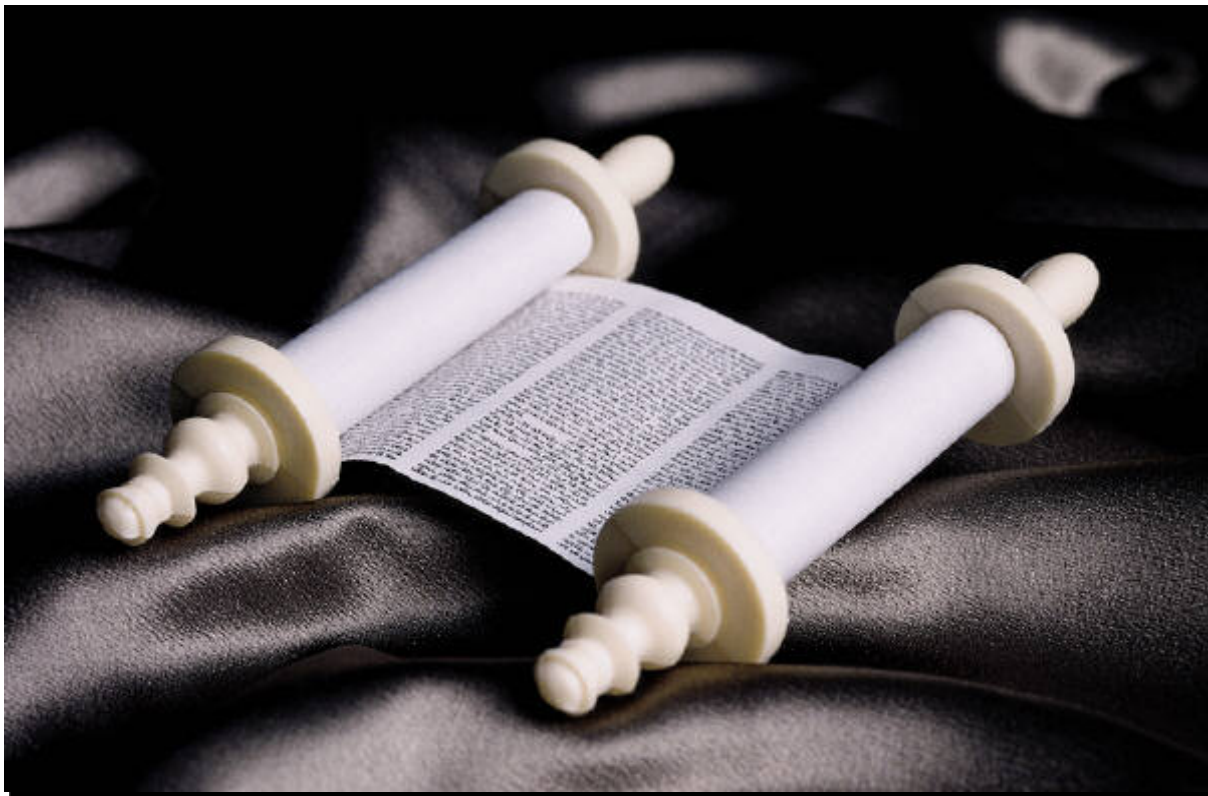


# *Foundation Institute*

## *Center for Biblical Education*

### *Fundamental Beliefs*

*Church of God, a Worldwide Association*



### *Three Days & Three Nights*

### *Handouts/Study Material*

## Summary of Fundamental Belief - Three Days & Three Nights

*Foundation Institute, Center for Biblical Education*

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Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the Father after His body lay for three days and three nights in the grave. The length of time that He was in the grave was the only sign He gave to prove He was the Messiah. The resurrection of Jesus Christ made immortality possible for mortal human beings. After His resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven, where He now sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest, elder Brother and Advocate with the Father.

*Scriptural support:* 1 Peter 1:17-21; 3:22; Matthew 12:39-40; 1 Corinthians 15:53; 2 Timothy 1:10; John 20:17; Hebrews 2:10-15; 8:1; 12:2; 1 John 2:1.

### Summary:

God the Father resurrected His only Son, Jesus the Christ, Who had been killed and placed in the tomb just outside Jerusalem. His death, allowed by the Father and willingly submitted to by Jesus (*John 10:17-18*), paid the penalty for all sins, on the condition that those sins are truly repented of. It was pre-ordained by the Father and the Word from the foundation of the world, as necessary for the salvation of mankind (*1 Peter 1:20*).

The death of Jesus Christ (God in the flesh) made it possible for all humans to have their sins forgiven (upon repentance and faith) and to be reconciled to God the Father. But the death of Jesus Christ was not the end of the matter. We are reconciled to God by Jesus' death, but we are saved by His life (*Romans 5:10*).

Only through Christ's resurrection to immortality could we have a living Savior, Who intercedes for us as High Priest to the Father (*1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:15-16; Romans 8:26-27*). Only because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead do human beings have any reason to believe in the gospel of the Kingdom of God, or to believe that they can be saved from eternal death (*1 Corinthians 15:14-19*). His resurrection provides for humans a basis for hope that they too may inherit eternal life (*1 Peter 1:3*).

Jesus offered both the fact that He would be in the grave (heart of the earth) for three days and three nights as the only divine sign to His generation that he was "greater than Jonah" and "greater than Solomon," and that His message should lead its hearers to repentance (*Matthew 12:39-42*). He said that He would be three days and three nights (a period of seventy-two hours; *John 11:9-10; Genesis 1:5*) in the heart of the earth (the grave), just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish (*Jonah 1:17*). In Mark, He is quoted as saying that He would "be killed and after three days rise again" (*Mark 8:31*).

The problem with the commonly accepted belief regarding the crucifixion and resurrection is that there are not three days and three nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. We believe the weight of scriptural and historical evidence leads to the conclusion that He died on Wednesday afternoon, was hurriedly buried in the tomb of Joseph shortly before sunset that same afternoon (the eve of an annual Sabbath, the First Day of Unleavened Bread; *John 19:30-31,42; Mark 15:42-46*), and was resurrected by the Father shortly before sunset on Saturday, three days and three nights after being placed in the tomb, exactly as He had said.

## Summary of Fundamental Belief - Three Days & Three Nights

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This explanation fits with the details found in Scripture. It does not require a difficult fitting of three days and three nights between Friday evening and Sunday by speculating about parts of days and nights. It reconciles the accounts of the women and the spices, found in *Mark 16:1* and *Luke 23:56*. In the first account, the faithful women obediently rested during holy time, and afterwards procured the spices. In the second account, the women prepared the spices and then afterwards rested during holy time. The only way to justify this time schedule is a Wednesday to Saturday three days and three nights.

These accounts are reconciled by understanding that there were two Sabbaths during the week in question. Jesus was crucified on the Passover (*Matthew 26:18-20, I Corinthians 5:7*), which was the preparation day (*Mark 15:42*) for the first annual holy day on the Jewish calendar, the First Day of Unleavened Bread. They waited until this day was over, then bought and prepared the spices, then rested again on God's weekly Sabbath day, and then proceeded to the tomb to apply the spices to Jesus' body, early on Sunday morning.

They visited the tomb following the two Sabbaths of that week (as the original Greek of *Matthew 28:1* should be translated). The annual Sabbath (annual holy days are called "Sabbaths" - *Leviticus 16:31; 23:24*) was Thursday and the weekly Sabbath was Saturday. When they arrived at the tomb on early Sunday morning, they found it empty and heard the announcement from the angel that Jesus was alive and was not here (*Mark 16:6*). He had already been resurrected.

A significant amount of historical and scriptural evidence points to 31 A.D. as the year of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Among the indicators of a 31 A.D. crucifixion are the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of the coming of the Messiah (*Daniel 9:24-26; Ezra 7 -- Artaxerxes' decree*), and a careful consideration of three milestones: the likely date of Jesus' birth, His age when He began His ministry, and the duration of His ministry.

By using the Jewish calendar, you can place the Passover in 31 A.D. on Wednesday, and Jesus Christ's death on that day fulfilled His role as the true Passover Lamb of God (*I Corinthians 5:7*). The next day, Thursday, was a holy (annual) Sabbath. On that Thursday, the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate to secure permission to seal and guard Jesus' tomb (*Matthew 27:62-66*). Later, on Sunday, the resurrected Jesus walked along the road to Emmaus and talked with two of His disciples, who discussed all the things that had happened, including the Thursday visit by the leaders to Pilate (*Luke 24:13-14, 20*). They mentioned that this day, Sunday, "led" the third day since all these things had happened (v. 21). Three days had now passed.

In summary, we believe that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, died for our sins on the Passover, was buried for three days and three nights (seventy-two hours), and then was resurrected and after a period of further contact with the disciples ascended to heaven to sit at the Father's right hand, far above all others in power, glory, and honor (*Ephesians 1:19-23*).

## *A Study of the Three Days and Three Nights*

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### *Matthew 12:38-40*

“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.’”

In each instance above the same Greek word (*treis*) is translated three. The simplest explanation is that Christ meant *three full days and three full nights* when He made this statement. But if this phrase means parts of three days and parts of three nights (which many scholars claim), there is still a problem. Although one can find *parts* of three days between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning, it is impossible to find *parts* of three nights!

The following scriptures contain the same Greek term (*treis*) that was used in Matthew 12:38-40. In every case it literally means three of whatever follows:

Matthew 12:40 “*three days and three nights. . .*”

Matthew 15:32 “*three days. . .*”

Matthew 17:4 “*three tabernacles. . .*”

Matthew 18:20 “*three are gathered. . .*”

Matthew 27:63 “*After three days. . .*”

Mark 8:2 “*three days. . .*”

Mark 8:31 “*after three days. . .*”

Mark 9:5 “*three tabernacles. . .*”

Mark 10:34 “*the third day. . .*”

Luke 1:56 “*about three months. . .*”

Luke 2:46 “*after three days. . .*”

Luke 9:33 “*three tabernacles. . .*”

Luke 11:5 “*three loaves. . .*”

Luke 12:52 “*divided three against two. . .*”

John 2:6 “*containing two or three. . .*”

Acts 7:20 “*for three months. . .*”

Acts 9:9 “*three days. . .*”

Acts 10:19 “*three men. . .*”

Acts 11:11 “*three men . . .*”

Acts 19:8 “*space of three months. . .*”

Acts 20:3 “*three months. . .*”

Acts 25:1 “*after three days. . .*”

Acts 28:7 “*lodged us three days. . .*”

Acts 28:11, 12, 17 “*three months. . .*” “*after three days. . .*” “*after three days. . .*”

1 Corinthians 10:8 “*three and twenty thousand. . .*”

1 Corinthians 14:27, 29 “*at the most by three. . .*” “*by three. . .*”

James 5:17 “*the space of three years and six months. . .*”

1 John 5:7-8 “*three that bear. . .*”

Revelation 6:6 “*three measures of barley. . .*”

Revelation 11:9, 11 “*for three days and an half. . .*” “*after three days and an half. . .*”

Revelation 21:13 “*three gates. . .*”

## *A Study of the Three Days and Three Nights*

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Where is the Biblical evidence that “three” does not mean three whole units? If this is the case then Christ must have intended three days and three nights.

Is this an idiomatic Hebrew expression? Where are the examples of such usage in scripture? Of course the New Testament was written in Greek and not Hebrew.

Statements from the book *The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection* by Samuele Bacchiocchi:<sup>1</sup>

The literal interpretation of the phrase “three days and three nights” as representing an exact period of 72 hours ignores the abundant Biblical and Rabbinical evidence on the idiomatic use of the phrase “a day and a night,” to refer not to an exact number of hours or of minutes, but simply to a calendrical day, whether complete or incomplete (page 26).

There are two examples quoted from the Old Testament to prove this usage of “three days and three nights” as an idiomatic expression. An idiom can be defined as “a turn of expression peculiar to a language; the distinctive characteristics of a language.”<sup>2</sup> It is what we would call a “figure of speech” and not to be taken literally. One must ask if Christ intended this to be taken literally or not? How did the audience of the first century interpret such an expression? Notice the two examples from the Old Testament quoted by Dr. Bacchiocchi:

1 Samuel 30:12-13 “And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. So when he had eaten, his strength came back to him; for he had eaten no bread nor drunk water for three days and three nights. <sup>13</sup>Then David said to him, “To whom do you *belong*, and where *are* you from?” And he said, “I *am* a young man from Egypt, servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind, because three days ago I fell sick.”<sup>3</sup>

Does this verse prove the usage of a Hebrew idiom? At best this verse is inconclusive. It is stated that the servant fasted for three days and three nights. The phrase “three days ago” does not dispute this passage. At the end of three days and three nights, he was abandoned “three days ago.”

Esther 4:16; 5:1 Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish! . . . Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on *her* royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, across from the king’s house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house.<sup>4</sup>

This verse does not include the term “three days and three nights” rather it is three days, night and day. This is a different expression in the Hebrew than the one found in 1 Samuel. There is no difficulty with this verse. Esther asks for a three day fast and then

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<sup>1</sup>Bacchiocchi, Samuele, *The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection*, (Biblical Perspectives: Berrien Springs, MI) 1991.

<sup>2</sup>*Webster’s New School & Office Dictionary*, (The World Publishing Company: New York) 1961.

<sup>3</sup>*The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

## ***A Study of the Three Days and Three Nights***

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on the third day (of the fast) she appears before the king. This clearly was at the end of the third day (after 2 full days and 3 full nights and nearing the end of the third day). Esther requests that Haman be invited to attend a banquet, which would take place in the evening, now after three days and three nights. This is a plausible explanation that avoids the expression referring to “parts” of days and nights.

The interesting thing about both of these examples (and any other that one may choose to use) is that even parts of three days and parts of three nights would require at least a portion of each day and each night. This is impossible with a Friday afternoon to Sunday morning stay in the tomb. There are no parts of three days and parts of three nights. It simply makes no sense for Christ to have said “three days and three nights” if He was only talking about 36 hours (from Friday about 6:00 P.M. to Sunday about 6:00 A.M.). This makes a mockery out of the term “three days and three nights.”

### ***Matthew 28:1***

“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.”

The Greek word translated Sabbath in the English Bible is from the Greek “*Sabbaton*.” This is the plural form of the word that may convey plurality or singularity. The context must determine which is being used. In this case Sabbaths, plural better explains what happened during this remarkable week. There were two Sabbaths—one was a “high day” (John 19:31) and the other was a weekly Sabbath.

*The Companion Bible*<sup>5</sup> offers the following information on this subject:

The fact that “three days” is used by Hebrew idiom for any part of three days and three nights is not disputed; because that was the common way of reckoning just as it was when used of years. . . . But when the number of “nights” is stated as well as the number of “days”, then the expression ceases to be an idiom and becomes a literal statement of fact. . . . Hence when it says that Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17) it means exactly what it says, and that this can be the only meaning of the expression in Matthew 12:40; 16:4; Luke 11:30 is shown in Ap. 156 (page 170 of the appendices).

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<sup>5</sup>Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (Zondervan Bible Publishers: Grand Rapids, MI) 1974.

# ***“Three Days and Three Nights”***

## ***(Matthew 12:38-42)***

*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.”*

	<b><i>First Day</i></b>		<b><i>Second Day</i></b>		<b><i>Third Day</i></b>	
<b><i>Wednesday</i></b>	<b><i>Wednesday Night</i></b>	<b><i>Thursday</i></b>	<b><i>Thursday Night</i></b>	<b><i>Friday</i></b>	<b><i>Friday Night</i></b>	<b><i>Saturday</i></b>
<p>Christ is crucified about 9:00 AM (Mark 15:25)</p> <p>Three hours of darkness from noon to 3:00 PM (Mark 15:33)</p> <p>Christ dies at 3:00 PM (Mark 15:34)</p> <p>Christ is buried before sunset (Luke 23:53-54)</p>	<p>Jewish Passover meal is eaten (John 19:14)</p> <p>Beginning of the Days of Unleavened Bread (15<sup>th</sup> day of 1<sup>st</sup> month).</p> <p>Christ’s first night in the tomb (belly of the earth)</p>	<p>First Day of Unleavened Bread (High Day, John 19:21).</p> <p>Guard is placed at the tomb (Matthew 27:64).</p> <p>Christ’s first day in the tomb (belly of the earth).</p>	<p>Christ’s second night in the tomb (belly of the earth).</p>	<p>Women prepare spices (Luke 23:56).</p> <p>Christ’s second day in the tomb (belly of the earth).</p>	<p>Women rest according to the commandment for the Sabbath (Luke 23:56).</p> <p>Christ’s third night in the tomb (belly of the earth).</p>	<p>Christ’s third day in the tomb (belly of the earth).</p> <p>Commandment to rest.</p> <p>Christ is resurrected at the end of the Sabbath day, exactly three days and three nights after being placed in the tomb.</p>

### **Terms and Scriptures:**

**“Sign of Jonah”** = *The amount of time He spent in the fish’s belly.*

**“after three days”** = *Matthew 27:63; Mark 8:31; Mark 9:31 (NAS, RSV, NIV, AMP); Mark 10:34 (NAS, RSV, NIV, AMP)*

**“the third day”** = *Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:23; Matthew 20:19; Luke 9:22; Luke 18:33; Luke 24:7; Luke 24:46*

**in three days”** = *Matthew 26:61; Matthew 27:40; Mark 15:29; John 2:19*

**“within three days”** = *Mark 14:58*

**“three days and three nights** = *Matthew 12:40*

In Mark 9:31 and Mark 10:34, the Greek word *meta* is found. This Greek preposition is translated “with,” “among,” or “behind.” Most translations use the word “after” in Mark 9:31 and Mark 10:34.

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## REVIEW OF FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS

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1. Name the two predominant views on the three days and three nights (Matthew 12:38-40).
  
2. Define the word "idiom."
  
3. Does the Biblical evidence show that the word "three" ever means "parts," as opposed to three whole units? Provide evidence supporting your answer.
  
4. List at least three other signs given by God in the Bible. Were any of them "idiomatic" expressions or were they literal?
  
5. Explain why proving a Sunday morning resurrection is important to the theologians.
  
6. Explain the series of events from the time of the crucifixion to the resurrection.