3 DAYS AND NIGHTS

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By Steven LeBlanc
One of our church members recently told me about an experience she’d had as a very young child. Early one morning before dawn her parents dressed her in her new Easter dress, put her in their car, then drove to a hillside not far from their home. Walking to a grassy area, her parents spread a blanket where they could sit and quietly wait for something “special” to happen. Our church member was too young to understand all that was taking place; but it wasn’t long until the sun rose, their blanket was returned to the car, and they drove home. Her parents told her she had participated in her first sunrise service. It wasn’t until much later she understood they had been celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. From her early childhood our church member had been introduced to the Catholic-Protestant doctrine concerning the Friday night to Sunday morning - three days and three nights – resurrection doctrine.

The astounding truth, however, is that Jesus Christ did not die on a Friday afternoon, and he was not resurrected on Sunday morning. This would have been impossible according to his very own words! Jesus said he would be three days and three nights in the tomb (Matthew 12:40). Can you count three days AND three nights between sunset “Good Friday” and sunrise Sunday?

Millions follow this Roman Catholic Good Friday/Easter Sunday tradition, unaware of what the Scripture actually says. This tradition teaches that Christ was in the grave from late Friday afternoon, just before sunset, until Sunday sunrise. This timeline includes Friday night, the daylight portion
of Saturday, and Saturday night. This is clearly two nights and one day—not three days and three nights as Christ foretold would be the great sign of his Messiahship.

There were no eyewitnesses to the resurrection. There is no other historical source of information save that one record which we have available to us today—the Bible. Any tradition that contradicts the word of God then MUST BE REJECTED! (I Timothy 6:3-5)
CHAPTER

1

Three Days and Three Nights

72 hours
On one particular day during his earthly ministry a group of envious Pharisees were asking Jesus for a sign—miraculous evidence—to prove he was the Messiah. Jesus gave only one sign that he was the Messiah. Notice Christ’s own words: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish; so shall the Son of Man be THREE Days and THREE nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:39-40).

Being three days and three nights in a tomb was the exact proof of his being the Messiah! Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for seventy-two hours. Jesus said he would be in the tomb for the exact same time! WHY? For the very important reason that to remain in the tomb for a full 72 hours would remove any possible doubt that Christ had actually DIED.

Many say Christ was using a Greek idiom when he spoke, meaning he really meant only “parts” of three days and “parts” of three nights; and that he would actually be in the grave just TWO nights and ONE DAY. But this argument loses all credibility when we refer to the book of Jonah—which Christ was referring to—where no “Greek idiom” can be found! Further, Jesus Christ would not have spoken in Greek to his disciples, who were Galileans—men of the countryside who spoke Aramaic not Greek. Hebrew scholars will tell you that the expression “three days and three nights” in Jonah 1:17 refers to a full 72-hour period. The Hebrew language does not allow you to mistake the timing (declaring three days and three nights to be a much shorter period of time).
Another interesting point brings us to the division of the day and night, which was clearly demonstrated in the book of Genesis which states: “and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. ... And the evening and the morning were the second day. ... And the evening and the morning were the third day” (See Genesis 1:4-13). This is very clear. God plainly tells us how long three days and nights were to take—three complete periods of light, and three complete periods of darkness.

Notice another biblical example defining the meaning of “days” found in the book of Esther. Esther asked all Jews to fast for “three days.” Notice what she said: “Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai... “Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is against the law: and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16). In this instance it is clear the three day period included a full 72 hours, including both night and day.

In another place Jesus said, “Destroy this temple (referring to his body), and IN THREE DAYS I will raise it up ... But he spake of the temple of his body” (John 2:19-21). Without question the statement, “in three days,” does NOT mean AFTER ONLY ONE DAY AND TWO NIGHTS. Rather, it means after three full days!
CHAPTER

2

The All-Important Key!
The chief reason so many believe Christ died on Friday is that the Bible explicitly says the day of the crucifixion was called “the preparation” (Luke 23:54). For the Jews, a preparation day always preceded a Sabbath. All Biblical scholars know the Jews keep a weekly Saturday Sabbath, so they automatically assume the “preparation” day spoken of in Luke 23:54 was referring to Friday.

However, what we read in the book of John tells us that there was another Sabbath—a yearly High Sabbath—that was also observed by the Jews that same week. Christ died on the day following the Passover service he had kept with his disciples (Luke 22:15). That day traditionally leads up to the observance of another festival mentioned in Leviticus 23, beginning in verse 6, called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The first day of this feast is called a “High” Sabbath. Christ was crucified on the preparation day that led up to this annual High Sabbath. (Note: We refer you to Leviticus 23 where you will find a list of the annual festivals, including High Sabbaths, observed by the Jews).

In order to hasten Christ’s death, the Jews intended to break his legs, which would have breached the prophecy that a “bone of him shall not be broken” (John 19:36; Psalm 34:20). Why would the Jews do this? Because, “it was the preparation,” meaning “that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day)” (John 19:31).
To fully understand the timing of Christ’s death, read John 19:31 again. The scripture mentions that the Sabbath immediately after Jesus’ death was a “high day”—not the weekly 7th day Sabbath (observed from Friday at sunset to Saturday at sunset); but rather one of the annual Festival Sabbaths—the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (see Leviticus 23:6-7).

In the book of Mark we find a further explanation of this important point: “After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by trickery and put him to death. But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people” (Mark 14:1-2).

As already mentioned, the Chief Priests and the scribes wanted Christ dead before the Feast of Unleavened Bread began. It was not allowed in the Jewish culture to leave a “criminal” unburied on a Festival high day (Deuteronomy 21:23) as criminals were considered anathema to God. We know that Jesus Christ was crucified on the 14th day of the month (the annual date of the Passover), the day following was the first day of Unleavened Bread—that day fell on a Thursday as this article will later show. (Please read Leviticus 23:5-6: “…the 14th day is the Lord’s Passover…the 15th day is the Feast of Unleavened Bread…”.)

Continuing the story, Mark 16:1 records what took place next: “And when the Sabbath (of Unleavened Bread) was past,
Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.” Since the women were not permitted to purchase spices on the weekly Sabbath (Saturday), they would have bought the spices on a regular week day—in this instance on a Friday. The next item recorded in Mark 16:2 is that the women came early in the morning on the First day of the week (Sunday), and were informed by an angel in verse 6 Christ had already risen.

Now we can put the sequence of events, including the exact days of the week, in proper order so that we can see that Christ’s prophecy regarding his time in the tomb came about just as he said it would:

NOTE: To understand the timing properly, it is important to know that days on the Jewish calendar begin and end at sunset, not at midnight as on the Gregorian calendar in general use today.

TUESDAY EVENING: Close to 7:30 PM—the time of sunset--Jesus observed the Passover service with his disciples (Luke 22:13-15).

WEDNESDAY: Christ was arrested and subjected to the ordeal of the crucifixion that culminated in his death. He died at 3:00 that afternoon (see Luke 22:39 – 23:46; Matthew 27:46-50), which coincided with the time the daily Jewish sacrifice for sin was offered up. This was on the preparation
day for the 1st day—the High Sabbath—of Unleavened Bread. **Jesus’ body was taken by Joseph of Arimathea, and then placed in the tomb just before sunset on this day** (Mark 15:42-46, Deuteronomy 21:23).

**THURSDAY:** The High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread was observed by the Jews. The disciples could not visit the tomb on this Holy Day.

**FRIDAY:** The women went out and bought spices in the market for anointing Jesus’ body—a Jewish tradition—before resting on the weekly Sabbath day (Saturday), which began at sunset (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56): “And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.”

**SATURDAY:** The women rested on the weekly Sabbath (Luke 23:56). **Jesus rose just prior to sunset on Saturday, exactly three days and three nights (72 hours) after his burial—just as he said he would** (Matthew 12:40).

**SUNDAY:** Early on Sunday morning, it being the first day of the week, the women brought the spices they had prepared to the tomb. When they arrived, it was still dark (Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Jesus had **already risen** (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:2-3).
For as Jonah 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.

-Jeremiah 12:40

Christ’s burial
Christ entombed just before sunset on Wednesday
John 19:38-42

CRUCIFIXION
Wednesday
9am-3pm
Matthew 27:46-50
Mark 15:34-37
Luke 23:44-46
John 19:30

High Day Sabbath
John 19:31
Mark 15:42

The First Day of Unleavened Bread
Exodus 12:18
1 Corinthians 5:7-8

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CHAPTER 3

How Much Time in a Day?
Notice Christ clearly stated he would rise AFTER three days: “And he began teaching them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and AFTER three days rise again”—Mark 8:31. He never said he would rise after a day and a half!

However, don’t we sometimes use the term “day” broadly to mean a portion of a day, perhaps a few hours only? But let’s think: If you were going to say something of major significance, wouldn’t you be very careful how you said it? Christ said the three-days-three-nights prophecy was of extreme importance: It would identify him as the Messiah. Would such an important message be left to mere ambiguities? Of course not! On the contrary, that is why Christ Himself was quoted as saying in John 11:9-10: “Are there not TWELVE HOURS in a day?…But if a man walk in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” He laid it out clearly: twelve hours in a day, leaving twelve hours for a night.

It should be clear to you now that the Catholic-Protestant doctrine has some serious problems. If Jesus had been placed in the tomb on Friday, he would have had to be raised on a Monday in order to satisfy the three-days-three-nights scenario. And if Jesus were in the grave only from Friday sunset to Sunday sunrise, then he was only in the tomb 2 nights and one day. The Catholic-Protestant doctrine fails under simple scrutiny when it comes to looking at the facts. But does all this really matter anyway?
That all depends on what you think God is like. If you believe He does not mean what He says, and that He teaches a message that warmly welcomes you to “come as you are” into His kingdom, you will prove you do not understand Him or His word at all. But if you believe God is the actual creator of the world—as the Bible clearly states—and that He sent Adam and Eve out of the garden for disobeying Him (Genesis 3), you will understand God means what He says. If you take scripture seriously, you will want to consider this quote from Jesus Christ about God:

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” –John 4:23-24 (NKJV)

You may also want to consider the following words by Jesus Christ spoken just before he gave the prophecy of the three-days-and-three-nights:

36 “But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. 37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” –Matthew 12:36-37 (KJV)

After reading this, you get the idea that what we say, and by implication what we believe, counts with God. Do you accept the testimony of the scripture, or will you embrace the mere tradition of men?
Remember, Christ warned against putting the traditions of men before the clear teaching of scripture: Christ harshly remonstrated the Pharisees for “…setting aside the word of God for your tradition that ye delivered; and many such like things ye do” (Mark 7:13). Millions set aside the words of Jesus Christ and teach that Christ was killed on a Friday and rose Sunday morning.
CHAPTER 4

Let's Review
Ok. We have gone over the facts about the timeline of Christ’s resurrection. Now let’s take one last look at the scriptures that tell us exactly what happened and when:

John 20:1 reveals that Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb “when it was yet dark” and found the stone that sealed the tomb had already been rolled away. Christ had risen long before sunrise! Luke 24:1 states, “Now upon the first day of the week (Sunday), very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.” The women found the tomb empty (vs. 3). Two angels in shining clothes revealed to the women that Christ had already “risen” (vs. 4-6). Mark 16:2 states that the women were present “at the rising of the sun.” This means Christ was resurrected BEFORE sunrise.

If we know approximately the time when Christ was placed in the tomb, then 72 hours after being placed in the tomb would have to be the very same time he would depart the tomb by his resurrection!

When exactly did Christ die? Scripture tells us: While on the stake, after “the ninth hour” (three o’clock in the afternoon), Jesus “cried out” (Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46) and died. Luke 23:44 also makes a reference to the sixth hour: “And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness in all the earth until the ninth hour.” The sixth hour is six hours after sunrise—or noon! This would make the ninth hour, 3 P.M.
As we have shown, Jesus was, in fact, killed on Wednesday, buried just before sunset Wednesday evening, and remained in the tomb until close to sunset Saturday evening. This fits the biblical statement of Christ when he said, “so shall the Son of Man be THREE Days and THREE nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12: 39-40). **Jesus Christ rose from the dead sometime just before sunset on the weekly Sabbath (Saturday) just before evening!** (NOTE: We should remember that the Bible counts days as the period from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32) or sunset to sunset.)
Let’s take a look at just one more scripture that gives some people problems. It’s a scripture that has been commonly misunderstood—Mark 16:9: “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils” (KJV).

The problem with this scripture stems from the fact punctuation was not found in the original Greek. To sync this scripture with all the other scriptures we have looked at, all we need to do is change the punctuation, which was arbitrarily added by translators in the 9th century. Instead of reading, “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene”. We can just as easily move the comma to read: Now “when” (the word “when” was not in the original manuscript) Jesus was risen, early the first day of the week he appeared first to Mary Magdalene.

Christ appeared to Mary on Sunday morning. The passage does not say he rose Sunday morning. It says after he had risen—then on Sunday morning he appeared to Mary Magdalene.
CHAPTER

6

Conclusion
Millions of people today observe a Sunday resurrection; but as we have shown, they are absolutely confused about the events surrounding the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Most know NOTHING about how to count the days of the Bible that begin and end at sunset. Neither do they understand the difference between a regular weekly Sabbath and a High Sabbath. Nor is there any record stating that the New Testament Church, as described by the Bible, observed a sunrise service or held a special celebration related to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A sunrise service was not even mentioned as an observance of the church Christ founded. As mentioned also in this article, there are Festivals of God that should be observed annually, and they can be found listed in Leviticus 23 in their proper order and time.

We hope this booklet has cleared up any confusion you may have about the timing of Christ’s burial and resurrection. But, you may also want to know there is a Festival we should observe annually involving Christ’s death that most Christians know nothing about. Do you know what it is? To learn more about God’s festivals, write us or phone in and request our literature on the Festivals of God. You can reach us toll free at 1-877-449-6753. We will send you this literature free of charge without obligation.