

The New Testament Passover

Before His crucifixion, Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples. What does it mean, and how is it commemorated?

Just before His betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus asked His disciples to prepare for His final Passover (Matthew 26:18-20). This evening, commemorated since the time of the Exodus from Egypt, involved the sacrifice of an unblemished lamb whose blood protected the Israelites while the firstborn of the Egyptians were slain (Exodus 12:5-7, 12-14). The New Testament makes clear that this lamb represented Jesus Christ. As John the Baptist had announced about Jesus, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

This last Passover was special, and Jesus taught His disciples new elements that would become the basis of the New Testament Passover service.

First, Jesus Christ set the example of love and service through washing His disciples’ feet (13:4-13). Then He told them, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14-15).

The symbols of the bread and the wine

After the foot washing, Jesus instituted two deeply meaningful symbols of the New Testament Passover.

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’” (Matthew 26:26-28).

Jesus said the bread represented His body. He willingly suffered to take our infirmities and bear our sicknesses (Matthew 8:16-17; Isaiah 53:3-5). Jesus is also the Bread that makes eternal life possible as we allow Him to live in us (Galatians 2:20). The wine represents His shed blood given for the forgiveness of our sins.

The apostle Paul repeated these Passover instructions about the bread and the wine in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. He reminded the Church, both Jews and gentiles, of the vital importance of this memorial that represents Christ’s death and a renewal of our commitment to God made at baptism.

Why did Christ have to die?

Why did Jesus come to the earth as a human being to die? Because of sin—the destructive thoughts and actions that go against God’s will (1 John 3:4).

God reveals His thinking and way of life throughout the Bible, and especially in His Ten Commandments and His good and beneficial laws that show us how He intends life to be lived. When we break His laws, we bring automatic penalties on ourselves, and especially the penalty of death—eternal death. We have all earned this penalty (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

God, in His perfect eternal justice, must exact the penalty; but in His awesome mercy, Jesus Christ was willing to pay that penalty for us! “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Christ gave His life so we could repent and be saved (1 Timothy 2:4).

That is the solemn yet joyous message of the annual Passover. This is the first step in God’s plan of salvation.

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Did Jesus Die on Good Friday? Was Jesus Resurrected on Easter Sunday?

These days are very important in modern Christianity. But did Jesus really die on Good Friday? And was He really resurrected on Easter Sunday? What did Jesus Himself say about the time He would be in the grave?

Most Christian churches commemorate Jesus’ crucifixion on Good Friday and His resurrection on Easter Sunday. But how does this fit with the specific sign that Jesus Christ gave that would prove He was the Messiah? He promised in advance exactly how much time He would spend in the grave.

The sign of Jonah

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day had seen Him work miracles but still didn’t believe He was the Messiah (Matthew 12:23, 38). In fact, the Pharisees plotted “how they might destroy Him” (verse 14) and accused Him of working for Satan (verse 24)!

So when they asked for another sign, Jesus said:

“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and

three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (verses 39-40).

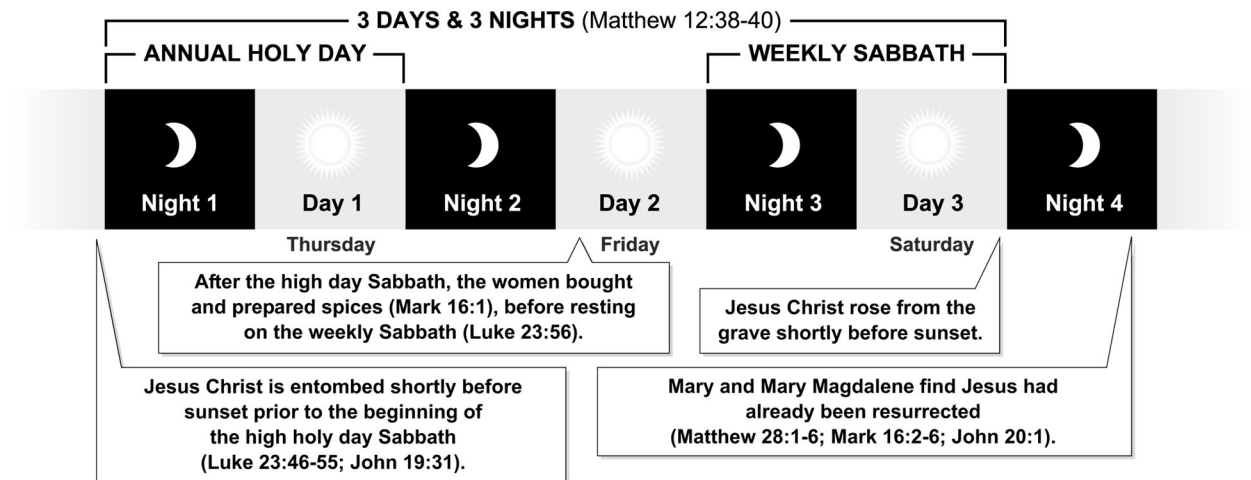
Jesus referred to the great miracle from the book of Jonah. Jonah was inside a miraculously created fish for three days and three nights before being spit out, alive, on the shore. And Christ let everyone know that He would be in the grave for the exact same length of time. He said that would be the only sign He would give them. This important prophecy was very specific.

How do you get three days and three nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning?

Yet today most churches ignore this sign or try to explain that it didn't really mean three full days and three full nights. Why? Because of a common misunderstanding about the holy times during that week many call Holy Week.

Why would Jesus make a point of saying three days and three nights if He didn't mean it? Is this a contradiction in the Bible or is there a simple explanation everyone would understand if they celebrated the festivals of the Bible as Jesus and His disciples did?

First, try to do the math. Almost all churches teach Jesus Christ died and was buried late Good Friday afternoon, then was raised early Easter Sunday morning. That's Friday night, Saturday day and Saturday night: two nights and one day. Even if you wanted to stretch things to call the few minutes of daylight on Friday a day, that's only two days and two nights. Remember, Jesus was already risen be-



fore sunrise on Sunday (John 20:1).

Why would Jesus make a point of saying three days and three nights if He didn't mean it? Is this a contradiction in the Bible or is there a simple explanation everyone would understand if they celebrated the festivals of the Bible as Jesus and His disciples did?

Jesus clearly stated that He and His disciples were celebrating the Passover when He washed their feet and added the New Testament ceremony of the bread and the wine. He said: "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15).

Jesus and His disciples followed the command found in Leviticus 23 describing the "feasts of the Lord." "On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover" (verses 4-5). Biblical days started in the evening, so after that Passover ceremony, but still on the Passover day, Jesus was arrested, beaten, crucified, killed and buried. In fact, the Jewish leaders were urgent that Jesus' body not remain on the cross the next day.

"Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that

they might be taken away" (John 19:31).

Most people today would see the word *Sabbath* and assume this means Saturday, since the regular weekly Sabbath day taught in the Bible is from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. But most miss the fact that John called it a "high day." What did he mean? Let's quickly go back to Leviticus 23. What comes right after the Passover (the 14th)?

"And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it" (Leviticus 23:6-7).

This First Day of Unleavened Bread was an annual Sabbath day—a high day. And it can come on different days of the week.

So the logical explanation is that Christ was exactly right about the three days and three nights. People today are just confused about when He died and was resurrected. It couldn't have been on a Friday afternoon and Sunday morning.

The accompanying chart shows the math that works—the chronology of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection that matches the biblical festivals and confirms the only sign Jesus said He would give!