

The Actual Day of the Crucifixion and the Question of the "Three Days and the Three Nights."

By David Baron

It would be too large a question on which to enter here, and one on which there has already been much discussion by men more able and learned than I, as to the day of the week on which the 14th of Nisan (the day the paschal lamb was slain) fell in that year, and as to whether it was on that day, and at the very time, that the lamb, or lambs, were being slain in the Temple court that our Saviour was crucified, or whether it was on that evening at the very time that the Jews were eating their paschal supper that our Lord ate His last Passover with His disciples, during which He instituted the Supper of the New Covenant, when He took the bread and brake it, and said, "Take eat; this is My body, broken [or 'given'] for you," and again, the cup, saying, "This cup is the New Testament in My blood," and that the actual crucifixion did not take place till the 15th of Nisan. It must be admitted that the first of these views is bound up with more and greater difficulties in spite of the almost universal and ancient Christian belief, which is supported even by Jewish tradition and Talmudic sayings, that it was "on the eve of the Sabbath and of the Passover" that Jesus was led forth to death. On both sides of the controversy, and with the consent of all whose view on such a question is worth anything, it is admitted that "our Lord was crucified on the Friday, and that He rose on Sunday," but the question is, was the Friday in that week the 14th of Nisan, or the day of the paschal lamb, or was it the 15th, or the first day of the Passover feast? It seems clear, more particularly from the synoptic Gospels, that the paschal meal of which our Lord partook with His disciples was the regular paschal supper which could not legally be eaten before the evening of the 14th, and, as all the terrible and solemn events of the last night of our Saviour's life intervened between that Supper and His death, the crucifixion must have taken place on the 15th.

But there are difficulties also bound up with this latter view, arising chiefly from statements in the Gospel of John—as, for instance, that the priests and Pharisees when they led Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's judgment-hall would not themselves enter "lest they should be denied, but that they might eat the Passover" (John xviii. 28); and again, "The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath (the day of that Sabbath was a great, or high, day), asked of Pilate that the legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away" (John xix. 31)—But these Scriptures Dr. Edersheim and others have explained—

1. That the Passover referred to in the first of these two passages was not the paschal lamb, but the *Chagigah* sacrifices, which were offered on the 15th of Nisan, and to the objection of Farrar and others that "there was nothing specially paschal about this Chagigah," he quotes Dr. Saalschutz, one of the most learned of Jewish writers, to the effect that "the whole feast and *all its festive meals* were designated as the Passover"—a view which is supported also by a passage in the Talmud (Sebach. 99 b, and Rosh. ha Sh. 5 a), where it is expressly said, "What is the meaning of the term Passover?" (Answer)—" *The Peace Offerings of the Passover.*"

I must remind my readers that we have not to do in these passages with Bible statements, but with the interpretations and customs in reference to the Passover which

existed among the Jews in the time of Christ. As a rule the Chagigah was always brought on the 15th of Nisan, and it required Levitical purity.

2. And as to John xix. 31, it has been replied by those who hold that the day of the Crucifixion was the 15th of Nisan that the expression, "the day of that Sabbath was a great, or 'high,' day"—does not necessarily imply that it was a double Sabbath, namely, because the first day of the Passover, which was called a Sabbath, fell on the ordinary weekly Sabbath, but because it was the second day of the feast, when the Omer, or "sheaf" of first-fruits, was presented in the Temple.

I have already stated that the question is too large a one to enter on here, but the following two points which Dr. Edersheim quotes from Wieseler are important as showing that St. John, like the synoptists, places the date of the Crucifixion on the 15th.

1. "Not only the synoptists, but St. John, refers to the custom of releasing a prisoner at 'the feast,' or, as St. John expressly calls it, 'at the Passover.' Hence the release of Barabbas, and with it the crucifixion of Jesus, could not have taken place on the 14th of Nisan, the morning of which could *not* have been designated as 'the feast,' and still less as 'the Passover.'"

2. When St. John mentions that the accusers of Jesus went not into Pilate's judgment-hall 'lest they should be denied, but that they might eat the Passover' he *could not* have referred to their eating the paschal supper. For the defilement thus incurred would only have lasted to the evening of that day, whereas the paschal supper was eaten *after* the evening had commenced, so that *the defilement of Pilate's judgment-hall in the morning would in no way have interfered with their eating the paschal lamb*. But it *would* have interfered with their either offering or partaking of the *Chagigah* on the 15th Nisan." (See the whole important Appendix on the subject in "The Temple and its Ministry.")

But whether on the 14th, when the paschal lamb was actually slain, or on the 15th, which was the first day of the Feast of Passover, the synchronisation of type and antitype in the fulfilment in point of time, as pointed out on pp. 45-47, is sufficiently near. It should also be borne in mind that the paschal lamb was sacrificed "between the evenings" of the 14th and 15th of Nisan, namely, before the close of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th, and that the paschal supper which followed later took place on the 15th itself, that is according to Jewish reckoning, which is not as in the West, of day and night, but of "the evening and the morning," that is, the night and the day (the day beginning as the first stars become visible), so that if we accept the 15th as the day of crucifixion, the Jewish paschal meal, our Lord's Last Supper, and the Crucifixion and Burial, were all included within that one "day," consisting of the night of what we should call the 14th and the day of the 15th.

But a question which the writer is continually asked is, How can we make out the "three days and three nights" (Matt. xii. 40) which the Lord said would intervene between His death and resurrection if the crucifixion took place on Friday, the 15th, and His resurrection on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath, or early on the 17th Nisan? On which I would observe—

(a) That the expression "three days and three nights" is an Old Testament idiom carried over into the New Testament, and means not necessarily three whole days and three whole nights, but in round numbers a period of about three days. In the case of Jonah, to whose typical experience the Lord refers, we have no means of accurately ascertaining

what actual measure of time he was in the belly of the whale, but in the other places where this idiom is used, or implied, we have strong reason to believe that it *could* not have meant literally three days and three nights. Exactly the same expression as in the case of Jonah is found in Sam. xxx. 12-14, when on David and his men's return to Ziklag on "the third day" (ver. 1), to find the place devastated in their absence, and their families and property carried off as spoil by the Amalekites, they found an Egyptian slave who had "eaten no bread nor drunk water three days and three nights" (ver. 12), but in the 14th verse we read that it was "three days ago" that he fell sick, and the impression left on the mind is that it was a period of *about* three days. In Esther iv. 16 we read that after Esther had been sufficiently roused by Mordecai to the imminent danger which was threatening, she sent a message to him: "Go, gather all the Jews that are present in Shushan and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink *three days—night and day; I also and my maidens will fast in like manner*"; but "it came to pass *on the third day*" (chap. v. 1), and evidently early on that day, that she appeared before Ahasuerus and on that same day we find her already at the "banquet" to which she had invited him and Haman.

(b) It is to no purpose to try to push back the day of the Crucifixion to the Thursday, or even the Wednesday in that week, as some have without basis, either historical or biblical, endeavoured to do, so as to get in three whole days and three whole nights between His burial and the resurrection, since, according to the express words of Christ, and of the apostles, the resurrection took place "*on the third day*."

Thus, to take only the Gospel of Matthew, we find that from the sixteenth chapter and onwards, when "Jesus began to show His disciples" with increasing clearness and fulness of detail the experiences which were awaiting Him in Jerusalem—how "the Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify Him,"—these statements always end with the confident prediction, "*and on the third day He shall rise again*" (Matt xvi. 21; xvii. 23; xx. 18, 19). And with these predictions as to the time of His resurrection corresponds the historic fact

To take only the testimony of one or two passages; we have in Luke the beautiful classic account of the meeting and conversation of the Christ with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus after His resurrection had become a glorious accomplished fact, and then, after their telling Him in their simplicity, as if He were "only a stranger," how He, whom they had trusted would have redeemed Israel, had been delivered by the chief priests and rulers to be condemned to death and crucified, but of whom the as yet incredible report had now reached them that He had risen from the dead, they add, "And beside all this *today is the third day* since these things were done."

The Apostle Paul, therefore, in summarising the great foundation facts of the gospel which he preached, and which were universally believed in the Churches, says, not only that Christ died for our sins, and that He was buried, but that "He rose again from the dead *the third day* according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. xv. 4).

I might point out also the fact that the Jews who heard the Lord use the expression did not understand it to signify literally "three days and three nights," for after the Crucifixion they came to Pilate saying, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver said while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made secure *until the third day*" (Matt xxvii. 63, 64).

(c) According to Jewish law part of the day stands for the whole, for "if a day had been once

entered on, even for a few minutes, the whole twenty-four hours were reckoned to the person who had so entered on the day." If a child is born in the last hour or even in the last few minutes of a day it is counted as a whole day of the period of time within which he must be circumcised. Thus *legally*, according to Jewish reckoning, the crucifixion and burial of our Lord having taken place before the 16th Nisan actually commenced, He may be said to have been in the grave "three days and three nights," viz., *Friday*, to which legally belonged the night of what we should call Thursday; *Saturday*, consisting of the night of Friday and the day of Saturday; and *Sunday*, to which belonged the night of Saturday and the very early morn of Sunday.