

Which day was our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified?

(READ FROM PAGE 3)

.....KNOW THE TRUTH AND THE TRUTH SHALL
MAKE YOU FREE.

JOHN 8 : 32.



AND when He had called the people unto him with His disciples also, He said unto them. Whosoever will come after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.

MARK 8 : 34.

THE STORY SIMPLY TOLD

BRETHREN, this story leads us on to holy ground, ground upon which we should tread with bared feet. Only grateful reverent hearts can safely consider the events surrounding the death of Christ. Let our hearts be such as in simple narrative the story of the Cross is told over once again. The details of our Lord's death are more easily retained in memory if we divide the day of His death into eight equal divisions of three hours each. Will you note that the Jewish Thursday began at six p.m. on the evening of Wednesday according to our method of reckoning.

THE FIRST THREE HOURS:- THURSDAY 6 P.M. TO 9 P.M. NISAN 14 (THE EVENING WATCH)

The passover having been prepared, our Lord took His place at the table with the twelve disciples. The sacred and significant paschal meal commenced. Even at such Holy time the disciples were occupied with unholy ambition. By the act of washing the disciples' feet Christ taught them the secret of true greatness. As the meal progressed the traitor was privately identified, with infinite wisdom the Lord merged the passover meal into the Lord's Supper. Then Judas withdrawal to carry out his awful crime. With the withdrawal of Judas our Lord's spirit was freed, and he poured into the disciples' ears incomparable words of love and beauty.

Having sung a hymn, the little company rose from supper and prepared to leave for seclusion of the Garden of Gethsemane on Mount Olivet. But before they passed through the door Jesus again commenced to talk with them. Oh what words they were! Undying words. Then suddenly, Christ ceased to address them, and lifted up His eyes and spoke to His heavenly Father. It was a wondrous prayer of intercession (John 17) and fittingly closed the first three hours of vital action.

*The Second Three Hours - Thursday 9 a.m. to 12 Mid-
night, Nissan 14 THE MID-NIGHT WATCH*

Then Christ led the eleven across the brook of Cedron. Eight were left near the entrance with only Peter, James and John, the Lord Jesus went on into the deeper recesses. After a while, having asked them to watch with Him, He left these three and went away about a stone's throw. For one awful hour the shadow of Calvary was upon Him, not the shadow of pain and shame, but the shadow of the world's sin which so soon He was to bear in His own body on the Tree. Coming back to the disciples the Lord found them sleeping. Again advising them to watch and pray, He once more went forth alone to the place of prayer. On returning the three disciples were again sleeping. A third time He went away, a third time He returned, and on this occasion he said to them "Sleep on now, take your rest" While they slept He watched. It was the Great Shepherd keeping His flock by night. But soon distant lights and noises betokened the coming of the traitor with the evil mob. Quickly the Lord roused the sleeping disciples, saying "Rise let us be going behold he is at hand that doth betray Me" Then he went back and awakened the eight who were also sleeping.

**THE THIRD HOURS - THURSDAY, MIDNIGHT TO
3 a.m. NISAN 14** (*The Cock Crowing Watch*)

It was about midnight the treacherous kiss was given and the arrest of our Lord took place. Quickly He was hurried back to Jerusalem and taken into the presence of Annas a high priest who had been deposed by the Romans, but who still received high priestly recognition by the Jews. After a painful scene Christ was sent bound to Caiaphas, the legally recognised high priest. With Him were gathered many of the chief elders and scribes. They pretended to try the Lord Jesus. It was hopelessly illegal and bitterly revengeful trial. Towards the close Christ distinctly asserted His Deity.

It was probably about 2.30 a.m. when the jubilantly pronounced Christ to be worthy of death. Then their evil passions were let loose, and Jesus became the centre of bitter derision, which merged into blasphemous brutality.

THE FOURTH THREE HOURS THURSDAY 3 A.M. TO 6 A.M. NISAN 14 (THE MORNING WATCH)

As soon as the morning watch dawned, a formal and more complete gathering of the Sanhedrin took place, and the previous death sentence was ratified. But the Jews were not permitted by the Romans to carry out the death sentence. They therefore very early hurried Christ along to the Roman Governor, Pilate in order that the sentence they had passed should be confirmed by him. Pilate sought to evade the Jewish demand, but they would not be denied.

The Roman Governor even sent our tired Lord to Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee who was then on a visit to Jerusalem in order that the responsibility of sentence might be upon him. But Herod after satisfying a little of his course passion, sent Jesus back again to Pilate. Pilate then sought to moderate the extreme demand of the Jews by giving Christ over to scourging and mockery, but even the sad spectacle of Christ bruised and bleeding, did not pacify them, and louder and louder grew the cry "Crucify Him, Crucify Him." At last afraid lest his leniency should be reported to Caesar, Pilate yielded to the voice of the multitude, and at about 6 a.m. passed the dread sentence of death by crucifixion.

THE FIFTH THREE HOURS—THURSDAY 6 A.M. TO 9 A.M. NISAN 14

Christ was then led away into the Barrack Room of the Roman soldiers. It was their hour. Indignity after indignity was heaped upon our Lord. It was crowned when He was crowned with a crown of thorns. By the time they had finished their brutality Christ was a sad spectacle.

Judas's treachery, Peter's denials, Anna's haughtiness, Caiaphas's blasphemy, Pilate's scourge the soldiers slappings, spittle and crown were too much for human dignity and strength to bear. When the rough cross was ready Christ was forced to carry it towards Golgotha. But the burden was too great and Simon a Cyrenian was forced to carry it. What a slow awful journey it was. At last the place of death was reached.

THE SIXTH THREE HOURS - THURSDAY 9 A.M.
TO 12 NOON NISAN 14

The Cross was laid on the ground and the Son of God transfixed upon it. About 9 a.m. it was raised to the vertical and the stump dropped with a sickening thud into the ground. It was the "lifting up" that Christ had referred to, hundreds of years before Christ himself, through the Prophet David, had precisely described His own appearance at this time, I am crimson worm (Hebrews) and no man. Wounds on the back, wounds round the head, wounds in the hands wounds in the feet, and more unbearable still wounds in the heart. The cruel minutes dragged on. Only three utterances of Christ during the first three hours on the cross had been preserved to us. How wonderful they were! There were wonderful words of forgiveness for His enemies "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." They were wonderful words of thoughtfulness for His earthly mother—Woman behold thy Son . . . behold thy mother. there were wonderful words of promise towards the penitent thief "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

THE SEVENTH THREE HOURS - THURSDAY
12 NOON TO 3 P.M. NISAN 14

Midday came then suddenly, Christ's physical sufferings were somewhat relieved, but His spiritual sufferings intensified. Darkness suddenly covered the earth. No longer did blazing sun burn upon

the Saviour's body. No longer was He such an outstanding spectacle to the passing crowd

But in the darkness something terrible happened. What it was none then could say. But towards three o'clock the awful mystery was disclosed. Then there escaped from the saviour's lips the measureless cry, my God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? The secret was revealed. The eternal Son, the son of fairest delight, the Son of unblemished loveliness, was separated from His Father. There was unutterable pain in the Trinity. What it all meant no finite understanding can grasp. Little wonder that a brief while after, the crucified one cried out "I thirst". Did He thirst for water? For vinegar? For the human race? Nay. His soul thirsted for God, the living God. A few minutes later, the deepest darkest night that soul ever passed through was ended. It is finished was His cry. Yes it is finished; the atonement for the sin of a prodigal world was finished.

And then from the Saviour's lips came wonderful words of trust, wonderful words of sweet reliance on eternal love. "Father into Thy hands I commit My Spirit" And then He dismissed His Spirit. And the earth quaked and rocks were rent, and the sun shone again.

THE EIGHTH THREE HOURS — THURSDAY
3 P.M. TO 6 A.M. NISAN 14

For about three hours after death the body of the Son of God remained upon the cross. During that period His side was pierced by a Roman soldier, and from it then came out blood and water. About 6 p.m. came Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus and they tenderly took down the body of our Lord Jesus from the Cross and laid it to rest in a garden, and the day of all days closed. Such is the story of the Cross simply told. The next Chapter will be given over to necessary explanation.

It seems well to give explanation on several matters about the day of Christ's crucifixion.

You will perhaps have been surprised to have noticed that in the foregoing the death of Christ was placed on a Thursday and not on a Friday. The reason for so doing is two fold:

- (1) The language of Matthew 12.40 demands it.
- (2) The statements of the four Gospels strongly support it.

In Matthew we are distinctly told that Christ was to be three days three nights in the heart of the earth. Those who hold to the Friday argue that in general conversation the Jews spoke of part of a day as a day and parts of a night as a night. This I readily grant, but even on such basis, from Friday after-noon until dawn on the first day of the week was only two days and two nights. Others to escape the difficulty fix Christ's death on Wednesday afternoon, but that makes Christ to have been in the heart of the earth for four days and four nights.

But from Thursday at three o'clock until the dawn on the first day of the week was three days and three nights.

Again the Gospels strongly suggest that two Sabbaths came together in that Passover week, The 15th Nisan was a feast Sabbath. "In the fourteenth of the first month at even is the feast . . . Seven day ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have a holy convocation, ye shall do no servile work therein" (Lev. 23.8) A similar kind of day in connection with the Feast of Trumpets was distinctly called Sabbath. (Lev. 23 : 39) See also Lev. 23 : 24. The more fully you study the evidence the more fully will you be convinced that Thursday Nisan 14 (which commenced according to our method of reckoning time at 6 p.m. on wednesday evening) was the preparation of the Passover. It was on that day towards evening that all leaven was removed from each dwelling, at evening the Passover lamb was slain.

The 15th Nisan (which commenced on Thursday evening at 6 o'clock according to our time method) was the day on which the Passover lamb was eaten that is after six o'clock on the Thursday evening. The Jewish day commenced with evening. It was also on the first day of the feast, which was to be kept as a feast-Sabbath; day of holy convocation. "That Sabbath was a High day" says the Apostle John. The fact that on it the Paschal lamb was eaten and that it was the first day of the feast, and that it was also the preparation for the weekly Sabbath, was quite sufficient to make it a high day. Then on the Saturday came the weekly Sabbath, and then, before dawn the following day the first day of the week-Christ had risen. Thus Christ was in the grave three days and nights as He said.

The whole question has been confused because (a) the coming together of the feast Sabbath, and the weekly Sabbath has been generally over-looked and (b) the distinction between the Preparation of the Sabbath has generally been lost sight of.

I would now gladly turn from this explanation to another subject altogether, but the study of the above matter will surely link you on to another perplexing consideration. "When did Christ with His disciples partake of the paschal meal?" If you read the first three gospels only, you would judge that Christ partook of the Passover at the scriptural time at the commencement of Nisan 15th, and that He was crucified a day after the lawful time for slaying the Passover lamb.

But if you read John's Gospel alone it is clear that Christ ate the Passover meal a day earlier than the time appointed by the law of Moses, at the commencement of Nisan 15, and that He died at three o'clock on the evening-afternoon of Nisan 14, the precise time, when according to the interpretation of the law of Moses, it became p e m i s s i b l e to kill the passover lamb.

What conclusion can we draw from this apparent contradiction between the first three gospels and the fourth. Simply this:- That Christ for some reasons or other was perfectly justified, according to the situation of that time, in eating the passover a day before the time appointed by the law of Moses. Can we offer any reasonable explanation of such an act? I think the following facts will help.

(1) The method of killing the Passover Lamb was a fairly lengthy one. It was as follows: "The Lambs were slain in a very solemn and formal manner. The people were admitted into the Temple only in groups and the Priests standing in two long lines from the entrance to the altar with cups of gold and silver passed with blood of the lambs from hand to hand, and poured it into two openings by the side of the altar."

(2) In the time of Josiah the keeping of the Passover was perforced modified for some. So great was the number of Lambs to be slain that the Priest engaged in the Temple service were not able to eat the Passover lamb until later than the usual time. "The Priests, the son of Aaron, were bussied in offering burnt Offerings and the fat until night therefore the Levites prepared for the Priest. (2 Chron. 35 : 14).

(3) Then about 30,000 lambs only were slain, and this number cause a modification in the method of keeping Passover.

(4) But in the time of Christ about 260,000 lambs were killed annually at this feast. Josephus says that "Cestius, in order to give Nero some notion of the power of the city of Jerusalem had asked the chief Priest to count the number of Paschal lambs offered at the Passover, and found that they were no less than 256,500!"

(5) So that if 30,000 lambs caused the Priests to make modifications in keeping the Passover, what would be the result of having 260,000 to deal with?

6. I suggest that to meet the difficulty it may have been that those who came in from the country, such as Christ and His Galilean Disciples, were in order to relieve the pressure of the actual Passover day, instructed by the Sanhedrin to partake of the Passover meal a day earlier. This would also mean that the overtaxed accommodation for the Paschal supper at Jerusalem would be greatly relieved, and would allow two companies, one on the 14th, and one on the 15th to partake of the supper in the same room.

It is certainly true that some local situation arose, which made it necessary that for the Lord and His disciples the Passover Lamb must be killed at the close of the 13th of Nisan and eaten at the commencement of the 14th. No doubt God over-ruled the local situation so that the Lamb of God might be slain at the exact time necessary to fulfil the type of the Paschal lamb of the Old Testament.

I will give in a closing list of references which may be helpful to you on this question:- Matt 27. 62-63; Mark 15 : 42; Luke 23 : 54; John 19 : 14, 31, 42; Matt 26:2, 5, 17-19; Luke 22:1, 7, 15; John 18:28-39; Matt 12:40, John 2:19-22; John 13:1; Mark 14:1-2; John 20 : 1-18; Mark 16 : 1-7; Luke 24 : 1-8; Matt 28 : 1-8; Lev. 23 : 5 - 8.

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

MATT. 5 : 18 - 19.

And the spirit and the bride say come and let him that heareth say come and let him that is athirst come and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

Rev. 22 : 17.

We invite you all to the Bible class on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 4 p.m. each day at No. 26, Mbukpa Road, Calabar. And also other Sections as Follows:-

SECTIONS:-

- (a) Bible Students or True Students.
- (b) Church members
- (c) Prayer members
- (d) Healing

But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Romans 10 : 8—9.