

The Good Friday Myth!

INTRODUCTION

According to tradition, Jesus was crucified on a Friday; hence, the Friday before Easter is termed *Good Friday*. Dr. M. R. DeHann, author of the book “Jonah, Fact or Fiction” called Good Friday the Good Friday Myth. He was convinced it was a myth because:

- It was a long-established tradition, and
- It didn't match-up with Jesus' words about Himself.

We need to refresh our understanding about Christian tradition; and we need to exercise caution, whenever an activity or belief in Christianity becomes traditional. Tradition must be examined very closely by Scripture and always be in agreement with Scripture. If the Good Friday timing is true, it will stand the test of Scripture. If, on the other hand, it does not, then we must regard it as a myth! Christian tradition that is not rooted in Scripture is susceptible to error.

We have a tradition, called Communion, that has lasted for almost 2000 years, and that tradition is rooted in Jesus' words, “This do in remembrance of me, until I come” ~Luke 22:19.

In implementing that tradition in most churches, another tradition took root, that is, Communion is on a specific Sunday of the month. That tradition is not rooted in Scripture. Yet, there are some that would give the second the same weight as the first!

So too, the tradition we call Good Friday. The question is raised: Does it really matter when Jesus was Crucified? The reasoning goes something like this: “After all, what is important is that He was crucified; and, of even greater importance is the fact of His resurrection.”

In many areas, that reasoning would suffice, but not here! Why? Because this historical event was what Jesus used to prove His authority! How did this tradition/myth begin? There are three areas of misunderstanding that have cemented the Good Friday belief:

First: All the incidents that are recorded in the Bible about Jesus' last week have taken place in the time between Palm Sunday and the crucifixion and need at least five days, or more information, to make them fit in a smaller time frame. The bottom line here, is that we are faced with using our understanding of the timeframe of the events of those last few days, or the time frame referenced by the words of Jesus, we'll look at that in more detail in our third reason.

Second: The Scripture states in Luke 23:54: “And it was the preparation day, and the Sabbath

was about to begin...” Much the same is stated in Mark 15:42-43: ⁴²“And when evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the Kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.”

In these two passages, we have a clear statement that the day following the crucifixion was a Sabbath day. But nowhere is it stated that it was the regular weekly Sabbath. That then is the second error: an assumption was made that the Sabbath referred to was the weekly Sabbath – i.e. Saturday.

Third: Not enough weight has been given to Jesus' words regarding His own death and burial. This third error, although more subtle than the first two, is far more damaging. We have seen in other studies, the great length Jesus went to in fulfilling prophecies concerning Himself, literally fulfilling them, so that there would be no mistakes regarding His person and His purpose!

Many of our modern Bibles print the Words of Jesus in red – rightly so, but we are often guilty of not giving those words their proper weight and authority in our lives. So, what was it that Jesus said? In a debate with the Pharisees over signs, Jesus said:

“An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” ~Matthew 12:39-40.

“As Jonah ... so the Son of Man.” Three days and Three nights – both occurrences are underscored in the Greek. I don't recall a controversy over Jonah's time in the belly of the big fish! As an aside, with Jonah, God was building a type that would be fulfilled in Jesus – the proof of this is that Jesus used Jonah as a comparison to himself. We need to be careful about messing with God's types – let's compare Exodus 17 with Numbers. In Exodus 17:1-7 while the Israelites were camped at Rephidim, they started complaining incessantly to Moses that they were thirsty. God instructed Moses to strike the rock. When he did, water poured out and satisfied the people. That rock is a picture of Jesus. He was struck for our iniquities. In Numbers 20:10-12, we see them at Mount Horeb – complaining again about no water. God instructed Moses to speak to the rock; instead, he struck it in anger. As a result of disobeying God's instructions, Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land. So, a word to the wise!

To understand why there is a controversy over Jesus' time in the tomb we need to better understand the Jewish and Biblical concept of time. The Jewish 24-hour day was broken down into two parts: 12 hours of light-day and 12 hours of dark-night. Genesis 1:5 “And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night”. Jesus said in John 11:9 are there not 12 hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble...

The Jewish 24-hour day was from sundown – sundown. Genesis. 1:5 “And there was evening and there was morning, one day.” This method of reckoning time is still practiced by Orthodox Jews. Sundown – Sundown unlike the Greek or Western method of midnight - midnight. So, according to Jesus: Three light periods of 12 hours equal 36 hours, plus, three dark periods of 12 hours equal 36 hours... 36 plus 36 equals 72. Therefore, 72 hours!

Our tradition says approximately 40 hours plus or minus. Because of the time frame of those numerous events and because the day following the crucifixion was the Sabbath, it is traditionally believed that Jesus was crucified on Friday and arose slightly before sunrise on Sunday morning.

There is no way to get 72 hours into that span of time. This problem was evidently solved by information from the Jewish Talmud (a compilation of Tradition & Scripture that came years after the death and resurrection of Jesus) stating that Rabbis considered part of a day as a whole day. That left everything in a neat package except for Jesus’ words – and since those words could not to be explained literally, they were taken in a figurative sense.

Let's follow the reasoning of this tradition: Jesus was crucified on Friday at about 9 AM and died about 3 PM. The Jewish day began at Sunset - let's say about 6 PM. In that space of time several things had to happen:

- Permission had to be given to break the legs of prisoners in order to hasten their death; but Jesus was already dead. Soldiers had pierced His side.
- After death was established, Joseph of Arimathea gained audience with Pilate to take Jesus' body for burial. Mark 15 tells us Joseph of Arimathea also purchased supplies to bury Jesus with.
- Then they had to prepare Jesus’ body for burial and finally, transport His body and bury Him.

John 19:42 “Therefore on account of the Jewish day of preparation, because the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” All in the space of less than three hours! No phones to make arrangements. No cars to make transportation easier. All of that in order to get in a few minutes to satisfy Talmudic tradition that part of that Friday constituted a whole day? Are we honestly prepared to state that is what Jesus meant to constitute one of His days in death? His PROOF of why He is and what He came to do? It doesn't fit... especially when we see Jesus literally fulfilling so many other prophecies concerning Himself. It does not fit either when we use the day/night descriptions of Jesus’ time in the tomb. The most we can come up with is two dark periods and one light period.

Now, if we were to be very generous and consider a few minutes of light on Friday evening before sundown as a “day” we would still only have two of each. The reason there are only two dark periods is because the Bible states that Mary came to the tomb while it was still dark – and He was gone!

Evidently then, Jesus rose, not at Sunup on that first day of the week, but sometime shortly after sundown on Saturday. Remember, we are dealing with what Jesus said! three days and three nights... 72 Hours. If you backtrack 72 hours from Saturday, 6 PM, you arrive at Wednesday 6 PM.

But our problem of time or events still isn't solved. We must also deal with the problem of the *Sabbath*. Remember, nowhere does it state that this was a *regular weekly Sabbath*. In fact, quite to the contrary:

“The Jews, therefore, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.” ~John 19:14.

“That Sabbath was a high day” ... a special Sabbath! v.14 tells us what that high day was: “the day of preparation” was preparation for the Passover...”

The Passover Sabbath was the most celebrated Sabbath in the calendar of Israel. So, here is the scene if we use Jesus' words instead of tradition:



The 13th day of that month was the day of preparation: While the Priests were slaying the lambs in the Temple, Our Great High Priest was offering Himself as the Lamb of God for the sins of the World!

On the 14th day of the first month – Passover. In that particular year, if our premises are correct, from *Wednesday* sundown until *Thursday* sundown. The Passover Sabbath was a remembrance of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (a type of the world) and was to be eaten in the evening... (see Exodus 12). Remember *evening* and *morning* constitute a day. While the people were partaking of the Passover lamb; The Lamb of God was, in the words of Hebrews 2:9 “tasting death for every man.”

On the 15th of the month... In that particular year From Thursday evening - Friday evening... The Unleavened Bread Sabbath was celebrated. Leaven (yeast) is a Biblical picture of sin! While the priests and people were celebrating the Feast of *Unleavened Bread*, *He who knew no sin* paid the ultimate penalty for sin... death!

On the 16th day of that month... Friday evening - Saturday evening ... was the regular weekly *Sabbath* during which God's people rested from all their labors. While the priests and people were resting from their labor, The Son of Man was securing our Eternal rest!

Three Sabbath days! Dr. M. R. DeHann stated:

“Had Jesus been crucified in any other year than the year in which He was crucified, these three Sabbaths would not have occurred in that particular order.” ~meaning that one of them could have shared the regular weekly Sabbath or not at all.

Three Sabbath days. It looks good from the standpoint of logic, but will it pass the test of Scripture? “In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first of the week...” ~Matthew 28:1.

The word translated Sabbath in that verse is actually in the plural and should read: Now in the end of the Sabbath days... But that is not all... there is more:

On the 17th day of the month, Saturday evening - Sunday evening, (the first day of the week) the Jewish people celebrated the “Feast of First Fruits”. A celebration in anticipation of the coming harvest: “It was an acknowledgment that the land and all its products were the gift of Jehovah to Israel, and in thankfulness for His bounty, all the first fruits were offered to Him.” ~I.S.B.E. (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

So, while the people celebrated a future harvest Jesus Celebrated the finished work of redemption! I. Corinthians 15:20 “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

These are the things we are to consider when we remember His death. As He instructed us His disciples “This do in remembrance of me...”.

Let’s briefly review:

On the 13th - Our Tuesday: Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover early. At the conclusion of that meal, Jesus and His disciples went to the garden of Gethsemane for prayer... it was there that Judas led the soldiers to find Him and then led Him away to be scourged and tried.

On the 14th - Our Wednesday: Sometime around mid-morning Jesus was Crucified. In mid-afternoon, Jesus gave His life as the Lamb of God while the Passover lambs were being slain by the Priests. *Before* evening, Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb, evidently because they were pressed for time!

On the 15th - Our Thursday evening: The Jewish community celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread...

On the 16th - Our Friday evening: The regular weekly Sabbath was in effect...

On the 17th - our Saturday evening: The Feast of First Fruits began: Sometime, shortly after Sundown, Jesus rose from the grave! Three days and three nights have been literally fulfilled!

“As it began to dawn (while it was still dark) towards the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.” ~Matthew 28:1.

In all probability, they made their way to the tomb to anoint the body of their Lord and found their Resurrected Savior! They came as soon as the Sabbath days were over. By Law they couldn't come any sooner!

Three days and three nights – Jesus' final proof of Who He is and What He came to do! Surely, He wouldn't have left this open for conjecture!

What is of greater importance: The tradition of men, i.e. Good Friday? Or the Words of Jesus? Jesus told the Scribes and Pharisees John 2:19 Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up. He told His disciples ... I'll rise again!

Have you met the two Mary's Resurrected Savior? He instructed His disciples to remember His death until He comes again - As King of kings! Part of our *tradition*? Yes! Substantiated by Scripture? Yes! Bread - Body that is broken... Cup - Blood that was shed...

“This do in remembrance of me, 'till I come.”

“He is Lord ... He is Lord,
He has risen from the dead and He is Lord,
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess,
That Jesus Christ is Lord!”