

April 15-21 2019

Easter

“O Grave, Where Is Thy Victory?”

Summary: **(Matthew 21)** *Jesus rides in triumph into Jerusalem—He cleanses the temple, curses the fig tree, and discusses authority—He gives the parables of the two sons and the wicked husbandmen.*

(Matthew 22) *Jesus gives the parable of the marriage of the king’s son—Pay tribute to Caesar and to God—Worldly marriages endure in this life only—The first commandment is to love the Lord—Jesus asks, What think ye of Christ?*

(Matthew 23) *Jesus pronounces woes upon the scribes and Pharisees—They will be held responsible for killing the prophets—They will not escape the damnation of hell*

(Matthew 24) *Jesus foretells the doom of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple—Great calamities will precede His Second Coming—He gives the parable of the fig tree.*

(Matthew 25) *Jesus gives the parables of the ten virgins, the talents, and the sheep and the goats.*

(Matthew 26) *Jesus is anointed—He keeps the Passover and institutes the sacrament—He suffers in Gethsemane, is betrayed by Judas, and is taken before Caiaphas—Peter denies that he knows Jesus.*

(Matthew 27) *Jesus is accused and condemned before Pilate—Barabbas is released—Jesus is mocked, crucified, and buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.*

(Matthew 28) *Christ the Lord is risen—He appears to many—He has all power in heaven and earth—He sends the Apostles to teach and baptize all nations.*

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What misunderstanding is there of “three-days and three-nights?”

Many Christians struggle with the symbolism due to a mainstream Christian tradition of Good Friday as the crucifixion day and Easter Sunday as the resurrection day. That, according to the scriptural way of calculating twenty-four hour days, still is only two nights and two days.

What did the Savior say about his death and resurrection?

“Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.” **(Matthew 12:38-42)** “The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day.” **(Luke 24:7, 46)** “. . . and be raised again the third day.” **(Matthew 16:21; 17:23, Mark 9:31)**

What other prophecies are there about three-days and three nights?

To the Nephites, “And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel.” (1 Nephi 19:10) “And the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel, the Lamanite, yea, for the time that there should be darkness for the space of three days over the face of the land. (3 Nephi 8:3-4) “And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land. And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen; and there was great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually; yea, great were the groanings of the people, because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them. (3 Nephi 8:22-23)

How does night time in Israel coincide with daylight in the Book of Mormon lands?

“And when the sixth hour (12-noon in today’s time) was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour (3:00 pm in today’s time).” (Mark 15:33-34) 3:00 pm in Israel is still 6:00 am even in the eastern part of the Book of Mormon lands. That may be understood as, the three days in the Book of Mormon lands – that were actually blackened – concur with three nights in Israel.

What chronology did early Apostles give?

It will help to remember that since creation, 24-hour periods (days) begin with nightfall. Six days before the Passover that year, Jesus spent the Sabbath eve and day (what we call a *Friday nightfall/Saturday*) with Martha, Mary and Lazarus, “Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.” (John 12:1)

What is the sequence of “Palm Sunday to the three-nights and three-days and the resurrection?

The following day was the Triumphal Entry, (John 12:12) Five days before Passover, Palm Sunday, (it was not “Palm Saturday” because riding or working an animal is not permitted on a Sabbath Day), (Exodus 23:13) “Palm Sunday” was the first day of the week (*Saturday nightfall/Sunday*). “. . . when the chief priests . . . saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple . . . Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased . . . Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise? And he . . . went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

How can the parable of the fig tree help us understand the Savior’s mission?

Four days before the Passover, the following day, (*Sunday nightfall/Monday*), “Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.” (Matthew 21:18) Jesus cursed a fig tree, it did not have the first-fruit. In Israel, the fig trees produce in the spring and in the fall. If the first fruit failed, how could there be a second fruit (a second coming)? (Mark 11:12-13)

How may expelling money changers connect to the ancient cleansing of the temple?

Three days before Passover, according to some tradition, was the annual cleansing of the temple prior to Passover in “Purifying of all holy things” as stated in **(1 Chronicles 23:28)** This may have been typified as Jesus whipped out the money changers, Jesus went into the temple, and . . . cast out them that sold and bought in the temple . . . And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. **(Mark 11:14-16)** That was likely three days before Passover, (*Monday nightfall/Tuesday*)

What plans were unfolding?

Two days before the Passover, (*Tuesday nightfall/Wednesday*) The plan unfolds to eliminate Jesus. “Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.” **(Matthew 26:1-5)**

How did the Savior prepare for our salvation?

One day before the Passover (*Wednesday nightfall/Thursday*) is the preparation day before Passover. The night and day that the Savior prepared the way for us to return to Heavenly Father’s presence. That is the only night and day there are no sacrifices at the temple. Jesus was the sacrifice, alone that night at Gethsemane.

Passover Preparations: Since the Passover was the next nightfall and day, preparations for cleaning, removal of all leaven, yeast, or items that might sprout or rise were under way. A tradition still followed in modern Israel is that the leaven must be “sold.” The chief rabbi arranges to sell the entire country’s supply of grain, prepackaged breads, and leavened products to a non-Jew before the Passover begins. In that way whatever leaven is still around does not really belong to the Jews. The deal usually includes that this Gentile will collect all the leaven (or what might rise) when his payment is complete. However, after only a token down payment the non-Jew, a nonbeliever, never really gets around to making the final payment. So, by default ownership is “returned” to the Jews; and it just turns out, meanwhile, that the Passover is completed anyway. With the Passover preparation in mind, the disciples asked, “Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover?” **(Matthew 26:17)**

The Upper Room: He instructed them to find a man carrying a water pitcher; this is something women usually would do. They found the man who led them to an upper room. Most people just assume that the upper room was upstairs. Jerusalem had two city parts known as the upper city and the lower city. It is possible that the term *upper room* really refers to a room in the upper part of the city where many prominent priests lived. The disciples said, “The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples.” **(Matthew 26:18)** From what follows in the scriptural narrative, the preparations may have been ready except for the sacrificial lamb. There are no sacrifices done or eaten during the preparation time until the ninth hour of the day (three hours before Passover begins the following nightfall).

Passover Traditions: To better understand Jesus’ “Last Supper,” consideration of other highlights of the Passover will be helpful. In the past the Seder table was set up in a U-shape with the participants sitting on the outside. The U open towards Jerusalem. So,

looking inward, the master of the house, usually the oldest male, would sit second from the right end. This kept an empty spot available to his right. Nowadays he will usually select a boy, probably the youngest, to sit at his right hand and assist him in the order (Seder) of the meal and ritual customs. One thing the boy does is sing a song, "Why is this night different from any other night?" Later we will consider three differences of Jesus' Passover from any other Passover.

Elijah at the Passover: Continuing with the seating arrangement, the last seat on the other end remains empty. It is available for Elijah. His place is opposite of the oldest and the youngest. Incidentally, the imagery and symbolism are outstanding. The Passover turns the hearts of the youngest to the traditions and deliverance of the past. Elijah's mission is to announce the coming of the "Deliverer." "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers . . ." (**Malachi 4:5-6**)

At the Masters' Right Hand: An event occurring before the Passover two thousand years ago was a discussion of who would sit at the right hand of Jesus, the Master. "Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. . . . Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left. Jesus answered to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." (**Matthew 20:20-23**) Jesus taught, "And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." (**Matthew 20:27**) Thus, the ancient Passover seating arrangement became quite significant; could the question have been a practical one for that season? Which of the youngest would sit by the Master?

Foods for the Passover: Considering the Jewish calendar and the scriptural narrative, Jesus then led a Passover meal with his disciples when they found the upper room. It still was only the beginning of the preparation night/fall/day. (The Passover for everyone else really began on the following evening). Modern-day preparations include bitter herbs that are symbolic of bondage. There is a mixture of chopped fruit, nuts, cinnamon, and honey that represent deliverance. Parsley or watercress is used as a token of gratitude for the earth's abundant goodness. Salted water represented tears. There are also preparations of a lamb's shank bone, a reminder of past sacrifices. There is an egg, also reminiscent of a new beginning.

Symbolism of Foods: At Passover, these and other certain foods are eaten, symbolizing the deliverance from Egypt. Wine is prepared, and it will be used four times. A prominent rabbi in Israel recently suggested that even the wine should be "unleavened" or unfermented. This could be considered as "new wine." The ancient metaphor of new wine was also used to anticipate the Deliverer. Ancient prophets said, "Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine." (**Joel 1:5**) "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine." (**Joel 3:18**) "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better." (**Luke 5:39**)

Wine and Bread Symbolism: Analyzing the symbolism, one can suggest that when wine is poured before the bread is broken, it is done to remember the first Passover deliverance. However, what is more important, it is done to look forward to a greater deliverance in the

future. In the Seder there are three times when the wine is blessed and sipped. Following each wine sip, a piece of unleavened bread is used. Each piece is blessed, broken, and eaten. There is a total of three pieces of bread, but they are used four times. Toward the beginning of the Seder, the middle of three pieces is first broken in two. Half must be hidden away, usually in an upper part of the house. In any case, it must be hidden “above” something—preferable to hiding it “underneath” something. It will be found later by children and it will be used with a fourth cup of wine. However, in many traditions, this fourth cup of wine is used after the fourth piece of bread, the *Afikomen*.

Door Left Open for Elijah: A complete meal is eaten with a door left open for Elijah, who by Jewish tradition would announce the coming Messiah. After the meal, children search for the hidden piece of bread that is often wrapped in a red cloth. When found, the children receive a gift. This piece of bread is then blessed, broken, and eaten. Some traditions use this last piece of bread, the *Afikomen*, to dip in the very sweet mixture of fruit and nuts, the *Charoseth*. As mentioned, it is after the *Afikomen* is found that the fourth cup of wine is poured and blessed. The master of the house then says, “Drink all of it.” The prayer spoken at that time invokes a hope for a greater deliverance in the future.

What was Judas’ role at the Last Supper?

Let us return to the “Last Supper” of Jesus with his disciples. Sometime that evening (Wednesday nightfall/Thursday), Judas had excused himself and left. The other disciples may have thought he was going out to purchase the lamb for the Passover meal. Instead he was leaving to sell the Lamb of God. Looking at the event in another way, one can see that his departure was to make a sale—for thirty pieces of silver he was selling the “Bread of Life” to the corrupt priests. Metaphorically we can see it as an act of selling the “Leaven, the Bread of Life,” to unbelievers. “And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God.” (**Amos 4:5**) “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.”

(**1 Corinthians 5:7**)

For what reason did Jesus preempt the Passover Meal with his own?

It seems that Jesus’ supper preceded the normal time for the Passover meal that year by a day. That is the first item that was different that night than any other Passover night. The second thing different about this day was the meaning He gave to the Afikomen, the “lost or fourth piece” of bread. The following evening really began the seven-day Passover period, and by that time Jesus was already crucified and in the tomb. This high, holy week always began on the first full moon after the first day of spring. Every year that day becomes an extra Sabbath that week; it is called a High Day. That High Day may occur on any day of the week, including the regular Sabbath. It is also important to remember that the beginning and ending day of the Passover is always treated as an extra High Sabbath day.

Bread and Wine Explained: The second item that makes the “Last Supper” different from any other night is the explanation of the bread taken before the wine. Jesus used this meal to teach his Apostles that he was the Deliverer. He likely showed that the Passover practice of partaking of wine followed by bread (three times) was very likely a symbolic anticipation of a future atonement. It was henceforth changed to bread followed by wine—symbolic of the deliverance he was to carry out within the next four days. “The Savior then, took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given

for you: this do in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19) “And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it . . .” (Matthew 26:27) He also said, “For this is in remembrance of my blood of the new testament, which is shed for as many as shall believe on my name, for the remission of their sins.” (Matthew 26:24 JST)

Messianic Symbol of Bread: The messianic symbolism can be further visualized in the three pieces of unleavened bread that could represent God, his Son, and the Holy Ghost. The three pieces are usually layered top, center, and bottom. In due course of the meal, the first part of the center piece is blessed (initially) and then broken. The hidden part of the center piece is found later (often wrapped in a red cloth) at the end of the meal by the children (a later generation), and then they receive a reward. That piece is then broken and then blessed, followed by wine. Another chiasmus can be recognized as first it is “wine and bread” then, after the “hidden” piece is found, it is “bread and wine.” The Atonement is the center focus. A tradition to place the hidden piece above something may also connote the second coming of the Messiah. The first time he came in lowly circumstances, a manger; and the second time he comes dressed in red and in great glory from above. It is he later generation that finds him and “great shall be their reward.”

A Traditional Upper Room: A traditional room built only eight hundred years ago reminds us of an upper room, as the scriptures say. As mentioned already, the word *upper* may refer more to the upper part of the city rather than a room upstairs. The upper part of ancient Jerusalem was the area where the priests lived, and generally it was considered the upper-class section of the city. It was the section where many “Temple Levites” lived. It was also close to the house of Annas the former High Priest and his son-in-law, Caiaphas.

Jesus as a Servant: The upper room Passover meal concluded with Jesus demonstrating his role as their servant. “After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.” (John 13:5) Peter objected, and Jesus responded, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” (John 13:8-9) Always teaching, the Savior continued, “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.” (John 13:14)

A New Commandment: There was another instruction given during this evening that was different from instruction given any other time. This is the third item that makes this night different than any other night. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you . . .” (John 13:34) From Sinai where the children of Israel compromised themselves to the “lesser law of performance,” the old concept was different, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)

How can I better visualize Gethsemane?

After their Passover meal, Jesus and eleven Apostles went to the Mount of Olives. The following prophetic conversation could have occurred on the way. “And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives . . . Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this

night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples. Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.” (Matthew 26:30-36)

Traditional Sites: Nowadays there are several traditional churches there: Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, and Catholic. The garden of the Catholic Church has had olive trees existing for the better part of twenty centuries. The garden mentioned in the scriptures was Gethsemane, a word that means a winepress or olive press, usually found in a vineyard or orchard.

Agony at Gethsemane: The agony that Jesus went through became so difficult that he pleaded with the Father for relief, yet submissively said, “O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. . . . and prayed the third time, saying the same words.” (Matthew 26:42, 44) He perspired great drops of blood. “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Luke 22:44)

Red Clothing: His clothing surely must have been stained red. His “red” (bleeding) may have been symbolized by the ancient biblical practice of sacrificing a red-haired, unblemished firstborn calf on this mount. The ashes of that red-haired calf were used in immersions of those needing a remission of sins. “This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, . . . bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish . . . And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; . . . And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.” (Numbers 19:1-9)

The Red Calf: In Jewish tradition the place where the red calf was sacrificed was as high as one could get on the Mount of Olives to be above the Temple. It was also in line with the Gate Beautiful and still northward of the Temple altar. It is thus likely that Jesus’ Gethsemane experience may have happened at the same location, farther up the mount, rather than in the traditional church places at the bottom of the mountain.

The Suffering of Jesus: The suffering of Jesus cannot be explained. He prayed again and again. Even he was astonished at the overwhelming suffering he had to bear. “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. . . . He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. . . . and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.” (Matthew 26:39-45)

Red Symbols: An additional messianic symbol of that suffering is Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah’s arrival in red clothing on the Mount of Olives. “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?” (Isaiah 63:1-2) “And it shall be said: Who is this that cometh down from God in heaven with

dyed garments; yea, from the regions which are not known, clothed in his glorious apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? And he shall say: I am he who spake in righteousness, mighty to save. And the Lord shall be red in his apparel, and his garments like him that treadeth in the wine-vat.” (Doctrine & Covenants 133:46-48)

What does this Chiasmus teach me?

Sacrifices of the red calves were made on the Mount of Olives in the ancient times. The expected arrival of the Messiah, in red, on the Mount of Olives will be in the latter days. The “red” (bleeding) experience of Jesus on the Mount of Olives was in the meridian of time. It is the central lesson of these events. He bled from every pore of His body for all our sins.

Betrayal: “And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. . . . In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.” (Matthew 26:47-58)

A Mock Trial: Late that night, Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and taken to Caiaphas the High Priest by his soldiers. The incarceration and interrogation were not part of an official trial. Both were illegal under the circumstances. That evening was the beginning of the Preparation Day, a holiday by itself; it was night time and there was no formal charge against Jesus. These and other items precluded any trial to be performed legally.

Caiaphas, the High Priest: Caiaphas was the High Priest over three councils that made up the grand Sanhedrin assembly. However, Caiaphas apparently was only meeting with one of the three councils and not the entire Sanhedrin (seventy men). The Sanhedrin would have to judge in such a case (if it were a legal trial), yet, never at night.

The House of Caiaphas: Caiaphas’s house is now a church built over dungeon rooms, two thousand years old, where prisoners were held. Holes in the rock walls were used to tie and spread out their hands and feet for scourging. This basement prison reminds us that Caiaphas and some powerful elders conspired to trap Jesus by his own words. “But Jesus held his peace . . .” (Matthew 26:63)

Blasphemy: The priestly wordsmiths, who would not even utter the name of God, had the practice of substituting words representing God’s name. They used phrases such as, “He that comes in the clouds of Heaven.” They referred to a Messiah as “He that sits on the right hand of Power,” or “Blessed is His name.” In anger, the High Priest challenged Him, in the name of God, “. . . tell us whether thou be the Christ, the son of God.” (Matthew 26:63) Jesus simply replied, “Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see [this] Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

(**Matthew 26:64**) The High Priest, perhaps stung by the realization that he himself had invoked God's name, cried out, "He hath spoken blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death."(**Matthew 26:65**)

Peter Denies the Savior: The cock had just crowed. In fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, Peter had just denied the Savior the third time. Then, one can imagine, turning and looking into Jesus' face, Peter turned again and ran out into the break of dawn, weeping bitterly. "Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly." (**Matthew 26:74-75**)

Execution for Temple Violations: Under the Roman political system, the Jewish priests were not to carry out executions except for temple violations. (Their executions would have been by stoning--throwing the victim over a high cliff and then covering him with stones they threw.) The priests bound him and led him away to Pontius Pilate, the governor.

What is the real story behind Pontius Pilate at the Antonia Fortress?

Today, a site is maintained by a Catholic Order, The Sisters of Zion. The archaeological ruins recently discovered may have been well preserved from Byzantine times. Floor stones and cisterns reveal ancient Roman markings and usage as a fortress.

A Wife's Dream: At the Antonia Fortress, Pontius Pilate at first did not want to be troubled with the case. He may have been bothered by his wife's dream that he should have nothing to do with Jesus. However, he soon realized a potential political gain. Repeatedly, he had Jesus brought forth, beaten, intimidated, and crowned with thorns. He taunted the priests with Jesus' release. He said, "I find in him no fault at all." (**John 18:38**)

Crucify Him: Maddened by Pilate's reluctance to favor them with an execution, they cried out, "Away with him, crucify him." (**John 19:15**)

Political Gain: Pilate, probably egging them on and hoping to accomplish something for himself, said, "Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar." (**John 19:15**) Ah, the political gain was achieved (since the priests publicly acclaimed Caesar to be their king). "Then delivered he him . . . to be crucified" (**John 19:16**) This may have been the achievement that endeared Pilate to Herod, since he motivated the Jewish priests to acclaim Caesar. "And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves." (**Luke 23:12**)

On what day did the crucifixion and burial really occur?

It was still the preparation day, the day before Passover, (Wednesday nightfall/Thursday). "The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." (**John 19:31**)

What were "Feast-days" also "High days" and how are they observed?

As commanded in the Old Testament, Passover is a high day, an annual Sabbath, (**Leviticus 23:4-6**). "There are seven annual Sabbaths. They are the first and seventh days of Passover, the first full moon after the spring equinox, Pentecost, the day Moses gave the commandments, Rosh Hashanah, the Hebrew New Year, Yom Kippur, the day of

atonement), and the first and last day of Succoth, the first full moon after the fall equinox. These are extra Sabbaths, times of ancient sacrifices (fasting) and are observed as a regular Sabbath would be. These seven festivals do not necessarily occur on a weekly *Sabbath*, (seventh-day Sabbath)

The Place of a Skull: Jesus, bearing His cross (probably just the cross beam, as the upright post was most likely already at the crucifixion place), “. . . went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha.” (John 19:17)

Simon from Cyrene: On the way, a man named Simon from Cyrene was made to carry the cross beam to the place of execution. (One can imagine that Jesus may have stumbled, although it is not mentioned.) The name Simon is Jewish; the place, Cyrene, is in Africa, close to Ethiopia. The man could have been one of the hundreds of thousands of Jews of various ethnicities gathering in Jerusalem for Passover. He carried the wood for the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb of God. Nowadays, there are approximately 190,000 Ethiopian Jews of which close to 130,000 have gathered to Israel.

Outside the City Wall: A site outside the city wall looks like the described place. It was the Roman practice to crucify along the roadways. A roadway still passes through this ancient, abandoned quarry, known by Jews as a place of execution. Daylight had progressed about six hours. It was close to noon, but, “. . . there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.” (Mark 15:33)

A Slow Death: Crucifixion was a slow, strangling death. Breathing required very painful movements, and speaking was virtually impossible. Yet, during His agonizing physical, mental, and spiritual anguish, He spoke several times. Mostly it was in concern of others.

Jesus Speaks from the Cross: The Bible records seven things that Jesus said while on the cross. **To those who nailed him:** “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.” (Luke 23:34) **To those who crucified with him:** “. . . for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise [world of spirits].” (Luke 23:41-43) **To His Mother:** “When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!” (John 19:26) **To John the Beloved:** “Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” (John 19:27) **To the Guards:** “After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. (John 19:28) **To His Father:** “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” (Luke 23:46) **To the World:** “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. (John 19:30)

His Legs were Not Broken: The Jewish priests did not want the crucified bodies hanging on the cross on Sabbath days (for that evening was the beginning of an extra Sabbath day, a High Day). So, they besought Pilate that the prisoners' legs might be broken. This would

hasten their deaths because they could not press against the nails in their feet to gasp for breath. Once dead, their bodies might be taken away. However, when the soldiers saw that Jesus was dead already “. . . they brake not his legs.” (John 19:33)

How does prohibition of mourning or burial on Sabbaths help me better understand the Savior’s atonement?

“Overt mourning on Shabbat and Jewish holidays is generally forbidden.” “. . . According to traditions, burials are not be permitted on Shabbat. In fact, strong mourning is not permitted during the Sabbath.” (<https://www.shiva.com/learning-center/commemorate/jewish-holidays/shabbat>) The Savior arranged to be buried before two Sabbaths, the Passover High day (Thursday nightfall/Friday) and the regular weekly Sabbath, (Friday nightfall Saturday) so that even His closest friends and family would not mourn. The first day of the week He arose, (Saturday nightfall/Sunday).

Disciples of Jesus Help with the Burial: After this, Joseph of Arimathaea, a member of the Sanhedrin, and “. . . a disciple of Jesus . . . besought Pilate that he might take the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave.” (John 19:38) With the help of Nicodemus, “. . . took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices . . . Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews’ preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.” (John 19:40-42)

Two Sabbaths in a Row: The scurrilous events of that day preceded the Passover which was due to begin at any moment. The Passover (a special Sabbath, an extra Sabbath, a high day) that week preceded the regular Friday-nightfall/Saturday Sabbath. “The Jews [Priests] therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,)” (John 19:31)

The Sign to the Pharisees fulfilled: There were two Sabbaths in a row that year (the Passover Sabbath and the regular seventh day of the week Sabbath). In that sense, Jesus was crucified on what we call a Thursday. This fits in the time reckoning of Palm Sunday being five days before the Passover (John 12:12). Then in fulfillment of prophecy, He really was in the tomb three nights; and on the third day He arose: This was also the only “sign” Jesus gave the Pharisees. (Matthew 12:38-40)

Who did some Jews anticipate as a Messiah?

When the famous Rabbi Schneersohn from Brooklyn died, some of his followers expected him to rise again after three nights and three days. Thousands of posters of the famous rabbi had been distributed, boldly captioned with statements such as “We want Messiah now!” “The 7th Lubavitch leader, Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, born in Russia in 1902 and educated in mathematics and engineering at the Sorbonne in Paris, led the New York community from 1951 until his death in 1994. He was childless and did not designate a successor. Under his direction, the influence of the Lubavitch community spread far beyond the Hasidic community and penetrated the mainstream of Jewish life in all parts of the world. . . . A campaign hailing Rabbi Schneersohn as a Messiah began in the late 80s and has continued beyond his death in the 1990s. The messianism gripped a large part of the Lubavitch community and has created a huge debate in the ultra-Orthodox communities in the Diaspora and Israel.” “To some, Messianism undermines the first line of defense against Christian missionizing which has always been that Judaism cannot accept a Messiah who

dies in the midst of his redemptive mission. To others, Rabbi Schneersohn is the one who will be resurrected to complete a process of redemption for the Jewish people.”

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How will you bear witness?

The scriptures bear witness, the spirit bears witness of an empty tomb: “He is not here.” They teach us that color, calendar, clock, people, places and experiences were used to foreshadow the atonement. With open hearts we may have experiences, meet worthy people, visit holy places, understand God’s timing of calendar events, and see eternal purposes of Him who died and came alive again! So will we.