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The Resurrection Sequence

Whatever the true sequence of events at the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the most important factor is that he did die and rise again, making possible the gift of eternal life for all of mankind.

by James McBride

Probing of the narratives surrounding the events of the resurrection of Jesus has, however, led to some questions about the sequence - and even to concerns that the Scriptures are inconsistent. In fact, when we put all the "pieces of the jig-saw" together it not only provides, despite remaining gaps, a logical and clear picture - it also is additional evidence of the inspiration of Scripture! For we have four separately written accounts which dovetail into a single unassailable account.

Following is a brief outline around which you may add the other events that make up that momentous part of history.

The narrative is based on the following timeframe: (The year of Christ's passion is irrelevant to the following sequence of events)

- in Bible times the "day" began at sundown. We should not read modern awareness of time back into ancient thought, which was far less precise than ours
- the Jews used a calendar different from our own
- the Hebrew calendar month of the crucifixion was Nisan (early spring), and the crucifixion was on Nisan 14: Wednesday. day- time. This was "the preparation of passover"
- the Bible, in addition to the weekly Sabbath, also has three holy day seasons which included a total of seven annual "sabbaths" when no manual work was permitted. The first of these was the first Day of Unleavened Bread on Nisan 15
- Nisan 14/15: Jesus buried around sundown on Wed afternoon
- Nisan 15: (Wed evgrl'hurs): Jesus in the tomb - a "high day" (John 19:31)
- Nisan 16 (Thurs evg/Fri): Jesus in the tomb
- Nisan 17 (Fri evg/Sat): Jesus in the tomb until the end part of the weekly Sabbath, and then resurrected

Note: Each Gospel account is from the author's own knowledge of events. To glean a complete picture of the sequence realize that there are "gaps" in each account that must be filled by reference to other Gospel accounts

A complete picture needs to take account of:

- the movements of the women in buying and preparing the aromatics *on two different days* - after a sabbath and before a sabbath
- Jesus' claim that he would be in the grave "three days and three nights" (Matt 12:40). The usual "Friday to Sunday" interpretation can *at best* come up with only three days and *two* nights - Friday and Saturday
- the Biblical view of life after death: a temporary cessation of existence

After Jesus was executed (by a spear-wound - John 19:34), His body was removed from the stake at the instigation of Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50ff). Together with Nicodemus he hurriedly wrapped the body with a hundred pounds of spices and placed him in the "garden tomb" (John 19:39-42, Deut 21:23).

It may come as a surprise to learn that this was at the end of Nisan 14 (Wednesday evening) and just before the annual First Day of Unleavened Bread - a "High Day" (holy day, Nisan 15), considered to be a Sabbath (Exodus 12:16, Leviticus 23:47, Luke 23:54, John 19:3 1), and the evening in which the Jews ate the passover lamb. That year the "preparation" for passover John 19:42 - was, as we shall see, a Wednesday.

Several women followers of Jesus from Galilee observed these activities, and followed the two men to the tomb (Luke 23:55). By now it would be quite dark and well into the holy day when they again entered Jerusalem. In other words, the shops were shut, having been so in compliance

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with Jewish “preparation day” practice, since around noon! The women likely participated in the Passover and were inactive during the remainder of that High Day/holy day.

But that Thursday saw lots of other activity. Even though it was an annual holy day when no work was permitted (Leviticus 23:7) - for the Jewish leaders were in panic! They hastened to Pilate demanding a guard be set on the tomb. For they remembered that Jesus said he would rise from the dead on the third day (Matt 27:62-66). They wanted some insurance! Pilate permitted it. Guards were set, and the stone sealed.

After the annual holy day probably on Friday morning two of the women purchased aromatics to anoint the body. This was “when the sabbath *was past* “ (Mark 16:1). The women mixed and prepared these during that day (Friday). They then “rested on the [seventh-day] Sabbath day according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56, Exodus 20:811). So, (Mark) they *bought* (Gk *agorazo*, not *brought* and not *had bought*) the aromatics *after* the sabbath but (Luke) prepared them *before* the Sabbath - two Sabbaths. One scholar (Dean Alford) calls this a “slight but valuable discrepancy showing the independence of the accounts” perhaps a 24hr difference! Edersheim, too, notes the discrepancy - but refuses to believe it!

As the weekly Sabbath was ending, the two Marys went again to the garden to see the tomb (Matthew 28:1), returning again to the city. [*Englishman’s Greek NT*: “Now late on sabbath as it was getting dusk towards (*epiphoskouse*) the first of the week”. Also: “the day was Preparation, the Sabbath was dawning” *Tatian*, c.170AD]

They arrived back after sunrise on Sunday morning, bringing the ointments to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:2). On the way their preoccupation was how they would get into the tomb past the sealed stone and its custodians. They need not have been concerned! While there the ground began to tremble, an angel appeared and rolled away the stone, the guards literally shook in their boots and fell into a coma (Matt 28:2-4). And found that Jesus had *already* risen (past perfect tense - Mark 16:9)! The time (“early...”) is properly associated with the women’s visit. (There was no punctuation in the Greek text.)

John (ch 20) relates how Mary Magdalene then came running to where Peter and John were in hiding, to break the news of the disappearance of Jesus. She had not heard the angel message to the other women. Peter and John then ran to the tomb. John arrived first but hung back, while impulsive Peter rushed in. John then entered and saw something that clinched for him that Jesus had been resurrected. The body of Jesus had disappeared - but the shroud (a long winding cloth) still lay in the niche where he had been laid, while the separate head wrapping lay nearby. The body of Jesus had passed through the tightly wound “bandages”! He believed!

Meanwhile Mary (v.11) waited outside, weeping. When the two disciples left she ventured to look in. Inside two angels awaited. Hearing a sound behind she turned - to be confronted by Jesus himself. While the Bible doesn’t say, it’s likely he had after his resurrection remained all night in the garden in intercession to his heavenly Father, as our High Priest.

A curious incident now occurs. Jesus told Mary not to touch him. “Do not hold me”, he said, “for I have not yet ascended to the Father” (v.17). When they separate, Mary - on Jesus’ instruction hurries to tell the remaining disciples that she had met him (v.18).

The weight of evidence is that Jesus was dead for three days and three nights. It was generally considered that death had surely occurred if there were no signs of life after three days (cp John 11:39). The Hebrew expression “third day” is first used in Scripture to include three periods of darkness and three periods of light - see Genesis 1:4-13. The crucifixion was on the Wednesday. There are ancient accounts that the Last Supper was indeed on a Tuesday evening. Numerous commentators over the centuries have rejected a Friday crucifixion.

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