

PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Easter

The Heart of
the Gospel

Easter, the Heart of the Gospel

EASTER, the Sunday we celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Like most Christian holy days it has a bit of controversy around it, although only among Christians. It should be the most important day on our church calendar. Easter is the day we celebrate the heart of the gospel. Actually it is the most gospel oriented Sunday of the year! Now, I realize some of you are ready to disagree with what I have just said. But, please hear me out. And, please bear with a little bit of word study before you dismiss my second favorite holy day.

The origin of the word “**Easter**” is a little vague. It is used in English and in the Germanic languages to designate the holiday but the scholars are not unanimous regarding the origin of the word. The most popular suggestion is that it once referred to Aostre, a Saxon goddess who was part of the vernal equinox celebration. But that is a bit misleading. The connection to Eostre is tenuous and doesn’t show up in history until about the 8th century. The church had already been celebrating the resurrection for almost 800 years. So the name “Easter” is a little misleading and it leaves you with the idea that we are celebrating a pagan spring festival, and that is obviously not the case.

In Greek and the romance languages Resurrection Sunday is referred to as “pascha” which means Passover. The word “pascha” is not even originally a Greek word; it is the Greek version of the Hebrew word “pesach” or Passover.

Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection took place immediately following the Jewish Passover. And our Christian celebration is forever linked to the Jewish Passover.

Then why don’t we celebrate Easter or Resurrection Sunday when the Jews are celebrating Passover?

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Well, it is a complicated discussion and my explanation will be over simplified, but here goes. The early church did celebrate Passover, they were after all Jews. But, as more and more gentiles came into the church calendar issues became a problem. The Jewish calendar is different than our modern calendar. Also, the church in the west, and church in the east each used different calendars. On the Jewish calendar each year Passover falls on different day of the week. The early church eventually decided they wanted the resurrection celebration to always be on Sunday. After all, they reasoned, Jesus was raised on the first day of the week. So, in the fourth century at the Council of Nicaea the western or Roman church officially split with the Jewish holiday of Passover and determined to always celebrate the resurrection on Sunday.

Passover was the day God ordained for the Jewish people to celebrate freedom from slavery. It was the first celebrated in Exodus 12. The last plague God executed against Egypt before the Israelites were set free was the death of the first born. The Passover was so named because on the night of the last plague, the Jews painted the blood of a lamb over the door post of their homes. When the death angel moved through the land he passed over or spared the homes of the Jewish people because of the blood of the lamb. The children of Israel were then set free by Pharaoh and they exited Egypt.

The Passover meal or Seder is the basis for the Last Supper, the Lord's Supper or Communion. Each time you participate in a communion service you are engaging in an abbreviated Passover Seder.

Passover leads up to Easter or Resurrection Sunday. But, Resurrection Sunday is the next step. With Passover we see the picture of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world, but there is no resurrection in the Passover. At the end of Passover the grave is still intact but that's Friday night, and Sunday's coming!

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The following passage covers what happened immediately following the crucifixion of Jesus.

Directions

OBSERVATION

Mark each reference to:

- **Joseph** (including pronouns) with a circle
- **the women** (including pronouns) with a box
- **Jesus** (including pronouns) with a cross
- **day** - underline. In this passage "day" is a very specific time reference.

Luke 23:50- 24:12

- 50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man
- 51 (he had not consented to their plan and action), a *man* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God;
- 52 this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.
- 53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain.
- 54 It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.
- 55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid.
- 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.
- 1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.
- 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,
- 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

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4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing;

5 and as *the women* were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the *men* said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead?”

6 “He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee,

7 saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”

8 And they remembered His words,

9 and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.

10 Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the *mother* of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles.

11 But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.

12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.

DISCUSS

What did you learn about Joseph of Arimathea?

When did Joseph take the body of Christ? On which day?

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If the Sabbath is Saturday, on which day did Joseph take the body of Christ and bury Him?

What were the women doing at the tomb?

Which day were they at the tomb?

What day is the first day of the week?

Which days was Jesus in the tomb?

WRAP UP

The Passover and Resurrection Day are intricately tied together. Christ, our Passover has been slain for our sins (1 Corinthians 5:7) and raised from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25).

Easter is the day we celebrate Christ our Passover, the Lamb of God for sinners slain.

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INSIGHT

For the Jews, following the pattern set in Genesis 1, each day begins and ends at sundown. Also, when counting days they would have counted a part of the day as a full day. So, if Jesus was buried on Friday a few hours before Saturday began, then they would count Friday as the first day he was buried. Saturday was the second day. And, if He was still in the grave for some part of Sunday, then he was in the grave for three days.

THE LAMB OF GOD BY TWILA PARIS

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*Your only Son, no sin to hide
But You have sent Him from Your side
To walk upon this guilty sod
And to become the Lamb of God*

*Your gift of love, they crucified
They laughed and scorned Him as He died
The humble King, they named a fraud
And sacrificed the Lamb of God*

*Oh, Lamb of God, sweet Lamb of God
I love the holy Lamb of God
Oh, wash me in His precious blood
My Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God*

*I was so lost, I should have died
But You have brought me to Your side
To be led by Your staff and rod
And to be called a lamb of God*

*Oh, Lamb of God, sweet Lamb of God
I love the holy Lamb of God
Oh, wash me in His precious blood
My Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God*

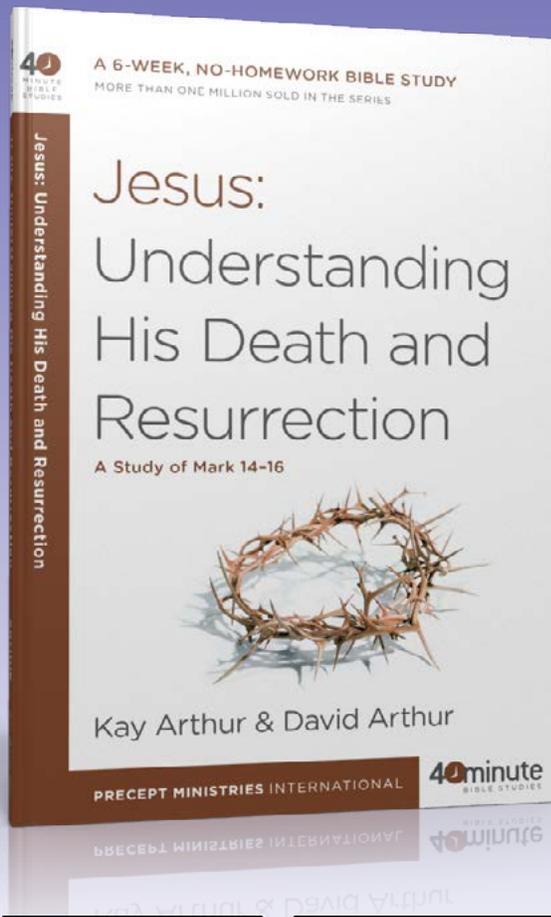
*Oh, wash me in His precious blood
My Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God*

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by Kay Arthur & David Arthur



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