

The Day of the Lamb

An hour by hour account of the day Jesus died

The two greatest holy days commanded in the Law of Moses are Passover and the Day of Atonement.

Passover (in Hebrew, Pesach) commemorated the night that each Jewish family in Egypt had to sacrifice a lamb and put its life blood on their doorposts to escape the Angel of Death sent to punish Pharaoh and Egypt. (Exodus 12)

The Day of Atonement (in Hebrew, Yom Kippur) was the single day that the High Priest of Israel was commanded to pass through a curtain into the Holy of Holies, God's inner sanctuary on earth, and there make atonement before God for the sins of Israel. He did so with the life blood of a sin offering. (Leviticus 16)

In all of history Passover and the Day of Atonement converged to fulfillment just once, in a single day – a day like no other. Let us examine it.

One Day

When studying the Bible, we should use the Bible's frame of reference. What is one day? Genesis 1 (vv. 5, 8, 13, 19, 23 and 31) lays out each day as "evening and morning;" Scripture and Jewish tradition based on Scripture have always begun each new day with sunset and finished it with the twilight of the next afternoon.

That is one day, in Bible terms.

The Lamb

Many lambs were sacrificed to atone for the sins of Israel under the Law of Moses. But only one man was ever declared to BE the Lamb. John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus to Israel by saying, "Behold, God's Lamb!" Isaiah wrote of Jesus centuries earlier:

"Just as many were astonished at you, my people, so his appearance was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: Thus will he sprinkle many nations...." (Isaiah 52:13,14 NASB)

"He was despised and forsaken of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face. He was despised, and we did not esteem him.

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth.

"By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?

"His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, yet with a rich man in his death; although he had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth.

"But the Lord was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief; if he would render his soul as a guilt offering, he will see his seed, he will prolong his days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand..... (Isaiah 53:3, 7-10)

Remember Isaiah's words, as we walk through the Day of the Lamb, as told in the New Testament Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. This account combines all four Gospels into one narrative of this day, as you will see.

Sundown, the Upper Room

Sundown, the Upper Room. For Jesus, that greatest day of Passover began with sundown and gathering for a Passover seder with his twelve disciples. John and Matthew identify that dinner as beginning after sundown.

Mark names the day of the dinner as "the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover Lamb." So does Luke: "Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed. And he [Jesus] sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the Passover, that we may eat." (John 13:1, Matthew 26:17-35, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:7,8)

Jesus had given them instructions to find the room for the Passover – the Last Supper—which included finding a man carrying a water jar. He also sent an explanation to the room's owner: "My time is near." The instructions were carried out to the letter, leading to an upstairs room now referred to as the Upper Room. (Matthew 26:18, Luke 22:10-13)

About 6:30 PM, the Upper Room

About 6:30 PM, the Upper Room. The day must have begun around sundown with the sacrifice of a Passover lamb, its blood sprinkled on the doorposts, as the Law commands.

The Passover dinner itself followed; the location was supernaturally confirmed, but even so, the disciples did not expect what happened at this Seder.

About 8 PM

About 8 PM. Then Jesus broke the Passover unleavened bread and passed the cup, giving the disciples revelation understanding of how to partake of Himself in the bread and wine. He said of the bread, "This is my body," and of the cup of wine, "This is my blood of the covenant, blood which is being shed for many, for the forgiveness of their sins." (Matthew 26:24-26)

About 8:30 PM

About 8:30 PM. The dinner itself ended with surprise after surprise. First a striking act: the Messiah Himself took a towel and a dish of water to wash His disciples' dusty feet!

In the next minute, He prophesied Judas' treachery, then shooed him out of the dinner. Judas, one of the twelve disciples, was fully a traitor to Jesus by now. Fearfully, that was a settled fact.

Jesus did not let who Judas was or what Judas was about to do hinder Him.

About 9 PM

About 9 PM. Instead, Jesus began to describe the New Covenant to them, the one He would seal with His own life blood. He spoke revelation, prophecy, promise, commandment, encouragement and warning to his disciples, as recorded in John 13-16.

About 10:30 PM

About 10:30 PM. The day was less than five hours old. Jesus had given His disciples their last spiritual feast before the Cross, and then prayed the longest, most striking prayer recorded of Him in Scripture. (John 17)

He kept, as He always did, a poise and balance in the midst of the extraordinary. They took time to sing a hymn, then crossed the brook Kidron to go to the Garden of Gethsemane. (Mark 14:26, Matthew 26:30, John 18:1)

About 11 PM, Gethsemane

About 11 PM, Gethsemane. John writes that Judas knew the Garden of Gethsemane well. Jesus went straight ahead anyway; He made no attempt to hide. (John 18:2)

He prayed "in an agony" there: "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Yet He prevailed to pray,

"Father...nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42) Jesus knew what He faced, and He chose to offer Himself as the sacrificial Lamb.

The disciples couldn't keep their eyes open, and nodded off twice. (Matt. 26:40, Mark 14:37)

About midnight

About midnight. Judas Iscariot arrived at the garden, bringing a detachment of soldiers and a big crowd of underlings of the priests, scribes and elders, carrying torches and lamps. In that moment Judas fulfilled prophecy: "Even my own familiar friend, who eats my bread and in whom I trust, betrays me." (Psalm 41:9)

After Judas kissed Jesus, and Peter lashed out at the crowd with a sword, Jesus healed the servant's sliced-off ear, then spoke a word to spare his disciples from arrest, only to see them flee for their lives. That too fulfilled prophecy: "Smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered." (Zechariah 13:7)

The soldiers bound Him and marched Him out of the Garden. (Matt. 26:47-56, Mark 14:43-52, Luke 22:47-53, John 18:3-12)

About 1 AM, Annas' house

About 1 AM, Annas' house. Jesus' captors brought him briefly to Annas, the high priest's father-in-law. Annas sent Jesus, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest. (John 18:13)

About 2 AM, the High Priest's residence

About 2 AM, the High Priest's residence. Jesus was brought face to face with the High Priest, Caiaphas. (Matt. 26:57-75, Mark 14:53-72, Luke 22:54-71, John 18:15-27)

This was a tribunal by lamplight: the chief priests, the elders, and the whole ruling council gathered there in the middle of the chill night, determined to do away with Jesus.

First Caiaphas tried to interrogate Jesus about His disciples and teaching. Jesus replied that he had taught openly, so ask the people that had heard him. An

officer slapped Him across the cheek for His reply, but He stood firm. (John 18:19-23)

The interrogators then tried to get two or three false witnesses to agree on their accusations against Jesus.

They failed. For all the hostility, they could not get willing liars to agree on the same set of lies.

Exasperated, the high priest asked one central question: "Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?"

About 5 AM

About 5 AM. Jesus said, "Yes, I am." The High Priest did not recognize the suffering Messiah in front of him—Jesus had declared Himself to be God's Lamb.

The High Priest tore his clothes, a sign of ritual sorrow, and called for a death sentence on the grounds of blasphemy. The condemnation was unanimous.

Some of the people there immediately began to mock Him, spit on Him, blindfold and hit Him. "Prophecy who hit you!," they jeered.

At about the same time Peter was in the outer part of the palace, denying for the third time that he even knew Jesus. When Peter realized what he had done, he went out to weep bitterly, but the Lamb stayed silent.

The cock had crowed, so it was nearly dawn. The day of the Lamb was half done.

About 6:30 AM, Pilate's judgment hall

About 6:30 AM, Pilate's judgment hall. The chief priests, elders, scribes and council, and the whole mob left the High Priest's palace at daybreak and delivered Jesus bound to Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator (a kind of governor), to have Him executed.

(One person had dropped out of the mob, probably back at the palace: Judas Iscariot, seized with remorse, threw the blood money down in the Temple and went off to kill himself.)

(Matt. 27:1-26, Mark 15:1-14, Luke 23:1-25, John 18:28-19:1)

Pilate wanted nothing to do with Jesus, and asked the Jews to judge Jesus in their own courts.

They replied that He deserved to be executed, and only the Romans had authority to carry that out. Then the crowd shouted against this Galilean troublemaker, that He had made Himself a King.

Jesus a Galilean! — Pilate seized the opportunity to step out of this early morning crisis: Since Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, was in Jerusalem then, send the Galilean to Herod!

About 7:00 AM, Herod's quarters in Jerusalem

About 7:00 AM, Herod's quarters in Jerusalem. Jesus was taken before Herod. Herod was really delighted, since he was consumed with curiosity to see a miracle from the "miracle-maker." He peppered Jesus with questions, lots of questions.

Jesus did not answer him. Herod quickly saw Jesus was not going to satisfy his curiosity at all. What's more, the chief priests and scribes had come over to visit Herod, too, and they stood fiercely accusing Jesus.

So Herod's mood quickly swung to mockery. He and the soldiers of his personal guard mocked Jesus. To ridicule His claim to be a King, they put an expensive robe around His shoulders and sent Him back to Pilate.

(Herod, not a Jew but a Gentile Edomite, correctly supposed that mocking a Jewish rabbi like this would probably draw a smile from his Roman superior, Pilate. It must have, because Herod and Pilate moved from mutual hostility to friendship that day, cemented by their mutual despising for the Lamb.) (Luke 23:8-12)

About 7:40 AM

About 7:40 AM, at Pilate's judgment hall. They brought Jesus back to Pilate. The chief priests and scribes then launched their many accusations against Jesus. He didn't reply a word. Pilate marveled. This fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "Like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth." (Matt. 27:11-26, Mark 15:1-15)

Pilate's first two tries at avoiding the issue had not worked, so he took Jesus aside and asked Him whether He was a King. Jesus answered Pilate directly with two statements: that He was a King whose Kingdom is not of this world, and that He had come to witness to the truth.

That was about as understandable a description of Who He was as could be given to a Gentile like Pilate.

Pilate the cynic replied, "What is truth?" He didn't wait for an answer.

Pilate went back outside, and summoned the Jewish leaders again.

"Neither Herod nor I found Jesus deserving to die, he said, so why don't I have Him flogged and let Him go?"

This was a feast day, the first day of Passover, when the Romans had an annual custom of a prisoner release. Pilate offered Jesus as the prisoner to be released.

The crowd around the judgement hall would have none of it, and urged on by the chief priests and scribes, began to shout for a notable trouble-maker and murderer, Bar-Abbas, to be released instead.

Pilate persisted again on this, his third try to avoid handling the issue of Jesus.

The crowd, still led by the chief priests and elders, kept shouting: "Take Bar-Abbas; put Jesus to death on a cross!"

Just at this point, Pilate's wife sent a message to him, urging him not to do anything against this righteous man Jesus – she had just had a terrible dream to warn her.

The crowd had pushed, and Pilate released Bar-Abbas. Now Pilate asked what he should do with Jesus. Only one answer from the crowd: Crucify Him!

At that point Pilate ceremoniously washed his hands in front of them all—to deny his responsibility for condemning Jesus.

Then Pilate tried for the fourth time to head off the issue by handing Jesus over to some of his Roman troops.

About 8:15 AM, the Praetorium

About 8:15 AM, the Praetorium. The Roman soldiers took Jesus inside the Praetorium (their garrison) to work Him over in private. They flogged Him, shoved a crown of thorns onto His head. Blood flowed. They put a purple robe on Him and put a reed as a mock scepter in His hand, then hit Him over the head with the reed.

They punched Him in the head and spat on Him as they mocked, bowing the knee to Him. "King of the Jews!," they jeered.

About 8:30 AM, Pilate's judgment hall

About 8:30 AM, Pilate's judgment hall. Pilate spoke to the crowd outside once more to see if his humiliation of Jesus would buy them off from shouting for crucifixion. Then he had Jesus brought out to the crowd's view, beaten up, with purple robe and crown of thorns.

The chief priests and their allies shouted their reply, "Crucify Him, because he made himself the Son of God."

Real fear gripped Pilate then. "Made himself the Son of God," they said—and there was his own wife's warning dream, and the fearless silence of the man standing before him. He went back inside where they had taken Jesus, and asked Him,

"Where do you come from?" Jesus the Lamb said nothing.

"I can have you put to death," Pilate said.

Then the Lamb spoke, "You could have no power except it were given you from above, so he who betrayed me to you has the greater sin."

Pilate was agitated and went out to the crowd again. He tried a fifth time to get off the hook; they shouted that he would be no friend of Caesar if he let Jesus go. Both the mob and Pilate understood politics, after all.

About 8:40 AM, at the Pavement (Gabbatha)

About 8:40 AM, at the Pavement (Gabbatha.) Hearing that, Pilate brought Jesus outside to the outdoor judgment seat there. The sun was well up in the sky, as bright as noonday, so the crowd could get a good look at how he had been beaten, mocked and tormented. Pilate shouted to the Jews, "This is your king!"

But they replied, "We have no king but Caesar."

Pilate made up his mind. He feared his Jewish subjects and their anger more than he valued the Lamb's innocent life.

The Lamb would die.

About 8:50 AM, on the way to crucifixion

About 8:50 AM, on the way to crucifixion. A large crowd followed the soldiers and Jesus. Jesus, though he was exhausted and beaten, warned the many women who were weeping for Him, prophesying to them that terrible days were ahead for Jerusalem. He was already looking past the death just ahead. He was still shepherding the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

9 AM, at Golgotha (Calvary: "Skull Place," in English)

9 AM, at Golgotha (Calvary: "Skull Place," in English.) Jesus was crucified between two thieves, hung on a wooden cross to the death. The Romans pierced His hands and feet to do it. A prophecy fulfilled from the Psalms: "They pierced my hands and my feet." (Psalm 22:16) They offered Him a drink of wine mixed with myrrh; He refused.

As He hung there, Jesus prayed for His executioners, "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing."

Passers-by mocked Him, "If you're the Son of God, come down off that cross."

Chief priests, scribes and elders on the scene mocked, too, railing against His claim to be Son of God and King of Israel.

The four Roman soldiers mocked Him, and offered him a drink of vinegar laced with bitter gall. That fulfilled another prophecy in the Psalms: "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." (Psalm 69:21)

Pilate mocked from afar, leaving a sign tacked high on the cross, on which he had written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Even the crucified thieves, facing their own deaths in the hours ahead, they mocked Him.

Meanwhile, the four Roman soldiers divided up Jesus' clothes; He wouldn't be needing them. But they cast lots over Jesus' coat, because it was woven without a seam. Another detail, another prophecy fulfilled from the Psalms:

"They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my clothes." (Psalm 22:18; John 19:24)

Then, as one thief kept mocking Jesus, the other thief had a change of heart. Rebuking his fellow thief, he asked King Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into His Kingdom. Eyes of faith, at last, in an unexpected place! (Luke 23:39-43)

Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Noon, all over the land

Noon, all over the land. Darkness came over the whole land.

Sometime during those three dark hours, He looked down on His mother Mary and John His disciple, standing near the cross with others of His friends. Ignoring His own condition, He arranged for His mother by putting her in John's care.

About 3 PM, at Golgotha

About 3 PM, at Golgotha. The Lamb shouted, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" using the words of Psalm 22:1. He cried again, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit," and yet once more shouted, "It is finished," and died. The Lamb had been sacrificed. It was finished.

About 3 PM, at the Temple in Jerusalem

3 PM, at the Temple in Jerusalem. The veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies was split open from top to bottom.

There was an earthquake and great rocks were split. Bodies of many godly people were raised from the dead. (Matthew 27:51-53)

A little after 3 PM, at Golgotha

A little after 3 PM, at Golgotha. The Roman centurion in charge and others with him saw all this, and were terrified, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54)

One thing the Romans marked was how Jesus shouted as he died. The Romans knew all about crucifixion. They knew that the victim's body weight, hanging from a cross, would little by little crush the lungs and suffocate the victim. Men dying by crucifixion died, not with a shout, but a whisper.

The people who had stood at a distance watching, including many of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee to help Him, now dispersed. (Mark 15:30)

About 4 PM, Pilate's judgment hall

About 4 PM, Pilate's judgment hall. Some of the Jesus' persecutors again approached Pilate. Break the legs of the three crucified men, they asked. That way they would hang limp and die faster, and not still be on the crosses on the Sabbath, some 26 hours away.

Pilate assented, so the Roman soldiers broke one thief's legs, then the other's...but Jesus was already dead, so not a bone was broken. Another fulfillment, because God commanded through Moses that not one of the Passover lamb's bones should be broken. (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; John 19:33-35)

About 5:30 PM, Pilate's judgment hall

About 5:30 PM, Pilate's judgment hall. As the day waned, Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man and counselor who became a secret disciple of Jesus, boldly asks Pilate's permission to bury Jesus' body. Pilate was so amazed to hear Jesus was already dead that he summoned the centurion from the crucifixion squad. When the centurion confirmed the death, Pilate granted their request. They could have the body.

Pilate marveled, for he understood crucifixion. Death was generally measured in days, not hours. Dead in six hours! (Mark 15:44)

About 6 PM in a garden near Golgotha

About 6 PM in a garden near Golgotha. Joseph bought clean linen cloth, then took the body down. Nicodemus the Pharisee, another secret believer, joined Joseph, bringing a large quantity of burial spices, myrrh and aloes. Together, they wrapped His body in the cloth with the spices. They put Jesus in Joseph's own new tomb, hewn out of rock. Buried in a rich man's tomb—fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy: "His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, yet with a rich man in his death." (Isaiah 53)

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, two of Jesus' followers, watched as Joseph rolled a large stone to cover its doorway.

Sunset

The sun set on the Day of the Lamb. It began with a Passover lamb, and ended with the Passover Lamb. It was finished.

Resurrection lay three nights and a sunrise away. The new day beginning was called the day of pre-Sabbath preparation, the next day was the Sabbath, and the third day was the first day of the week. (Mark 15:42)

Jesus' sacrificed body lay dead during daylight hours of Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and the nighttime hours of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday – three days and three nights in the earth. As He Himself had foretold. (Matthew 12:40)

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