

Question:

From Friday around 6 p.m. to Sunday around 6 a.m. is 36 hours that Jesus was in the grave. How does that cover the three days and three nights (72 hours) that Jesus himself predicted?

Answer:

"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" (Matthew 12:40).

"Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"" (John 2:19).

"Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up." And they were exceedingly sorrowful" (Matthew 17:22-23).

"On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first"" (Matthew 27:62-64).

The fact that Jesus would spend three days in the grave was known by Jesus' followers and His enemies. The question then is how to account for these three days. Before we launch into our study, I need to correct one misconception. Jesus did not say he would be in the grave for 72 hours. The statement is "three days and three nights." The Jews, as we do today, counted a partial day or night as being a day or night. Someone might say "I worked all day on that project;" but we don't conclude that he spent 24 hours or even 12 hours at work, even though he stated "all day."

The last supper that Jesus ate with his disciples occurred on the day of preparation for the Passover. *"Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?""* (Mark 14:12; see also Matthew 26:17; Luke 22:7). This would place it on the thirteenth day of the first month. *"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening"* (Exodus 12:18). In Israel, a day is counted from sundown to sundown. We follow the Roman style of accounting days from midnight to midnight. This difference of six hours sometimes causes difficulty in discussing when events took place, so keep it in mind as it becomes important later.

One thing many people miss is that the Passover is always eaten on the fourteenth day of the month, just after sundown. Yet the fourteenth day does not always fall on the same day of the week. The Passover feast began a week long feast known as the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. The first day and the last day of this feast were special holy days. *"On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat - that only may be prepared by you"* (Exodus 12:16). These holy days carried the same rules used for the weekly Sabbath days; thus, they were also referred to as Sabbath days even though they might not actually fall on the seventh day of the week. For example, *"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath[-rest], a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation"* (Leviticus 23:24).

Jesus and his disciples remained until late in the evening and then went to the Garden of Gethsemane. After a period of praying, during which the disciples kept drifting off to sleep, Jesus was arrested by a mob and hauled to Annas' home (John 18:12-13). Next he is taken to Caiaphas, the High Priest (John 18:24). It is at Caiaphas' home that the incident of the rooster crowing took place, so we know that it was near dawn (John 18:25-27). Then early that morning he was taken to Pilate. Here we find a

telling fact: *"Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover"* (John 18:28). This is another point saying that Jesus was crucified on the preparation day and not on the actual Passover day. This is again confirmed when Pilate brought Jesus out, *"Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!""* (John 19:14).

At the crucifixion, there was concern about getting the deaths completed before sundown. *"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). Notice that John specifically mentions that it is still the Preparation Day and the following day was a Sabbath. But John states that this was a special Sabbath, a high day, or what the Old Testament called a holy convocation. This day does not necessarily fall on Saturday; it falls on the fourteenth day of the month.

Joseph came to ask for the body of Jesus on the same preparation day. *"Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus"* (Mark 15:42-43). Jesus was hastily prepared for burial and put in a tomb. *"So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby"* (John 19:42). The rush was because at sundown it became the Passover day and no work could be done, including burying a loved one.

The next day, after the Passover was completed, we find the Jewish leaders petitioning Pilate. *"On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people,*

'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first." (Matthew 27:62-64).

Luke's account states, *"Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near. And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment"* (Luke 23:50-56). Jesus was buried on the preparation day. The Sabbath drew near (the special Sabbath of the Passover), and everyone rested on the Sabbath (either the special Sabbath or the actual Sabbath of the week).

Most people assume that the Passover that year fell on Saturday, not realizing that the Passover day itself was a special Sabbath. When that is done, and you try to lay out the events of the last week, you find that each day is richly described in detail -- except for Wednesday. For everything to fit, there must be a gap of one day in the last week when all the accounts mention nothing. However, if we accept that the Passover fell on Friday, then there is no gap in the records. Each day is accounted for and little happens on Friday or Saturday because they are both days of rest.

Here then is a rough time line:

Wednesday		Thursday		Friday		Saturday		Sunday	
Morning	Evening	Morning	Evening	Morning	Evening	Morning	Evening	Morning	
	Last Supper Garden Pre-trials	Trials Crucifixion Burial	Night 1	Day 1 Guards Requested	Night 2	Day 2	Night 3	Day 3 Resurrection	
	Preparation Day		Passover Holy Convocation		Sabbath		First Day		

"Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it" (Matthew 28:1-2; see also Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).

Peter, looking back on these events stated, *"And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly"* (Acts 10:39-40). Peter said the resurrection happened **on** the third day, not **after** the third day. Jesus time in the tomb wasn't a full day, but only a part of a day -- a very small part since he arose early in the morning before it became fully light. Thus there is no contradiction or difficulty in the records.

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Accessed 23 December 2021.