

RICHARD K. SCOTT:

**THE CRUCIFIXION MAY HAVE OCCURRED ONE DAY EARLIER THAN
TRADITIONALLY BELIEVED**

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INTRODUCTION

The four Gospel writers devoted 1/3 of their chapters (23 of 89) to the final week before the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Subsequent Bible commentators have since spent much effort analyzing and ordering the abundance of information there recorded. Yet, the written account leaves many intriguing details unclear. From clues within the New Testament record we attempt to sequence the events and identify the corresponding day in our Sunday through Saturday calendar system. Unfortunately, the four Gospel accounts cannot be fully harmonized without compromise. The Triumphal Entry and Resurrection are generally accepted as occurring on successive Sundays, but there is less certainty as to the precise day of the midweek activities. In fact, most attempts at reconstruction work inward from the two Sundays and end up one day short of a full week. This approach requires the creation of a day of no activity, inconsistent with the characteristically detailed descriptions of this most important of all weeks. Furthermore, what about the clear promise that the crucified body of the Savior would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt 12:40)? The traditionally accepted hypothesis of a Friday crucifixion allows for only a partial fulfillment of this prophecy.

There remain many questions to be answered, perspectives to be considered. From the vantage point of Old Testament pattern of the Passover week and the unique Book of Mormon account of the death of Christ, this paper will take yet another look at the final events in the mortal mission of Jesus Christ. The conclusion reached is that there is no midweek day of inactivity. Jesus was crucified on Thursday, fulfilling the Passover requirements and adding further witness that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

THE PASSOVER PATTERN REVEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The sacrifice of a symbolic lamb (Moses 5:5) was required from the time Adam and Eve commenced mortality. To them, the angel explained, "this thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father" (Moses 5:7). Thus from "the time of Adam to the time of the atoning sacrifice the lamb was a vicarious sacrifice offered by the shedding of its blood in similitude of the sacrifice that Christ would make for all men." (Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism*, p.2.) After the Exodus, the Israelites continued this focus on the Savior through the sacrificial slaying of the Passover lamb. "All that was associated with the Passover was a type of the atoning sacrifice of Christ." (ibid, p. 267, see also pp. 48-50)

In revelations to Moses, the Lord instituted the Passover and gave specific instructions as to how and when the feast was to be celebrated. There has been much written showing that all symbolisms of the Passover were fulfilled in the final week of the Savior's life. For the purposes of this paper, only facts relative to when the Passover should be celebrated will be considered.

From the 12th chapter of Exodus, we learn the Passover event should be celebrated in the "first month" (v.2) of the Israelite calendar. The selection of the lamb to be sacrificed was to be made "in the tenth day of this month." (v.3) The chosen lamb was to be kept "until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it, in the evening" (v. 6). (The transition time from one day to the next, herein called "evening" or "even," was sunset (Deut. 16:6), later standardized as 6:00 p.m.). Later "that night" (Gen. 12:8) (on the next calendar day, the 15th, according to the Israelite system) the slain lamb was to be eaten along with the

other symbolic foods. This "feast to the Lord" was to include "an holy convocation" wherein "no manner of work shall be done" (vv. 14, 16). This "sacrifice of the Lord's passover" (v. 27) was a "night to be much observed unto the Lord" (v. 42) and was also called "the ordinance of the Passover" (v. 43).

Relative to this very significant annual feast, Levite priests were instructed, "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even (Lev. 23:5 footnote b: between day-time and night-time) is the Lord's passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of the unleavened bread unto the lord: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein" (Lev 23:5-7). This fifteenth day of the month (the first day of the seven days of unleavened bread) is elsewhere referred to as a "Sabbath" (BD p. 627 Feasts) and "the feast" (Num 28:17).

The first day of the lunar month of Abib-Nisan was carefully determined by the sighting of the new moon. "In order to prevent possible confusion to the central religious authority, the chief of the Sanhedrin, in conjunction with at least two colleagues, was entrusted with the determination of new moon day for the whole nation" (*Jewish Encyclopedia* Vol. 3 p. 502). Since the major Passover activities were scheduled 14 and 15 days later, the celebration always coincided with the full moon, (see Times and Seasons, *Eardmans' Handbook To The Bible*, pp. 110-111).

Weeks, on the other hand, were calculated on the basis of seven solar days. Unfortunately, the solar year, seven day week, and twelve lunar months cannot be fully harmonized. To illustrate from our Julian calendar: if a holiday is always on a certain day of the week, such as Easter, it is celebrated on a different date each year. If a

holiday is scheduled on a specific date, such as Christmas, it varies yearly as to the day of week upon which it is held. The Passover Sabbath was to be celebrated annually on 15 Abib-Nisan and, therefore, would be on various days of the week. This annual Sabbath was independent from the weekly Sabbath. The year the Lamb of God was sacrificed, Abib-Nisan 15 was on Friday, corresponding to April 7th in our calendar system. (Bruce R. McConkic, *The Mortal Messiah*, Vol. 4, p. 6, and Roger Rusk, *The Day He Died*, "Christianity Today", March 29, 1974, pp. 4-6, and James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 510)

PASSEOVER PATTERN PROJECTED ONTO CHRIST'S FINAL WEEK
Abib (later called Nisan)

Israelite Month Abib-Nisan	10 th	14 th	15 th
Passover Activity	Selection of the Lamb to be sacrificed. "take to them every man a lamb" Ex. 12:3	Lord's Passover "the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening" Ex. 12:6	Feast or Sabbath "this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever." Ex. 12:14
Day of Week	Sunday	Thursday	Friday
Corresponding Calendar Date	April 2	April 6	April 7

DETAILED LAST WEEK FOLLOWS THE PASSOVER PATTERN

In no other section of the Gospels is the Messiahship of Jesus more evident than in those chapters dealing with the last week of his life. The importance of these events warranted devoting a disproportionate number of chapters (28 of 89) to the account of but a single week. Correspondingly, New Testament commentators and teaching manuals typically include detailed charts and lists of each day's activities.

However, when one studies the individual Gospel accounts there remains some ambiguity as to when certain midweek activities occurred. The issue is further complicated by the differing writing styles and points of focus of the four Gospel writers. The existing lists and charts attempt to harmonize the Gospel accounts and provide a probable sequence of events. Of necessity the compilers have had to make compromises, for the Gospels don't always agree, and rely to some extent on assumptions and attempts at consistency. The challenge is emphasized by James E. Talmage who stated, "Controversy has been rife for many centuries as to the day of the passover feast in the Lord's death." (*Jesus the Christ*, pp. 617-619.) The purpose of this paper is not to refute the conclusions of other commentators, but merely to suggest that compliance to the schedule stipulated for proper Passover observance may have been followed more strictly than once thought.

The Apostle Paul stated, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor 5:7). Let us consider then the possibility that as the Passover Lamb, Jesus, may have been slain in strict compliance with the requirements of the annual Passover schedule. The Passover schedule stipulated in the Old Testament synchronized with corresponding activities in the Savior's final week would produce the following chart:

Israelite Month of Abib-Nisan	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Day of Week	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Stipulated Passover Activity		Lamb Chosen				Lamb Slain			
Literal fulfillment by Lamb of God		Triumphal Entry				Crucifixion			
Additional Activities	Anointed		Taught	Taught	Last Supper	Interred	Rejoice with liberated dead in Spirit World		Resurrected
Julian Calendar Month of April	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

There is some question as to whether the supper at Bethany, whereat Mary anointed Jesus, occurred Saturday night (Jn 12:1-9) or in midweek (Matt 26:12-13 and Mk 14:1-9). Regarding the first day in Passion Week James E. Talmage (*Jesus the Christ*, p. 523) acknowledged, "A comparison of the accounts of the Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and of certain events following, as recorded by the three synoptists, shows at least a possibility of discrepancy as to sequence. . . . The question is admittedly an open one." However, most commentators concur that the Triumphal Entry transpired on Sunday. John mentions the significant branches of palm trees, Hosanna shout, and ass's colt then adds, "These things understood not his disciples at

the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him" (Jn 12:16). The very public and dramatic acceptance of Jesus as the promised Messiah (and possibly the anointing on the previous night) would be the most evident act of selecting Jesus to be the Lamb of God. As expected, the Triumphal Entry and probably the anointing took place on Abib-Nisan 10 in accordance with the Passover schedule.

The several days following the Triumphal Entry are filled with instruction and dialogue. However, the authors do not always agree or even specify the day upon which the teachings occurred. John did not even record these events. Luke, who prided himself in chronological exactness (Lk 1:1-3), merely said Jesus "taught daily" (Lk 19:47) and "on one of those days" (Lk 20:1) he taught parables. Luke used this lackadaisical approach until the "feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called Passover" (Lk 22:1). Mark identifies the day after the Triumphal Entry as "on the morrow" (Mk 11:12). We are alerted to the next day with the phrase "in the morning" (Mk 11:20). Thus we can account for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday but with some ambiguity.

After the detailed record of the Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday activities, the synoptic Gospels conclude the Savior's public ministry. In this initial daily account the point of reference is how many days since the supper at Bethany and Triumphal Entry. As the focus now turns toward the final preparations of the Apostles, the point of reference for counting days shifts to the rapidly approaching Passover. This transition from a past reference point to a future one does not suggest a day of inactivity but merely a concentration of focus toward the more intimate group of devoted disciples.

This small, personal group of friends were preparing for the family experience of the symbolic and final Passover celebrations.

The "first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover" (Mk 14:12, see also Matt 26:17 and Lk 22:7) is the next day mentioned. If this is a daily account (which all internal evidence suggests) then preparations for the Last Supper were completed on Wednesday. Modern writers often speculate a Wednesday of inactivity, but no Gospel writer mentions such a day or even hints at a lapse in the style of detailed accounting. But why would Jesus have a Passover lamb slain on Wednesday the 13th when the Passover schedule stipulated this activity take place on the 14th? A clue may lie in the fact that Jesus ate the Passover meal (Matt 26:17, Mk 14:12, Lk 22:7-8) one day earlier than the Jews celebrated the feast (Matt 26:2-5; 27:15-26, 62; Mk 15:6-15, 42; Lk 23:15-17, 38-40; Jn 13:1-2, 29; 18:23; 19:14, 31, 42). One possible explanation for this variance is that Christ, "the real sacrifice of which all earlier altar victims had been but prototypes," had to celebrate the Passover meal one night earlier for on the official day he was committed to be the Lamb of God. Another hypothesis is that the official calendar followed by the Jewish temple leaders differed by one day from that followed by the orthodox Qumran community which Jesus may have favored. "They certainly kept festivals on different days from those observed in the temple. Practice may have varied in the days of Christ more than was once thought; this may help to explain why the last supper did not coincide with the day of Passover in the temple." (*Eardmans' Handbook To the Bible*, p. 111.) It has also been observed at the time of Christ tradition may have added an additional day of feast, the Chagigah, and possibly even an additional day of sacrificial slaying to accommodate the logistical challenge of

slaying 250,000 plus lambs. (James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 618). For whatever reason, the Savior celebrated the Passover one day before the Jews and, therefore, was available to be the Lamb of God for all mankind on the official day of 14 Abib-Nisan.

The Jews plotted to kill Jesus but specifically chose not to do so "on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people" (Matt 26:5, also Mk 14:20). Accordingly each of the Gospel writers noted (Matt 27:62; Mk 15:42; Lk 23:54; Jn 19:14, 31, 42) that Jesus was crucified on the day of preparation before the Sabbath. This sabbath reference may have been too hastily interpreted by some to refer to the weekly Saturday Sabbath. For this reason most charts place the crucifixion day on Friday, thus putting the Last Supper on Thursday. Such a conclusion creates a vacuum of activity for Wednesday.

However, such a conclusion overlooks the fact that there is no "preparation" day before the weekly Sabbath. The preparation day was for the annual Passover Sabbath of 15 Abib-Nisan, which that year happened to be on Friday. Let us not forget that this unique week had two Sabbaths; the Friday 15 Abib-Nisan Sabbath for Passover, and the weekly Saturday Sabbath. The day on which Christ was crucified was Thursday, the day of preparation for the Friday Passover Sabbath.

John stated, "The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was a high day) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away" (John 19:31). Note that the Sabbath which concerned the Jews was not the weekly Sabbath, but a very special 'high' holy day. John made special note of that fact.

(*Eardman's Handbook To The Bible*, p. 547) adds "the reference here is to the preparation for the Sabbath of Passover week." A footnote to John 14:31 in the LDS Edition further clarifies, "Jesus arose on the first day of the week. The previous day was the weekly Sabbath. The day before the Sabbath, being also the day after the Passover meal, could be the 'high' day." In chart form, this information is perhaps more graphic:

Preparation and Passover meal	'High' day Sabbath	Weekly Sabbath	Resurrection on first day of week
Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
14	15	16	17

Again, the commitment to the Passover schedule of killing the lamb on the 14th, followed by a special Sabbath on the 15th is evident.

It is of special interest to note that some Bible translations (Ferrar Fenton's and Scofield) are true to the original Greek in stating (Matt 23:1) that the resurrection occurred, "In the end of the Sabbaths."

Consecutive Sabbath days would also make the period of internment and prophecies thereof more compatible.

If Christ was crucified on Thursday rather than Friday his body would have been in the tomb a full 24 hours longer than some have taught. This would be more consistent with prophecy than the traditional Friday night through Sunday morning internment. On numerous occasions (see *The Significance of 'Three Days' in the Bible*, located in accompanying Appendix) Jesus prophesied that he would be resurrected three days after his death. The Friday through Sunday theory only allows for about 36 hours in the tomb. True, it can be shown (and it always has to be explained because it isn't readily evident) that these hours do overlap parts (perhaps minutes) of three calendar days. However, if the hours and days must be orchestrated, it would seem to

dilute the intended impact of the sign. The conspicuous inadequacy of the Friday through Sunday approach is evident when one considers the very descriptive statement by Jesus that "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" (Matt 12:40). A Friday through Sunday interpretation may overlap three calendar days but there is no way it can include three days and three nights. A Thursday afternoon to Sunday morning internment of approximately 60 hours certainly approaches a more literal fulfillment of the Savior's prophecy.

The wicked Jewish leaders to whom Jesus gave the "three days and three nights" prophecy seemed to understand it to mean a full three days. The day after Jesus' body was placed in the tomb "the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day" (Matt 27:62-63). The request seems to express concern not for just one more night but for several more days.

When Matthew advanced in his narrative from the day of crucifixion to the day the guards were posted he used the phrase "Now the next day" (Matt 27:62). There is no such "next day" or "on the morrow" phrase introducing the day of resurrection. The day by day account seems to have concluded temporarily and resumes again "after the Sabbath . . . toward the first day of the week" (Matt 28:1).

That the scriptural prophesies of Christ's death and time in the tomb were important to the later Apostle Paul is evident. He said, "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures . . . he was buried, and that he arose again the third day

according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15: 3-4). Prophecies recorded in the scriptures stipulate three days and three nights in the tomb. The preponderance of evidence considered would suggest that Jesus was slain on Thursday, resurrected on Sunday and thus satisfied all the demands of prophecy.

BOOK OF MORMON CLARIFICATION

The controversy as to the day upon which events of the Savior's last week occurred continues with no clear conclusion. Therefore, it may very well be that further dialogue using the Bible only will not bring about the desired clarification. What is needed is a fresh approach, another perspective. The Book of Mormon provides precisely that, another account of the Savior's death and resurrection. Combined, these two companion scriptures may finally provide the clarification needed to present a clear description and further increase the reader's faith in searching the scriptures to solve scriptural dilemmas.

In the very first chapter of the Book of Mormon is recorded the prophecy of Lehi concerning "the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world." (1 Nephi 1:19) As "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," this sacred writing never diverts from its focus on Christ and, therefore, provides the reader with additional detail of his birth, life, death, and resurrection. Though thousands of miles separate the descendants of Lehi from Jerusalem, their town of origin, the focus of their family history continues to be an unquenchable interest in the fulfillment of prophecies relating to all aspects of the Savior's mortal mission.

That the Disciples of Christ in the Americas understood the Savior's sacrificial role is clearly evident. Nephi said of Jesus, "He offered himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law" (2 Nephi 2:7). Amulek taught, "Therefore, it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled, every jot

and tittle, and none shall have passed away. And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal (Alma 34:13-14).

Prior to leaving Jerusalem, Lehi's family obtained the Brass Plates which contained much of our current Old Testament. These plates also contain some additional writings which have special relevance to scattered Israel and their awareness of Christ. These records included the detailed prophetic statement that the future Messiah "yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inherit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 19:10). "A careful reading of these words of Zenos seems to indicate that the 'three days of darkness' that were to accompany the crucifixion of Christ were not to be a sign to those of the house of Israel around Jerusalem but to those who lived away from Jerusalem or on 'the isles of the sea'." (Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, p.120)

As we continue to read the Book of Mormon we will discover that the three days of darkness were experienced with exactness. The question then becomes, "Were the three days of darkness merely a sign of his death or also a statement

of the length of time to be spent in the sepulcher?" Further analysis of Book of Mormon statements will suggest that there may in fact be a direct correlation.

The prophet Nephi, after quoting extensively from Isaiah's Messianic chapters (2 Nephi 13-24) added his own "prophecy according to . . . plainness" (Nephi 25:4). Nephi emphatically stated, ". . . they will crucify him; and after he is laid in a sepulcher for the space of three days he shall rise from the dead." (2 Nephi 25:13). It should be remembered that Nephi's intent was to speak in plainness and not in some hard to understand "manner of prophesying among the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:1).

King Benjamin's masterful discourse concerning Christ includes very detailed information regarding essential aspects of his mortal life and death. Like Nephi, Benjamin simply states, "and shall crucify him. And he shall rise the third day from the dead." (Mosiah 3:10).

Hundreds of years elapsed, but the interest of these devoted disciples in Christ did not diminish. Even before the angel Gabriel visited Zachariah, Elizabeth and Mary, the inspired Book of Mormon prophet Samuel said, 'Behold I give unto you a sign; for five years more cometh, and behold then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name. And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day. Therefore, there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall know of the rising

of the sun and also of its setting; therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born" (Helaman 14:2-4).

The day before the long awaited birth the Savior revealed himself to Nephi and said, ". . . the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets. . . . And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken; for behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came, . . . And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all the night, but it was as light as though it was mid-day. And it came to pass that the sun did rise in the morning again, according to its proper order; and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given.... And it had come to pass, yea all things, every whit, according to the words of the prophets" (3 Nephi 1:13, 15, 19-20).

These details concerning the birth of Jesus are not directly related to the main theme of this paper - the final week, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They are quoted here because they evidence three truths about Book of Mormon prophecies. First, prophetic details and equally detailed fulfillment are recorded "every whit, according to the words of the prophets" (3 Nephi 1:20). We can, therefore, conclude that prophesied details will occur precisely and not in some generalized manner requiring later commentators to theorize inconclusively for

centuries to come. Second, the concept of "day" and "night" as perceived by the Nephite observer seemed to correspond to the apparent rising and setting of the sun rather than to the 6 p.m. (Jewish) or 12 p.m. (Roman) methods of counting "days." Since it was for these very same Nephite observers that the sign of "three days of darkness" was designed, it seems probable that we should expect the fulfillment to involve three full solar days and not merely parts of three calendar days. Third, Jesus stated, "this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world" (3 Nephi 1:13). "And it came to pass that the sun did rise in the morning again according to its proper order; and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given" (3 Nephi 1:19). Jesus was to be born at a moment in time which to the Nephites would follow their night and, therefore, be during day-light hours. Yet the New Testament account (Luke 2:8) implies that Jesus was born at night in Bethlehem. This discrepancy in time is to be expected for time of day is relative to longitude and the Book of Mormon and New Testament locations are more than a quarter of the earth's circumference distance from each other. Therefore, an event occurring in Bethlehem in the night would easily coincide with day-light hours in the Americas. More will be said of this interesting time distinction later for both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon writers relate events that occurred in their respective locations at the precise moment of the Savior's death.

That same Samuel, whose "one day and a night and a day" prophecy proved to be so literal, also gave a detailed sign regarding Christ's death. Said

Samuel concerning " a sign of his death, behold, in that day that he shall suffer death the sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light unto you (notice again the concept of "day" by these writers is relative to solar observations); and also the moon and the stars; and there shall be no light upon the face of this land (remember this is to be an 'isles of the sea' phenomenon); even from the time he shall suffer death, for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead. Yea, at the time that he shall yield up the ghost there shall be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours" (Helaman 14:20-21). Thus, it is clearly stated that the darkness would begin at the moment of the Savior's death in distant Jerusalem and end three days later at the resurrection. The faithful were told to look for a day (as perceived by sunrise) which would be blackened by violent storm and the attending three days of darkness.

The sign of the Savior's birth occurred precisely as predicted. Thirty-three years later "the people began to look with great earnestness for another sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel, the Lamanite, yea, for the time that there should be darkness for the space of three days over the face of the land. And it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land. . . . And it came to pass that when the thunderings and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease - for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and it was said by some that the time was greater; nevertheless, all these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours (notice how important it is to

the writers that we are aware that their references to elapsed time are precise) - and behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. . . . And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen" (3 Nephi 8:5, 19, 23).

It may be possible to deduce the approximate time of day that the prophesied three day period commenced. Samuel's statement that the sun "shall be darkened and refuse to give his light" would imply that the three day period would commence in the daylight hours. This would be consistent with the detailed New Testament account which records the time of death in Jerusalem as being the Jewish 9th hour (MK 15:33-37). Jerusalem and Central America are separated by so many longitudinal degrees that they would have approximately an eight to nine hour time difference. Thus, 3 p.m. in Jerusalem would be synchronized with about 6 a.m. Nephite time, or shortly after sunrise.

While still in the midst of the three days of darkness, the surviving Nephites heard the voice of the crucified Savior detail the various destructions which had recently befallen the less righteous inhabitants of the land. (3 Nephi 9) Through the thick darkness the Savior said to the righteous survivors, "Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and taken it up again; therefore, repent, and come unto me, ye ends of the earth, and be saved" (3 Nephi 9:22). Either the Savior was speaking prophetically or had already been resurrected for he said of his life, ". . . have taken it up again." It may be reasonable to conclude that Jesus was resurrected hours (but not days) prior to the full three days sign (3 Nephi 10:1-2).

As to the termination of the three day period the Book of Mormon account is very specific, "And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land" (3 Nephi 10:9). Since we have already concluded that the storm and darkness commenced soon after sunrise, the total time was in fact, a full three day period. This exactness may be very important when we consider the literalness of various signs and times associated with the Savior's death and resurrection.

Earlier, we quoted Nephi who associated the three day period with the length of time Jesus was to be laid in a sepulcher (2 Nephi 25:13). We have also noted that the Savior's comments from the darkness may evidence the resurrection occurred some hours prior to the conclusion of the full three days (3 Nephi 9:22). The New Testament account specifies that the slain body of the Savior was placed in the sepulcher "when even was come" (Matt 27:57) and was removed "as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week" (Matt 28:1). Considering all evidence it would thus appear that the time between the Savior's death and resurrection was approximately 1/2 day short of three full days, or a total of 2 1/2 days.

From the vantage point of Central America a 2 1/2 day period of supernatural darkness which commenced soon after sunrise would be followed by the natural darkness of night and combine to make a full three days of darkness. As prophesied, those of Israel scattered on the "isles of the sea" experienced three days of darkness which were associated with the death and resurrection of Christ.

These Israelites of the Book of Mormon who experienced the three full days of darkness were very careful to relate these events with prophetic statements. An editor of the Nephite record concluded, "And thus were the scriptures fulfilled which had been spoken by the prophets" (3 Nephi 10:11). The record keeper then draws the attention of the reader back to the initial three day prophecy (1 Nephi 19:10) recorded in the Book of Mormon with this counsel, "Whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them. . . . Yea, the prophet Zenos did testify of these things, and also Zenock spake concerning these things, because they testified particularly concerning us, who are the remnant of their seed" (3 Nephi 10:14, 16).

Soon "after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself" (3 Nephi 10:18) unto his disciples in the Book of Mormon lands. Of this ministry Mormon records, "I would that ye should behold that the Lord truly did teach the people, for the space of three days; and after that he did show himself unto them oft" (3 Nephi 26:13). This reference is cited only to reemphasize that Book of Mormon writers consistently use the term "day" to refer to daylight hours, or a 24 hour period commencing with the daylight hours. The three days of darkness experienced by the Nephites were literally three 24 hour periods or three periods of daylight each followed by a corresponding period of darkness. This day-followed-by-night sequence itself may be significant. Christ was quite specific in prophesying. "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" (Matt 12:40). Certainly the disciples in Central America experienced

a more literal fulfillment of this prophecy than did those dwelling in Jerusalem.

Since the New Testament account is not clear as to the day of the week upon which crucial events occurred, controversy of interpretation continues. Using Passover Feast days as reference points has left the question unsettled, for the Feast days can fall on any day of the week (such as our New Year's Day or Christmas). Using the Sabbath as a reference is also ambiguous for it is not clear whether Jesus was hurriedly buried before the Passover Feast (a Sabbath) or the weekly Sabbath. However, the New Testament is specific in stating that the resurrection was on the First day of the week (Matt 28:1) subsequently called the Lord's day. Thus, the New Testament provides the reliable reference point, Sunday morning, for the resurrection. The Book of Mormon provides the time frame, 2 1/2 days for length of time in the tomb. With these two bits of information, we can conclude that the crucifixion occurred on Thursday afternoon, 2 1/2 days before the Sunday morning resurrection.

Locating the crucifixion on Thursday is an intriguing idea, since it eliminates the need to speculate about an unrecorded Wednesday and more closely complies with the Passover pattern. The year Christ was killed, Thursday fell upon Nisan 14, the very day the lambs would have been sacrificed in symbolism of the Lamb of God. Therefore, the Book of Mormon supports the less traditional but defensible hypothesis that Jesus was slain on Thursday afternoon the 14th of Nisan, remained in the tomb through Friday the Passover Sabbath, Saturday the weekly Sabbath, and was resurrected Sunday morning the 17th of Nisan.