

## COUNTING BY INCLUSIVE RECKONING

The traditional view of the events of Passion Week is dependent on counting the days Jesus was in the tomb by the method of inclusive reckoning. This method of counting considers that any part of a day can be counted for an entire day. Thus, the Friday Jesus was supposedly placed in the tomb is counted as a full day since Jesus was placed in the tomb a few minutes before sunset, and Sunday is also counted as a full day since He was supposedly resurrected shortly before sunrise on Sunday morning. The traditional view argues that these two partial days with a full Sabbath day sandwiched in between represents the full “three days and three nights” Jesus said He would be in the heart of the Earth (Matthew 12:40) even though this time period amounts to only about 36 hours.

Applying the principle of counting days by inclusive reckoning to both the first and last days Jesus was in the tomb is tempting because the principle has been applied to counting the first and last years a king was in power in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Any part of the year that a king reigned was generously considered as a full year when counting the years a king was on the throne. If a king began to reign during the last month of the biblical year, the entire year was considered as his first year of reign even though it covered only a short part of the year. The beginning of the next month which began the new year would begin the second year of his reign. This method of counting was also applied to the ending year of a king’s reign. If a king began to reign in Adar and died just over a year later in the month of Nisan, the first month of the biblical year, the king would have reigned during 14 months, but would have reigned during three different calendar years and would have been given credit for a three-year reign.

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<sup>1</sup> See the SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 5, 1980 edition, page 249 on how the principle of counting by inclusive reckoning is applied to calculating the years of a king’s reign. See also the Anchor Bible on Hosea, pages 36-37.

Moreover, when the son of a king was elevated to the status of king as a co-regent with his father, both kings would be credited with full rulership during those years. Thus, the years of a king’s rulership are often confusing and identified as a longer time period than what we would count today because the principle of counting by inclusive reckoning was applied to both the beginning and ending years of a king’s reign. This method of counting the years of a king’s administration always caused an apparent overlap of time with the preceding and subsequent kings so that it was inherently and literally inaccurate by a straight, simple counting. But it is a useful technique as it reduces the apparent inaccuracies of scripture by providing us with a method of reconciling the year of ascension of any given king with the reign of another in a different jurisdiction.

I suggest it is inappropriate to apply the method of counting by inclusive reckoning to the time Jesus was in the tomb. The apparent overlap with the rulership of another does not exist in the case of Jesus’ time in the grave. The purpose of applying the principle of counting by inclusive reckoning is to resolve the apparent disparity between the length of reign of one king with the reign of another king because scripture often ties the start of the reign of one king to a certain year of the reign of another king. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus does not overlap with any other event or person so that an adjustment needs to be made to account for his time in the tomb. The time Jesus was in the tomb is not tied to any event or person other than the “three days and three nights” He stipulated in Matthew 12:40.

I further suggest that we don’t properly understand the concept of counting days by the method of inclusive reckoning, that Christian scholars have been far too eager to apply it to the time Jesus was in the tomb, and have failed to properly apply it to the time Jesus was in the tomb. While counting days by the method of inclusive

reckoning is a genuine principle used in certain circumstances throughout the Hebrew world during the Old Testament, the Second Temple period and beyond, the method does not have universal application.<sup>2</sup> There is a right way to apply the principle and a wrong way to apply it. Following are two examples of how the method of counting days by inclusive reckoning is used, first the proper application and then an incorrect application.

Example 1: The proper application: Scripture commands that all male babies are to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. Let's say a woman gives birth in the wee hours of the night at say 2 A.M. Babies often show up at times that are inconvenient to adult schedules. By a strict count, eight days later by the watch would require that the parents should take their son to be circumcised in the middle of the night. But the priests didn't hold midnight circumcision rituals. The method of counting days by inclusive reckoning applies and so the parents, keeping in mind that the day begins at sunset, would schedule the circumcision for anytime eight days later during any portion of the day a priest is available. If the ritual were done at 2 in the afternoon, that would be eight-and-a-half days later by the watch, but still on the eighth day so that the requirement for circumcision is correctly fulfilled. By the method of inclusive reckoning, any part of the eighth day counts as the proper day for the circumcision to be done.

Conversely, if a woman gives birth at 5 P.M., just one hour before sunset at the end of the day, the circumcision could be scheduled to take place at 9 A.M. on the eighth day. This time is literally less than a strict count of eight days by the watch being 8 hours short of a full eight days, but counting the days by the method of inclusive reckoning and remembering that the day begins at sunset, any part of the day counts as the eighth day and this schedule satisfies the requirements for circumcision. Moreover, conceivably, the parents could schedule the circumcision to be on the early night portion of the day if they could find a priest to do it, say at 7 P.M. on the eighth day, which would be only seven

days and two hours. According to the principle of inclusive reckoning, it would be on the eighth day and would also satisfy the requirements for circumcision. Both of these situations illustrate the proper use of counting days by the method of inclusive reckoning.

Example 2: The incorrect application: Consider a farmer who needs a wheel replaced on a wagon. The farmer takes the wagon with the broken wheel to a wagon maker at 4 P.M. After looking over the situation the wagon maker tells the farmer that it will take a day to repair or replace the wheel. When should the farmer return to get his repaired wagon? By the words of the wagon maker, it would be the next day that the farmer would expect the wagon to be repaired. But if one counts the days by the method of inclusive reckoning where any part of a day counts for a full day, the farmer should be able to return in a few minutes, say at 4:30 P.M. the same day to get the repaired wagon. After all, if any part of a day counts for a full day and the wagon maker said he needed only a day to repair the wheel, then returning the same day satisfies the principle of counting the days by inclusive reckoning. Obviously, this is an improper application of the principle of counting days by the method of inclusive reckoning. The principle of counting days by the method of inclusive reckoning does not allow a small portion of the first day to be counted for a full day. The principle that any part of the day counts as a whole day is applied to the last day in the sequence of days, but is not applied to the first day in the sequence of days.

How does this apply to the time Jesus was in the tomb? If we count the days by the method of inclusive reckoning and assuming, in arguendo, that Jesus was placed in the tomb just before sunset on Friday evening, then sunset at the end of the weekly Sabbath would complete the first day; sunset Sunday would complete the second day; and sunset Monday would complete the third day; but by counting the days by the method of inclusive reckoning, Jesus could be resurrected anytime after sunset Sunday night. This is so absurd that nobody teaches it. But even more absurd is the notion that the principle of counting the days by the method of inclusive reckoning can be applied to the first day in

<sup>2</sup> An electronic search in JewishEncyclopedia.com of the term "inclusive reckoning" returned no hits.

the sequence of days so that Friday is counted as an entire day even though Jesus was in the tomb for only a few minutes before sunset. Christian scholars and teachers typically truncate Jesus' words and their meaning by a series of misapplications of logic: first, His statement is classified as an idiomatic expression which diminishes its literal importance as a reliable sign; second, references to the night time portion of His statement are eliminated to make it seem as though only half of the sign needs to be accounted for thereby diminishing the entire statement; third, the principle of counting days by the method of inclusive reckoning is incorrectly applied to both the first and last days Jesus was in the tomb; fourth, Jesus is said to have been resurrected on Sunday morning rather than at the close of Sabbath as all the Gospels testify; and then the Friday crucifixion--Sunday morning resurrection is declared to fulfill the sign Jesus cited in Matthew 12 as the primary evidence that He is sent from the Father while at the same time acknowledging that this isn't actually 'three days and three nights' and doesn't need to be. The traditional view misapplies the principle of counting days by the method of inclusive reckoning to both ends of the sequence of days so that Jesus is said to be in the tomb for only half the time He predicted He would be there which nullifies the sign Jesus promised we could rely on that He was sent from the Father. This interpretation is taught as if it is in perfect harmony with the story of scripture when it factually conflicts with scripture on many points. There is no justification for such a misapplication of logic other than to create the appearance of making the pieces of the puzzle of Passion Week fit as the celebration of the resurrection of our LORD is transferred to a pagan holiday. In actuality, the pieces cannot be made to fit by incorrectly applying the principle of counting the days by the method of inclusive reckoning.

The notion that the Jews of the Second Temple Period typically counted consecutive days by the method of inclusive reckoning is contradicted by the ritual washing in the *mikvah* which Hebrew women were required to do on a regular basis. The ordinary method of counting can be seen in the language related to the time for cleansing.

Historically, the orthodox Jewish people follow very strict rules with respect to ritual cleansing and the time required for certain acts to be completed. For example, in order for a wife to experience the Tevilah, the ritual cleansing after her monthly cycle, the law requires "seven spotless days and nights" before she can immerse in the *mikvah* and be ritually clean.<sup>3</sup> The Jews did not consider that any part of a day counts for a whole day in this situation. They knew that the days and nights are unique to each other and that seven days and seven nights must be completed before the Tevilah could be done, and that no short cuts were allowed. This Jewish writing and Leviticus 15:19-30 certainly set a standard for the observance of these seven days stating that on the eighth day she is clean. If the method of counting by inclusive reckoning was commonly used, then she should be clean after the beginning of the seventh day, but scripture states she is unclean until the eighth day. Likewise, Leviticus 22:27 says that a newborn bullock, sheep, or goat is to remain with its mother for seven days and on the eighth day it can be used in a sacrifice. If counting by inclusive reckoning was commonly used, then the offspring should be acceptable for a burnt offering after the beginning of the seventh day, but scripture states it is acceptable from the eighth day on. The Jewish method of counting consecutive days and/or parts of days was not limited to the concept of inclusive reckoning where any part of a day was considered equal to the complete calendar day. It is clear that when "seven days and seven nights" are specified, the time element must encompass all of the days and nights stated. There is no reason to believe that this same time principle does not apply to Jesus' declaration in Matthew 12:39-40 regarding the sign of Jonah.

Jesus removed the possibility of counting His days in the heart of the Earth by the method of inclusive reckoning when He stipulated that the time would include "three days and three nights"

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<sup>3</sup> This is found at <http://jew.dp.ua/english/mikva.htm>. Look down toward the end of the page to the heading "The Proper Time for Tevilah - Immersion in The Mikvah" and you'll see that they understood that seven days and seven nights must be completed before the Tevilah could be done.

just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights. The correct method of counting the days in question is to count them literally just as they were counted for Jonah. Whatever method is used to determine the beginning and ending times that Jesus was in the tomb must account for both the “three days” and the “three nights” of His statement. Any method of counting the days that fails to account for this entire time period is nothing less than an attempt to discredit Jesus. The “three days and three nights” is the specific event that Jesus pointed the scribes and Pharisees to in Matthew 12 that would verify that He was sent to them by God. Any method of counting that truncates Jesus’ explicit words is nothing short of a veiled attempt to make Jesus seem to be a liar and prophetically incompetent. Who, more than anyone else in the Universe, wants Jesus to be seen as a liar? Who wants Jesus to be seen as prophetically incompetent? The traditional view does exactly that. If we believe on Him and in the One who sent Him, we should be putting our efforts into exonerating the words of Jesus, not attacking and discounting them. Counting the days Jesus was in the tomb by the method of inclusive reckoning is a misapplication of the principle.

The traditional teaching of the sequence of events of Passion Week has caused a significant portion of the power and beauty of the story to be lost. When we who claim to follow Jesus say that His words don’t really mean what He said, we are creating god in our image. Man creating his own god is the essence of paganism. Applying the principle of inclusive reckoning to calculating the days Jesus was in the tomb has very subtly diminished the force of Jesus’ own words and has led untold millions away from a clear understanding of the events of Passion Week and the full force of the blessing God intends His people to enjoy.

There is another agenda that has long been at work to deceive the very elect. There are at least three theological principles that are short circuited by the 36 hour orthodox view. First, because the three day requirement of the pagans and Greeks cannot be met by the 36 hours of the orthodox view, it is not possible to discuss whether Jesus is qualified to describe what happens when one dies

nor to demonstrate the type of bodies the righteous will have throughout eternity. Lazarus met the requirements of the three day rule when he died and was resurrected on the fourth day, so he is qualified to report on what one experiences at death. But the 36 hours of the orthodox view for the time Jesus was in the tomb does not allow Jesus, from a strictly human point of view, the same qualification and authority as Lazarus. Second, the orthodox view that Jesus was resurrected on Sunday morning, rather than at the close of Sabbath, not only places the time of the resurrection at odds with scripture, but in harmony with the pagan teaching of Ashtoreth and the resurrection of Tammuz. This mythical annual resurrection of Tammuz was the foundation of Easter Sunday worship and had been celebrated with Easter lilies, Easter eggs, and bunny rabbits for 400 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem<sup>4</sup>. The adoption of Easter in the place of Passover as the celebration of the resurrection has also been, at least in part, the basis for the adoption of Sunday, the first day of the week, in place of the seventh day Sabbath as the day of weekly worship. Third, by removing the resurrection from Passover, Christianity has given up the study and practice of observing all the LORD’S festivals and Holy Convocation days which He said are to be kept forever. By rejecting the words of Jesus in Matthew 12, it becomes a little easier to also reject the LORD of the Old Testament when it comes to keeping all His festivals. Rejection of God’s advice, counsel, direction, encouragement, instruction, and nurture in the Old Testament — His Torah or Law — is at the heart of the rejection of a literal interpretation of the words of Jesus in Matthew 12.

By promoting a shortened version of the time Jesus was in the tomb, significant understandings about the character of God have been overlooked by the masses of individuals who have come to call themselves Christians. Certainly there is a need for more education and reformation.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Two Babylons*, by Alexander Hislop. Chapter 3 entitled ‘Festivals’ is a discussion of the pagan influence on festivals adopted by Christianity. Section 2, pages 103-113, outlines the origin of Easter as part of the pagan religion of Ashtoreth and its adoption into Christianity.