It would be natural for John to call this Sabbath a "high day." It is this day, the seventh-day Sabbath that falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, that John and the other Gospel writers are referring to.

John 19:41-42 reads: "Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand." It is now near Friday evening, which for the Jews ended the sixth day of the week and began the seventh-day Sabbath. About this time, "the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment" (Luke 23:55-56).

"Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate" (Matthew 27:62). It is now the Sabbath, our Saturday. Besides the women resting and the Jews going to Pilate to ask that the tomb be made secure, the Bible is silent about what occurred on this day. Yet, this is the day that Armstrong tradition would have you believe that Jesus rose from the dead!

"And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him" (Mark 16:1). According to Armstrongism, this verse, coupled with Luke 23:55-56, says that there had to have been two Sabbaths (an annual Sabbath and a weekly Sabbath) separated by a non-Sabbath day between Jesus' death and His resurrection. It says this non-Sabbath day (which it says was Friday) is the day the women bought and prepared the spices. Admittedly, the time sequence in Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:55-56 is not completely clear. There is no reason, however, to resort to this explanation of two Sabbaths separated by another day as the weight of evidence is against it.

Luke may not have meant that the women went home and prepared the spices immediately. It is completely possible that he meant that the women went home and prepared spices, but they (first) rested on

the Sabbath. They would have procured and prepared the spices on Saturday night, after the Sabbath. Alternatively, the women may have prepared some spices as soon as they returned home, rested on the Sabbath, then procured more spices and prepared them on Saturday night. These explanations are not, of course, completely conclusive. Nevertheless, they are stronger arguments than Armstrong's explanation that requires the insertion of an entire day between the words, "And they returned" and "and prepared spices and ointments" (Luke 23:56)—a day that is never mentioned.

### **Sunday**

"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre" (Matthew 28:1).<sup>23</sup> "And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun" (Mark 16:2). "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them" (Luke 24:1). "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre" (John 20:1).

Notice that although Matthew's and Mark's accounts indicate the time as dawn, Luke only says "very early in the morning." John, however, says, "when it was yet dark." There are several possible reasons for this seeming discrepancy. Perhaps John meant it was still dark when they left their houses, but the sun rose as they were on their way. Or Mary Magdalene may have left before the others and arrived first. "Dawn" and "sunrise" in Matthew and Mark may refer to the time of morning when the eastern sky is beginning to get light, but before any of the disk of the sun is above the horizon. This can still be called "dark." What is important is that all four Gospel writers agree that this was the first day of the week.

Nevertheless, Armstrong makes the following statement: "Jesus was already resurrected from the dead and had already risen from the grave by sunrise Sunday morning! Of course he was. The resurrected Jesus rose from the grave the previous evening!"<sup>24</sup> True, Matthew 28:5-6, Mark 16:6, and Luke 24:6 tell us that Jesus was already risen when the women arrived. But must this mean that He rose on Saturday evening? Absolutely not! Armstrong read more into these scriptures than is there.

Jesus need only have risen moments before the women arrived, which would still be the morning of the first day of the week. Jesus died on the cross and was buried on Friday and rose from the dead on Sunday, the third day. This is supported by the weight of biblical evidence.

### **Some Additional Scriptures**

Herbert Armstrong also mentions Mark 16:9: "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils." While Armstrong tries to make this verse sound like support for his argument, it is not.<sup>25</sup> It is either support for a Sunday resurrection or it is neutral. Does "early the first day of the week" refer to Jesus' resurrection or to when he appeared to Mary Magdalene? This uncertainty makes this verse of little use in this discussion.

The next scripture Armstrong examines is Luke 24:21.<sup>26</sup> This occurred on the road to Emmaus on the "same day" (verse 13), Sunday. Two disciples were walking along the road when Jesus came up to them. Because of divine intervention, they were unable to recognize Him (verses 13-16). Jesus asked them what they were discussing (verse 17). One asked Him whether He was a stranger to Jerusalem who did not know about the things that had happened (verse 18). Jesus asked, "What things?" (verse 19).

And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre.

—verses 19-22

In Armstrong's scenario, Sunday would be the fourth day since Jesus' crucifixion and burial. But these disciples call Sunday the "third day since these things were done." To get around this, Armstrong reasons that the "third day since these things were done" the disciples referred to included "the setting of the seal and the watch over the tomb the following day."<sup>27</sup> This is a forced explanation. These disciples never mentioned "the setting of the seal and the watch over the tomb the

following day." They ended their relating of the events with their account of Jesus' crucifixion.

Why would they even have said, "and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done."? "The third day" held some significance for them. Why? As *The NIV Study Bible* explains, this was, "A reference either to the Jewish belief that after the third day the soul left the body or to Jesus' remark that he would be resurrected on the third day (9:22)."<sup>28</sup> I think the latter is the more likely, but either of these would mean that the disciples meant that Sunday was the third day since Jesus' death on the cross.

### **Further Appeals**

On page 6 of *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday* we read, "It is the so-called apostolic fathers, steeped in traditions, who first began to teach that the crucifixion occurred on Friday. Yet they admitted that the ancient custom of fasting on Wednesday—the actual day of the crucifixion, as we have seen [i.e. as Hoeh and Armstrong have unsuccessfully tried to demonstrate]—was derived from 'the day on which Jesus was betrayed' and 'on which the Sanhedrin decided to kill him' (*Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 'Fasting')!" But is the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* referring to the day (evening to evening) on which Jesus was arrested and crucified? Absolutely not.

This is what the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* states in the article cited by Hoeh: "Fasting was based in principle upon the suffering of Christ. The commemoration of the death of Jesus on Friday seems to be very old, and it is possible that from the beginning (cf. Mark ii. 20), as the resurrection of Jesus was commemorated every Sunday, so was his death every Friday."<sup>29</sup> So the crucifixion of Jesus was observed by a fast on Friday, not Wednesday.

Continuing where we left off with *Schaff-Herzog*: "For the observance of Wednesday it was not so easy to find such a motive; and the various artificial derivations of the usage from the history of the Passion, designating it as the day on which Jesus was betrayed, or on which the Sanhedrin decided to kill him, are obviously later justifications of the choice of a day."<sup>30</sup>

The reference in the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* to "the day on which Jesus was betrayed, or on which the

Sanhedrin decided to kill him" cannot mean the day (24 hours from evening to evening) during which Jesus was arrested and crucified. That 24-hour period was commemorated with a fast on Friday. What, then, is meant by "the day on which Jesus was betrayed, or on which the Sanhedrin decided to kill him"?

Paul called the night on which Jesus was arrested "the night he was betrayed" (1 Corinthians 11:23). If we ignore the other evidence I have, "the day on which Jesus was betrayed, or on which the Sanhedrin decided to kill him" would seem to be the same day Paul referred to. But there is another explanation, one that perfectly fits with a Friday crucifixion.

All four Gospel writers make it clear that the Sanhedrin did not truly decide to kill Jesus after he was arrested. The decision in Matthew 27:1 was only a formalization of a decision they had already made. One decision was made over a week before Jesus was crucified. It is found in John 11:45-53. But another decision—a decision that involved Judas—was reached some days later. This decision was two days before Jesus' arrest. Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16 reads:

And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.... Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

So on this day—two days before Jesus' was arrested—we find a decision to kill Jesus and the beginnings of Judas' betrayal. Notice that although John says Satan entered Judas on the night Jesus was arrested ("And after the sop Satan entered into him"—John 13:27), Luke says Satan first entered Judas on the day Judas first went to the Jewish leaders ("Then entered Satan into Judas"—Luke 22:3, see

context). Matthew tells us this was two days before Jesus was arrested (see also Mark 14:1-2, 10-11).

Jesus was arrested late Thursday night or very early Friday morning, long before dawn. Two days before this was Tuesday night or very early Wednesday morning. There is no need to be extremely precise about this because, for Jews, the days were from evening to evening. The period between Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning would be considered part of the same day. Sometime during the Tuesday evening to Wednesday morning portion of this day, the Jewish leaders met to discuss ways to arrest and kill Jesus, and Judas began his betrayal of Jesus by giving the Jews the means they needed to carry out their decision. Because the daylight portion of this day occurred on Wednesday, it would be natural for the church, decades and even centuries later, to observe this day by fasting on Wednesday. It was not the night of Jesus' arrest that the church observed with its Wednesday fast, but the day of His original betrayal that occurred two days earlier.

In his attempt to convince his readers of his position, the Worldwide Church of God's Herman Hoeh appeals to the bogus Gospel of Peter. He quotes this work as saying that after Jesus' crucifixion "we [supposedly Peter and the other apostles] fasted and sat mourning night and day until the Sabbath."<sup>31</sup> Of this, Hoeh comments, "Between the crucifixion and the Sabbath, the disciples and Peter are said to have fasted 'night and day until the Sabbath.' This alone is a candid admission that the crucifixion was not on Good Friday! You can't fit 'night and day' between Friday afternoon and Friday sunset!"<sup>32</sup> But the Gospel of Peter cannot be taken as authoritative! Such a contradiction as this is typical of spurious works.

The Gospel of Peter was written in Syria in the middle to late second century and falsely attributed to Peter.<sup>33</sup> As early as 190,<sup>34</sup> Serapion of Antioch wrote a pamphlet called The So-called Gospel of Peter. "This he wrote," records Eusebius, "to refute the lies in that document, which had induced some members of the Christian community at Rhossus to go astray into heterodox teachings."<sup>35</sup> In the introduction to his 1924 translation of the Gospel of Peter, M. R. James writes, "It is not wholly orthodox: for it throws doubt on the reality of the Lord's sufferings, and by consequence upon the reality of his human body. In other words it is, as Serapion of Antioch indicated, of a Docetic character." The mention of "night and day until the Sabbath" in the Gospel of Peter can be dismissed as being part of a carelessly written fabrication.

*The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday* also refers to a scholar who says that references in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (a work written in northern Syria in the third century that falsely attributes its authorship to the 12 apostles<sup>36</sup>) and in the writings of Epiphanius of Constantia and Victorinus of Pettau support a Tuesday night Passover and the arrest of Jesus on Wednesday morning.<sup>37</sup> But, since Hoeh does not say what in these documents supports this position, there is no reason to give this serious consideration, especially in light of the biblical evidence I have presented that supports a Thursday night arrest and Friday crucifixion. Interestingly, a page on a Roman Catholic website (run by Eternal Word Television Network, Global Catholic Network) titled "The Obligation to Attend Mass on Sundays," written by Manuel Garrido, O.S.B., after saying that the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday stems from the celebration of Jesus' resurrection on that day, quotes the *Didascalia Apostolorum* as saying, "teach the faithful and exhort them to be present at Sunday Mass" (<http://www.ewtn.com/library/ANSWERS/OBLIMASS.HTM>). This hardly supports Hoeh's or Armstrong's position!

Hoeh also appeals to the Hebrew calendar to find the dates of the Passover during the years of Jesus' ministry.<sup>38</sup> In doing so, it gives a list of the Passover dates for the years A.D. 27-33 "verified by works on the 'Jewish calendar'—actually God's sacred calendar—correct according to computation preserved since the days of Moses!"<sup>39</sup> This claim is highly questionable. Scholars often debate over the dates for the Passover during those years showing that the only thing certain about them is that they are uncertain.

John L. McKenzie, writing on this topic, says it is an assumption "that the Jewish calendar was regulated with astronomical precision. It appears certain that it was not."<sup>40</sup> This being so, Hoeh's argument on this point falls apart.

Hoeh also claims that John 9:14 falls on a weekly Sabbath that also happened to be the eighth day (Last Great Day) of Jesus' last Feast of Tabernacles before His crucifixion. This, says Hoeh, pinpoints the year of Jesus' crucifixion. But again, this conclusion depends on knowing for certain the Hebrew calendar for those years. Since we do not have that knowledge, this claim also holds no weight.<sup>41</sup>

*The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday* also attempts to prove that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, April 25, A.D. 31, by constructing an extremely shaky house of cards consisting of his personal

understandings of the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-26, the use of "about thirty" in Luke 3:23, the year of Herod's death, when the wise men arrived, the reign of Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor, and the length of Jesus' ministry as determined by Daniel 9:27 and the number of Passovers in Jesus' ministry.<sup>42</sup> Hoeh presents his conclusions concerning these points as absolute, indisputable fact. But this is far from the truth. Bible scholars have debated these points for centuries and the conclusions of most scholars differ from Hoeh's. These scholars also use additional points in trying to determine the dates of Jesus' birth and death, points that *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday* does not even mention.<sup>43</sup>

Most importantly, it is extremely reckless and unwise for Hoeh and other followers of Armstrong to stake the legitimacy of Jesus' claim to be the Messiah on debatable historical dates and dubious interpretations of prophecy. God never intended that we must correctly interpret such evidence before we can believe for sure that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and our Savior!

### **The Sign of the Prophet Jonah**

As I have shown, writers for the Armstrong-era Worldwide Church of God believed that the "sign of the prophet Jonah" was the precise amount of time Jesus was in the tomb—72 hours. But these writers apparently never stopped to think of one crucial fact. No one ever witnessed the precise time of Jesus' resurrection. How could the precise time of Jesus' resurrection be a sign to that generation of Jews if no one was there to record that time? The Jews of that generation would abide by Deuteronomy 19:15 which says, "A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." Without those witnesses, the precise time of Jesus' resurrection could not be a sign to that generation of Jews.

Something else to consider is found in Luke 11:29-30: "And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation." Although Luke quotes Jesus as referring to the "sign of Jonas," or sign of Jonah, and as saying "for as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites," He never mentions the "three days and three nights." This omission is excellent evidence that the precise amount of time Jonah was in the fish is not essential to the sign of Jonah. As I will shortly explain, the

precise time Jonah was in the fish could not possibly have been a sign to the Ninevites.

A sign requires witnesses. Although no one witnessed the moment of Jesus' resurrection, there were witnesses to something else. After His resurrection, Jesus explained what these people were witnesses to: "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:45-48). Numerous scriptures confirm that the apostles were witnesses that Jesus died and was resurrected. This is what is important, not some precise moment of time.

Notice also that part of what the apostles were witnesses to was that repentance and forgiveness of sins was to be preached in Jesus' name to all nations—the Gentiles. They did not comprehend this when Jesus spoke to them in Luke 24. Jesus got them to understand it later. Read Acts 10 and see how central is the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles by those whom God chose to be witnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

What does this have to do with the sign of the prophet Jonah? Let's turn back to Matthew 12. The sign of the prophet Jonah needs to be seen in its full context. Verses 38-41 state:

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

Jesus goes on to make a similar comparison with the Queen of the South, but it is the men of Nineveh that I would like to focus on. Nineveh is the Gentile city to which God sent Jonah. He wanted Jonah to preach repentance to the Ninevites so they could be physically

saved from destruction. This can be seen as typical of the spiritual salvation that would one day be offered to the Gentiles.

Jonah did not want to preach repentance to the Gentiles. He tried to flee from the responsibility God gave him. This brought God's wrath, in the form of a storm, upon the ship in which he was traveling. Jonah offered himself to be sacrificed. As soon as he was thrown into his watery "grave," the storm ended. Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and was inside his "tomb" for a period of time idiomatically expressed as "three days and three nights." Under normal circumstances, Jonah would have died. But God delivered him alive from his "tomb." Jonah then preached a message of repentance to the Ninevites, the Ninevites repented, and they were saved alive.

What was the sign of the prophet Jonah? Being delivered from the grave after about three days was part of it. But there was more. The "sign of the prophet Jonah" included the preaching of salvation to the Gentiles. That is why Jesus said the men of Nineveh would judge His generation. The Gentiles of Nineveh repented, but on the whole the Jews of Jesus' generation did not.

This is what the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* says: "Jonah is regarded in Christianity as the proof of the capacity of the gentiles for salvation and the design of God to make them partake of it. This is the 'sign of Jonas'."<sup>44</sup> While no one witnessed the precise time of Jesus' resurrection, many witnessed the fact of Jesus' resurrection. And—as the Book of Acts testifies—the preaching of salvation to the Gentiles was known to the Jewish leaders and was therefore a witness to them.

It is this point concerning the nature of the sign of the prophet Jonah that makes this subject so important. Of his and Armstrong's belief that "the sign of the prophet Jonah" was Christ's being in the tomb for a literal three days and three nights, Herman Hoeh writes, "If Jesus did not fulfill that sign [being in the tomb for 72 hours], then he was an impostor and you are without a Savior!"<sup>45</sup>

To this, I reply, Speak for yourself. Hoeh and other followers of Armstrong ought to be ashamed of themselves for such blasphemy, which has now been used by scoffers to try to debunk Christianity! Notice the following from an Islamic website:

The Armstrong family has debunked the whole Christian world. They seem to know their arithmetic! Mr. Robert Fahey of the "Plain Truth" magazine, delivered a lecture

recently at the "Holiday Inn", Durban, where I was present. Mr. Fahey attempted to prove to his Christian audience that Jesus Christ was crucified on a Wednesday and not on Friday, as is supposed by Orthodox Christianity for the past two thousand years. According to him if one counts backwards from Sunday morning deducting 3 DAYS and 3 NIGHTS, one ought to get WEDNESDAY as the answer....

The question arises, who deceived the millions of Christians for the past TWO THOUSAND years. GOD or the DEVIL? Mr. Fahey categorically answered: "THE DEVIL!"

"If the devil", I said, "can succeed in confusing the Christians in the most elementary things of their Faith, whether to celebrate a Good Friday or a Good Wednesday, then how much easier for him to mislead Christians in other things concerning God?" Mr. Fahey blushed and walked away.

If this is the belief of the trend-setters of the Christian Faith in the world today, may we not then ask: is this not the mightiest hoax in history?<sup>46</sup>

But as we have now seen, it is the followers of Herbert Armstrong who are promoting a hoax. Instead of a miserly counting of days and hours to a specific time that no one even witnessed, the sign of the prophet Jonah was the truth of Jesus' resurrection from the dead that has resulted in the repentance and salvation of millions of people—Jews and Gentiles alike. Now that is a miraculous sign! Jesus fulfilled it, He is our Savior, and, from their own words, you and I should know who the impostors are.

### **Notes**

1. Herbert W. Armstrong, *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1988), no version number given, December 1989 printing.
2. Herman L. Hoeh, *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1979), version 1.1, May 1991 printing.
3. Armstrong, *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*, p. 2.

4. Ibid., p. 3.
5. Ibid., pp. 2-3.
6. Ibid., p. 8.
7. As quoted by H. L. Ellison in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), p. 375. Ellison credits the quote to j *Shabbath* 9.12a.
8. R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 213.
9. Armstrong, *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*, p. 3.
10. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. X (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), p. 398.
11. George L. Robinson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 79.
12. Ellison, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 375.
13. Hoeh, *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday*, p. 4.
14. Ibid.
15. Armstrong, *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*, pp. 3-4.
16. "The Passover was expanded to mean the entire feast that followed, and vice versa." A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1950), p. 280.
17. Herbert W. Armstrong, *Pagan Holidays or God's Holy Days—Which?* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, Chapters 1-4 1986; Chapter 5 1982; Chapter 6 1974), version 1.0, August 1989 printing. [Herbert W. Armstrong wrote chapters 1-4 and 6, L. Leroy Neff wrote chapter 5.] p. 9.
18. K. J. Stavriniades, "The Passover of the Exodus," p 2. Stavriniades, "Christ and the Passover," p. 5. *Reviews You Can Use*, May-June 1990.
19. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, p. 282.
20. Ibid., p. 283.
21. Armstrong, *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*, p. 7.

22. Abraham E. Millgram, *Jewish Worship* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971), p. 224.
23. Although it is not certain, it appears likely that, as is found in some King James Version margins and explained in a note on Matthew 28:2 in *The NIV Study Bible* (p. 1489), the events in Matthew 28:2-4 occurred before the women arrived at the tomb. "There was" might better be rendered "Now there had been."
24. Armstrong, *The Resurrection Was Not On Sunday*, p. 8.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. *The NIV Study Bible* in a note on Luke 24:21, p. 1589.
29. Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967), s.v. "fasting."
30. Ibid.
31. Hoeh, *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday*, p. 6.
32. Ibid., p. 7.
33. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. II (San Francisco: The Catholic University of America, 1967), s.v. "gospels of the apostles."
34. Ibid.
35. Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson (London: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 251-252.
36. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, s.v. "Didascalia Apostolorum."
37. Hoeh, *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday*, p. 6.
38. Ibid., pp. 8-9.
39. Ibid., p. 9.

40. John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), s.v. "passion."
41. Hoeh, *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday*, p. 23.
42. Ibid., pp. 10-17.
43. Such as the building of the temple of Herod and the census of Augustus Caesar.
44. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 10, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972), s.v. "Book of Jonah," column 174.
45. Hoeh, *The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday*, p. 1.
46. Ahmed Deedat, "What Was the Sign of Jonah?", <http://www.islamworld.net/jonah.html> . Deedat also makes the claim that because Jonah was alive in the belly of the great fish but Jesus was dead in the grave, Jesus failed to fulfill the sign of Jonah. But, of course, Jonah was merely a type of Jesus as Savior, and as a type, there was no need for Jonah to die. His being in the belly of the fish merely pictured Jesus' death and burial. Jesus, on the other hand, had to die for the sins of His people.