

Spirit-Filled Pastor: On What Day Did Christ Really Die?

This sinless Son of God came to seek and to save that which was lost, to reconcile sinful mankind with its Creator.

As the apostle Paul explained to the Corinthian believers, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them ... He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:19-21, NASB1995). In Old Testament imagery, He became our substitute lamb (see Gen. 22:1-13, Ex. 12:1-8).

The writer of the book of Hebrews explained that Jesus, "by the grace of God," would "taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9, NKJV). Though He is our Creator and Sustainer, it was God's gracious will that "the captain of [our] salvation" be made "perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10).

Thus, Jesus would suffer being arrested, mocked, bruised and beaten for us (Mark 15:16-32), "that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil ... [and] to make propitiation [a spiritual covering] for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2: 14,17).

From the Garden to the Cross

The Passion of the Christ continued from intense intercession in the garden of Gethsemane to a long night of agony and cruelty as the ultimate sacrifice lamb. He was brutally beaten (John 19:1-3), maliciously mocked (Luke 22:63-65) and mercilessly flogged (Matt. 27:26-31) at the behest of those religious leaders and cowardly crowds who rejected Him, just days after magnanimously welcoming Him in a kingly fashion.

Finally, He was arrested, falsely accused and hurriedly tried

in nighttime tribunals by religious and military leaders before being scourged and delivered to the cross (John 17-19). There, He was crucified between two criminals outside the northern gates of Jerusalem, on a hill called Calvary (Latin) or Golgotha (Aramaic). The names meant the Place of the Skull, either because of the appearance of the rock formation of the hill or that it was known as a place of crucifixion where skulls accumulated (John 19:17).

There, His hands were stretched out latterly and nailed to the cross-piece and his feet nailed together. Jesus later presented both his hands and his feet as evidence that He was risen from the dead (John 20:20). The T-shaped cross was then dropped into the hole dug to hold the wooden implement of death upright.

It was 9:00 in the morning on the Passover's Day of Preparation (John 19:14)—the same time sheep were beginning to be ritually slaughtered in the temple for use in the Passover meals. He hung there through the morning hours until noon, when "darkness fell over the whole land" until mid-afternoon. He struggled to avoid asphyxiation, as His limp body slumped more and more. He would have tried to raise himself up, pushing on the metal spike through his feet, to allow himself to breathe.

His final words were profound. Dr. Luke tells us that He cried out, in a loud voice, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" and breathed His last breath (Luke 23:46). John adds that when he had received some sour vinegar-like wine (fulfilling Ps. 69:21) He also said "It is finished," meaning the prophecies of mankind's redemption were completed, with the results extending continuously. Then He bowed his head and "gave up His spirit" (John 19:30).

After being confirmed as dead, by the Roman soldiers (John 19:31-37), and because Jewish law dictated that the dead bodies of criminals should be removed from sight before sunset

(Deut. 21:23), Pilate allowed Jesus' body to be taken down by Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, "who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus" (Matt. 27:57).

After being joined by Nicodemus (a Pharisee and also a secret disciple), who brought 100 pounds of mixed spices for Jesus' burial, they tightly wrapped the spices around the body with clean linen strips, as was customary (John 19:39-40). Then, as the Passover's evening events began at sundown, they secured the body in Joseph's own nearby and new garden-tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock (Matt. 27:57-61). Before leaving the tomb, they rolled "a large stone against the door of the tomb."

But, that grave could not hold Him! Three nights and three days later, just as He prophesied in Matthew 12:40, Jesus had risen from the dead!

Did Jesus Really Die on "Good Friday"?

The events of Holy Week all surround the annual Jewish remembrance of the Passover event found in Exodus 12. Jerusalem was crowded due to pilgrims coming to observe the Passover Week, as stipulated when the Passover was instituted (-36).

The seven days were to be "bookended" by a sabbath-like observance at the beginning of the week and again at the end of the holy week, which was to begin on the 14th day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar (Ex. 12:15-20). This perpetual memorial-observance was to be calendar-based and not confused with nor affected by the weekly sabbaths (Ex. 20:8-11), which were and are observed on the seventh day of each week, modeled by God's rest after the work of Creation. However, these Passover sabbaths were distinguished as a "high day" or "high Sabbath" (John 19:31).

This included the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread which

commemorated the ancient Jews subsisting on meager foods while they fled from Pharaoh and his army. The disciples had asked Jesus, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" That meal became what we refer to as the "Last Supper" (Matt. 26:17-30).

John, alone among the four Gospel writers, explained that Jesus was taken down from the cross before sundown of what was the "Day of Preparation" for a special "high Sabbath" (John 19:14, 31), which was in conjunction with the Passover, not the weekly Sabbath (Friday sundown until Saturday sundown).

This second-Sabbath possibility can synchronize Jonah's recorded time in the great fish and the "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," which Jesus predicted for Himself, in Matthew 12:40.

Because of these biblical clues, I am among those who understand John's statements as suggesting that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday of that Holy Week and not on Friday. This understanding provides for the special "high day" Sabbath of Passover (John 19:14, 31) with its Day of Preparation on Wednesday and observance on Thursday, as well as the regular Saturday Sabbath, with its normal Day of Preparation on Friday.

Joseph of Arimathea would have removed Christ's body from the cross sometime before Wednesday's sundown when they put Him into the tomb, where He remained until Saturday's sundown (John 19:38-42). This aligns the Jonah/Jesus specifically-predicted three days and three nights and avoids awkwardly trying to explain the three-day entombment as including "partial days" on Friday night and Sunday morning.

A Wednesday afternoon crucifixion provides for the "three days and three nights" in the tomb and the resurrection as occurring sometime after Saturday's sundown but well before Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early the next morning before

sunrise, while it was still dark (John 20:1-2).

Yes, Jesus died, was buried and rose again! He became our Passover lamb and has now “delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). {eoa}

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