

Time in the Tomb

There are some who believe that Jesus was in the tomb after his death for three nights, not two nights. But before we get into that discussion there are a few foundational facts that need to be established:

Jesus shared the bread and wine with his apostles, known as "*the Lord's supper*" (1Co 11:20), immediately following the Jewish Passover meal. The Mosaic Law commands that the Passover sacrifice and meal are to be on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Nisan (Ex 12:6-8), the weekday of which changes from year to year. The sacrifice is to be done in the twilight hours of Nisan 14th, that is to say, immediately after the sun has set while there is still enough light to perform the sacrifice. The Jewish day begins at sundown so the Passover sacrifice and meal happen at the very beginning of Nisan 14th.

(Note: The first Passover in Egypt was a family/domestic event (no Temple or centralized priests) and there was time enough for the slaughter to be performed in those twilight hours after sunset. But later Torah law and practice shifted sacrifices to the sanctuary/Temple (see Deuteronomy 16:5-6 and 2 Chronicles 35:1-2 for centralized examples). In Temple times the Jews brought their sheep to the priests who handled the sacrifices. But there was not enough time for the priests to sacrifice the many thousands of sheep during the twilight hours after sunset, so the sacrifices were started earlier in mid to late afternoon on Nisan 13th, allowing time for all to bring their sacrificed sheep back home, cook it, and have their Passover meal in the beginning hours of Nisan 14th as required by Mosaic Law. (Ex 12:8)

The next morning and following daylight hours are still Nisan 14th. That evening at sundown begins Nisan 15th and for the next seven days, from the beginning of the 15th to the end of the 21st, is the Jewish Festival of Unleavened Bread. Leavened bread was not allowed to be eaten at the Passover meal or during the following 7 days of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, so by Jesus' day the Jews referred to the entire 8 day period as "*the days of the unleavened bread*" (Ac 12:3; 20:6), "*the festival of the Passover*" (Lu 2:41; Jn 13:1), and "*the Passover festival*". (Jn 2:23)

(Note: A "*festival*" is an extended celebration. A "*feast*" is a large celebratory meal. Therefore, due to the three food items eaten (sheep, unleavened bread, and bitter greens) the Passover meal was not a "*feast*", which is why it is merely referred to as a "*meal*". The original Greek word *heorté* means both feast and festival, and some Bible translators mistakenly translate *heorté* as "*feast*" when the text is referring to a "*festival*".)

Since unleavened bread was required both for the Passover meal and the following 7 day Festival of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 14th was also referred to as "*the first day of the Unleavened Bread*". (Mt 26:17; Mr 14:12)

The first and last days of the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 15th and 21st) are designated as

"*holy convocation*" days, and in accordance with Mosaic Law are treated similar to a Sabbath day regardless of what day of the week they fall on. (Lev 23:7-8) I say "similar" because no work at all is allowed to be done on a standard Sabbath:

(Leviticus 23:3) Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convention. You may not do **any** sort of work. It is to be a Sabbath to Jehovah wherever you dwell.

But on "*holy convocation*" days you are only forbidden from doing hard or laborious work:

(Leviticus 23:7, 8) On the first day, you will observe a holy convocation. You shall not do any hard (laborious) work.⁸ But you are to present an offering made by fire to Jehovah for seven days. There will be a holy convocation on the seventh day. You shall not do any hard (laborious) work.”

I also say "similar" because nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) are the first and last days of the Festival of Unleavened Bread ever called "Sabbath" days. They are ONLY referred to as "*holy convocation*" (Hebrew miqra' meaning sacred assembly) days, as you can see from verses 7 and 8 above. But the last day of each standard week throughout the year, other than merely being identifying it as the "*seventh day*" (Ge 2:2; Lev 23:3), is always referred to as the "Sabbath".

Beliefs

Ok, now that the known facts are stated, lets' begin.

Those who believe Jesus was in the tomb for 3 nights (herein called 3-nighters) believe the Passover sacrifice and meal, and Jesus' death, occurred on Nisan 14th(Thursday), the "*holy convocation*" day occurred on the 15th(Friday), the week's standard Sabbath occurred on the 16th(Saturday = 7th day of the week), and the women found Jesus gone from the tomb on the 17th(Sunday = 1st day of the week), meaning Jesus was in the tomb for three nights

Those who believe Jesus was in the tomb for 2 nights (herein called 2-nighters) believe the Passover sacrifice and meal, and Jesus' death, occurred on the 14th(Friday), the "*holy convocation*" day, and the week's standard Sabbath, both occurred on the 15th(Saturday = 7th day of the week), and the women found Jesus gone from the tomb on the 16th(Sunday = 1st day of the week), meaning Jesus was in the tomb for two nights

"three days and three nights"

3-nighters have Matthew 12:40 at the core of their belief.

(Matthew 12:40) For just as Jo'nah was in the belly of the huge fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

3-nighters point out that Jesus said he would be in the tomb for "*three nights*", therefore if he was entombed during the dark hours of Saturday and Sunday (as 2-nighters believe) then he would only have been in the tomb two nights, which would make what Jesus said at Matthew 12:40 a lie.

(Reminder: Jewish days are from sundown to sundown.)

2-nighters point out that if Jesus was entombed during the dark hours of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday (as 3-nighters believe) that would indeed make three nights in the tomb, BUT it would only make two periods of daylight since Jesus was entombed at the very end of Thursday's daylight hours and gone when the women arrived at sunup on Sunday. (Mt 28:1; Mr 16:2; Lu 24:1; Jn 20:1) Clearly Jesus was separating the days into two parts at Matthew 12:40 (day and night) with three of each, so Matthew 12:40 still does not match what happened to Jesus either way.

So did Jesus lie? No. Then how can Matthew 12:40 be explained? It's quite simple, actually. All you have to do is look at these verses:

(Matthew 13:10, 11) So the disciples came and said to him: "Why do you speak to them by the use of parables?" ¹¹ In reply he said: "To you it is granted to understand the sacred secrets of the Kingdom of the heavens, but to them it is not granted.

(Mark 4:11) He said to them: "To you the sacred secret of the Kingdom of God has been given, but to those outside all things are in parables,

(Luke 8:10) He said: "To you it is granted to understand the sacred secrets of the Kingdom of God, but for the rest it is in parables so that, though looking, they may look in vain, and though hearing, they may not get the sense.

Jesus himself tells us in those three verses that he ALWAYS spoke to outsiders using parables, and only spoke plainly to his apostles. The original Greek word *parabole* means *comparison, parable*. A parable is a short fictitious narrative. At Matthew 12:40 Jesus is speaking to scribes and Pharisees, not to his apostles. Therefore Jesus wasn't lying. He was using a parable.

Since Jesus was not in the tomb for 3 daylight periods, does that invalidate the 3-nighters' claim that he was in the tomb for 3 nights? No, it doesn't.

Sabbath / Sabbaths

(Matthew 28:1) After the Sabbath, when it was growing light on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to view the grave.

3-nighters claim that John was referring to the "*holy convocation*" day as a Sabbath, and point out that the Greek word *sabbaton* at Matthew 28:1 is plural and therefore should be translated as "*Sabbaths*" in that verse, proving that John was referring to two consecutive Sabbath days in a row:

the "*holy convocation*" day followed by the normal Sabbath day.

2-nighters point out that the exact same Greek word (sabbaton) is used twice in that verse. The second time sabbaton is translated as "*of the week*". Why is that? Because sabbaton has two meanings: *Sabbath* and *week*. Since "week" refers to 7 days sabbaton is plural. When "*Sabbaths*" is the intended word, the Greek word sabbata is used, not sabbaton. (see Acts 17:2)

High Day

(John 19:31) Because it was the day of Preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the stake on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath day was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate to have their legs broken and the bodies taken away.

(Side note: The word "*stake*" is the correct translation of the original Greek word stauros which means stake or post without any horizontal attachment. Most Bible translators translate it as "cross" to align with their personal belief or with public opinion.)

3-nighters reason that John calling that Sabbath "*a high day*" only makes sense if he was not referring to a standard Sabbath day, but was referring to the first "*holy convocation*" day on Nisan 15th. They say that "*high day*" has nothing to do with the Sabbath day during the Festival since that Sabbath day came on Nisan 16th.

2-nighters say that John used the term "*high day*" because the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the "*holy convocation*" day, fell on the same day as that week's standard "*holy Sabbath*" day, putting two "*holy*" days together on the same day, thus making it a special Sabbath day, a high day. They also point out the fact that "*holy convocation*" days are never referred to in the Hebrew Scriptures either as a "*Sabbath day*" or as a "*high day*".

"For"

(John 19:31) Because it was the day of Preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the stake on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath day was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate to have their legs broken and the bodies taken away.

The Greek word gar, translated as "*for*", means because.

3-nighters say that in this verse John was referring to the "*holy convocation*" day when he wrote "*Sabbath*". Therefore the bodies needed to be taken away because the next day was a "*holy convocation*" day, which is why John called it a "*high day*".

3-nighters also point out that If the following day was a standard Sabbath that the bodies would still have needed to be taken away, so there would have been no reason for John to say that they needed to be taken away because that Sabbath was "*a high day*". Merely being a standard Sabbath day

would have been reason enough. Why even mention that it is "*a high day*" if it wasn't relevant to Joseph's permission to get the body? It seems reasonable that since Pilate was not a Jew he needed to be informed that the following day (Friday) was also a Sabbath because it was a "*holy convocation*" day (a "*high day*") so the body needed to be released a day earlier than Pilate expected.

2-nighters say the text's wording doesn't harmonize with that argument. If "*that Sabbath*" referred to a "*holy convocation*" day, as 3-nighters claim, then John's words meant: "**for** *that holy convocation day was a high day*". What was different about that "*holy convocation*" day that made it different from other "*holy convocation*" days to make it warrant the term "*high day*"? Nothing. But if the next day was a standard Sabbath day, which also coincided with a "*holy convocation*" day, than that Sabbath would be a special day, "*a high day*". Also, nowhere else in the Bible is a "*holy convocation*" day ever called a "*high day*".

2-nighters ask: If "*holy convocation*" days are "*high days*" and are referred to as "*Sabbath*" days, as 3-nighters argue, than why say "that Sabbath day" (that "*holy convocation*" day) "*was a high day*", as if it stood out as different from other "*holy convocation*" days? If the point was to convince Pilate to release the body he would merely need to be informed that the following day (Friday) was also an additional Sabbath to the Jews. And if that was the case, It makes much more sense that John would have said something like this: "For the next day was a Sabbath day."

2-nighters point out that if there were two consecutive Sabbaths following Jesus' death, as 3-nighters claim, the fact that it wasn't mentioned in any of the Gospels is a glaring omission. People were doing many things and waiting to visit the tomb. Surely waiting during two Sabbaths in a row would have been mentioned by someone, right?

Astronomy

2-nighters say that astronomical reconstructions prove that Nisan 14th fell on a Friday in 33AD.

3-nighters say that although that may be true, astronomical reconstruction of when the new moon appeared is not that relevant because back then it was up to imperfect human eyewitnesses to decide when the new moon was visible in Jerusalem to mark the beginning of Nisan.

Day of Preparation

(John 19:31) Because it was the day of Preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the stake on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath day was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate to have their legs broken and the bodies taken away.

3-nighters say it was the "*day of Preparation*" because the Jews needed to prepare for the "*holy convocation*" day the following day(Friday), proving it was the daylight hours of Thursday.

2-nighters point out that nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures does it ever say that either of the "*holy*

convocation" days (on Nisan 15th and 21st - Lev 23:7, 8) had a preparation day on the previous day since a day of preparation wasn't needed because cooking was allowed on those two days:

(Exodus 12:16) On the first day you will hold a holy convocation, and on the seventh day, another holy convocation. No work is to be done on these days. Only what every person needs to eat, that alone may be prepared for you.

2-nighters say that unlike the "*holy convocation*" days, no work at all is allowed on a Sabbath so a "*day of Preparation*" is needed, which is what John was referring to at John 19:31. (Lev 23:3)

Preparation of the Passover

(John 19:14) Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews: "See! Your king!"

What are the words "*it was the day of Preparation of the Passover*" referring to? In Jesus' time the Jews referred to all 8 days as Passover:

(Mark 14:1) Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread was two days later.

(Both were "*two days later*", not the Passover 2 days and the Festival 3 days.)

(Luke 2:41) Now his parents were accustomed to go from year to year to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.

(Luke 22:1) Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called Passover, was getting near.

(Reminder: A festival is an extended celebration, not a single meal like the Passover meal.)

John almost always referred to the Passover as a "*festival*". (see also Jn 11:55-56)

(John 2:23) However, when he was in Jerusalem at the festival of the Passover, many people put their faith in his name when they saw the signs that he was performing.

(John 6:4) Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.

(John 13:1) Now because he knew before the festival of the Passover that his hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father,

Only one time did John refer to the Passover and not call it a "*festival*", and that was at John 2:13.

(John 2:13) Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Yet John later clarified what he meant at John 6:4. (see above)

So when John wrote "*it was the day of Preparation of the Passover*" at John 19:14 he wasn't referring to the Passover meal of Nisan 14th. The Hebrew texts never refer to a day of Preparation for the Passover sacrifice and meal. The sheep is sacrificed and the food is cooked the same day, not a day in advance like with Sabbath days. Work is not forbidden on Nisan 14th. The Passover sacrifice and meal don't need a day of Preparation. So what was John referring to at John 19:14? The details of John 19:31 answers that question.

(John 19:31) Because it was the day of Preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the stake on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath day was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate to have their legs broken and the bodies taken away.

There it tells us that it was "*the day of Preparation*" because the next day was a Sabbath. All year long they have a "*day of Preparation*" once a week. They are the day before each Sabbath to prepare food since they couldn't cook or do any other work on the Sabbath. But this "*day of Preparation*" at John 19:14 was for a Sabbath that was during the Passover festival when leavened bread was prohibited. So this day of Preparation was different. It wasn't your normal day of Preparation. It was "*the day of Preparation of the Passover*".

John 18:28

For those curious about the timing of John 18:28, the Jews didn't want to go into Pilate's residence because they didn't want to become unclean ("*defiled*") which lasts for seven days. (Nu 19:11, 14, 16)

(John 18:28) Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the governor's residence. It was now early in the morning and they did not enter into the governor's residence so that they would not get defiled but could eat the Passover.

This was during the daylight hours of Nisan 14th. At sundown began the Festival of Unleavened Bread. (Lev 23:6) Remember, the Jews called the Festival of Unleavened Bread the Passover:

(Luke 22:1) Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called Passover, was getting near.

The simple reason the Jews didn't want to become unclean was because "*the Passover*" festival began that evening at sunset.

Conclusion

So there are two beliefs:

- 1) Jesus meant it when he said "*three nights*" at Matthew 12:40, and John calling the day of Preparation a "*high day*" at John 19:31 proves that it was a "*holy convocation*" day followed by a standard Sabbath day.

2) Matthew 12:40 was a parable, and John calling the day of Preparation a "*high day*" at John 19:31 meant that the "*holy convocation*" day fell on the same day as the Sabbath.

In the end, whichever you wish to believe doesn't change the fact that Jesus died for us, and for that i am very thankful.

What do you think?

Let me know if i missed anything.

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