

The Gospels' disagreement on the time of the crucifixion

Louay Fatoohi, PhD
28 November 2011

This article is adapted from [*The Mystery of the Crucifixion: The Attempt to Kill Jesus in the Qur'an, the New Testament, and Historical Sources*](#)

—

The four Gospels differ on a number of details in their accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus. I have dealt in previous articles with two disagreements, namely [whether Jesus was arrested on or before the Passover](#)

and

[what charges were brought against him before Pilate](#)

. In this article, I discuss another conflict between the Gospel reports, which concerns the time of Jesus' alleged crucifixion.

The day of the ancient Jewish lunar calendar was reckoned from sunset to sunset. The night and the daytime consisted of 12 hours each, with the first hour of the night starting around 6 pm and the first hour of the daytime around 6 am. John (11:9) says that in one of his dialogs with his disciples Jesus said: "Are there not twelve hours in the day?"

According to Mark (15:25), Jesus was crucified at the 3rd hour in daytime: "And it was the third hour when they crucified him

." At the 6

th

hour the land was covered with darkness which lasted until the 9

th

hour, at which point Jesus died:

³³And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"

which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

³⁵And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah."

³⁶

And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."

³⁷

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.

The 3

rd

, 6

th

, and 9

th

The Gospels' disagreement on the time of the crucifixion

Louay Fatoohi, PhD
28 November 2011

hours correspond to 9 am, 12 am, and 3 pm, respectively.

Both Matthew (27:45-50) and Luke (23:44-46) reiterate Mark's statement that the darkness lasted from the 6th to the 9th hour and that Jesus died at the 9th hour:

⁴⁵Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

⁴⁷

And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah."

⁴⁸

And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink.

⁴⁹

But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

⁵⁰

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

⁴⁴It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

John (19:14-16) disagrees with Mark, Matthew, and Mark, claiming that it was the 6th

hour in daytime, that is midday, when Pilate handed over Jesus to be crucified:

¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" ¹⁵They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." ¹⁶So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

John does not say when Jesus died or specify how long his ordeal lasted so the time of death remains unknown.

To resolve the conflict between John and the Synoptists (i.e. Mark, Matthew, and Mark) about when Jesus' crucifixion started, it has been suggested that John followed the Romans in reckoning time from midnight, so his sixth hour corresponds to 6 am. In addition to the fact that there is no evidence to support this assumption, this attempt would still require presuming that three more hours passed before the crucifixion started to reconcile John's account with the Synoptists. Furthermore, it is far more likely that John reckoned the time the Jewish way because that would make the crucifixion coincide with the slaughter of the Passover lambs — something that reflects his description of Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 1:36) and works well for his theology.

The Gospels' disagreement on the time of the crucifixion

Louay Fatoohi, PhD
28 November 2011

The time of Jesus' alleged crucifixion is one of the unresolved contradictions in the Gospels.

Note

Bible translations are from the *English Standard Version* (ESV) Bible.

Copyright © 2011 [Louay Fatoohi](#)

Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/louay.fatoohi>

Twitter page: <http://twitter.com/louayfatoohi>

All Rights Reserved