

Introduction

As most people know, Yeshua¹ died at the time of the Passover and rose from the dead three days later. One of the problems with associating one particular day in our present-day calendar to the death of Yeshua is that our calendar does not track with the Jewish calendar. Yeshua did not die on Good Friday, but during the day on the 14th of Nisan.

Using our present-day calendar causes confusion and disassociates the death of Yeshua from when He actually died. He died as our Passover lamb. When we observe the death and resurrection of Yeshua on a fixed Gregorian date we never actually observe the real date, but a made up date. Freeing our perceptions from the Gregorian calendar can help us to more properly observe and understand the events that took place surrounding Yeshua's death and resurrection.

There were actually two events where women visit Yeshua's tomb. There appears to be a contradiction between Rabbi Yochanan (John) and the writers of the synoptic accounts. If we take the Jewish calendar into account, it appears that Yeshua most likely rose on our Saturday evening. It says in John that it was early the first day of the week in Jewish reckoning (that is, our Saturday evening).

One simple way to understand when He rose is that Yochanan (John) said it was dark and early on the first day of the week; Yeshua was still at the tomb. The synoptic gospels tell a different story of a group going back to the tomb early the next morning while it was still dark and Yeshua is no longer there.

Some say what difference does it make when we observe Yeshua's death and resurrection? But, why shouldn't we understand an accurate accounting. Not only that, celebrating Yeshua's death and resurrection on the wrong days disassociates what occurred with the Jewish roots of the Bible. After all, Yeshua, Miryam (Yeshua's mother), and all Yeshua's disciples were Jewish. Without the Jews we would have no Bible and no Messiah.

Then there is the problem of associating Yeshua's resurrection with Easter. Most of us know that Easter is a pagan holiday (the pagan goddess Eostre)². The story I've heard is that the fertility goddess Ishtar fell from heaven in an egg and landed in the Euphrates; and, out came Ishtar. We use the word "Easter" to synonymously to refer to Yeshua's resurrection day. This also causes Yeshua's resurrection to be "isolated" in language from its Jewish roots and associated with the wrong day. I prefer to call the observance of His resurrection, "Resurrection Weekend," which I would very much hope you will agree is a better way to refer to Yeshua's resurrection than a pagan name. When someone wishes me a happy Easter I often reply, "Happy resurrection of Jesus (or Yeshua)."

I've heard a number of pastors and also read in at least a few books that Yeshua rose on Saturday, but I had to sit down and study it for myself before I understood why. I looked at the Greek in all four gospels to make sure I understood what was being said. I also used Hebrew names because they were after all, Jewish. Also, in a modern context, Yeshua and those He was teaching would be known as rabbis,³ so I may sometimes call them rabbis. I hope this book will also help you too to see the differences between the two events of the women visiting Yeshua's tomb.

We should remember that the gospels don't have to be telling the same stories in exactly the same way. Otherwise, we might think their accounts were doctored or copied from each other. Similar accounts can be the same or different stories entirely. Some accounts that are the same can also add more information to the story. In the case of the women going to Yeshua's tomb, it appears there were two stories. In this case, the synoptic gospels tell one story and Rabbi Yochanan (John) tells another different story.

¹ Yeshua is Jesus' actual name.

² Easton Dictionary of the Bible

³ Yeshua had a problem with people calling themselves "great ones" which is what rabbi used to mean. It no longer means that. Also, we should understand that when using titles, we are not to consider ourselves "great ones" or become prideful with our title. With a title comes responsibility; we are responsible to get the work done in a godly manner.

The Confusion of Events

Since there are several books of the Bible detailing Yeshua's (Jesus') ministry, sometimes I've been confused by differences between the accounts. Of course, since these accounts were written by different people, we would expect some differences in information, perspective, and also some different stories. Thanks to studious and insightful scholars and teachers, we have some very good solutions.

When I've talked to people about the timing of Yeshua's resurrection the questions often start coming. Often, it seems that the person is focused on one or more quotes from the Bible, and whatever they quote seems to be the logical timing to them. The problem is that there were several accounts of His resurrection and actually two events at the tomb and so we have to determine which books of the Bible talk about which event.

In one of the accounts where the women visit Yeshua's tomb, it is nighttime and Yeshua is still there. In the other three accounts he is not. The best explanation is that after some of the women went to the tomb at night shortly after Shabbat ended (our Saturday night), some came back the next day with other women. Perhaps they wanted to check out the situation again to make sure what had happened or that was the plan the day before. Looking into one or two verses is not enough. We have to see the differences in the accounts as well as understand the accounts in a Jewish context; it was a Jewish culture. Also, I use the New King James Version (NKJV) because my Greek resources use the NKJV.

The First Account (John)

First, I'd like to talk about Yochanan's (John) account in John. In the first verse, Miryam of Magdala goes there early the first day of the week in the dark. I feel it is unlikely that she is the only woman there, but this account only mentions her. She goes and gets Kefa (Peter) and Yochanan (John) after she finds the stone has been rolled away. The first day of the week in Jewish time begins on Saturday night. Shabbat ends when the sun goes down on Saturday. She would not have gone to the tomb until after Shabbat. Since it says that it is dark and early, it is probably referring to sometime our Saturday night.

In the account, after Miryam gets Kefa and Yochanan they leave except for Miryam. She looks into the tomb and sees two angels. When she turns around she thinks Yeshua is the gardener, but then realizes it is Yeshua. We should note that Yeshua is still at the tomb. Perhaps, He had just risen from the dead not long before she had arrived. Yeshua talks about His ascension at this time. He doesn't talk about going to Galilee until the next morning.

Summary of the First Account in John

The first account comes from Saturday night in the Gospel of John; early the first day of the week in the dark. Yeshua is still there.

John 20

Early the first day of the week in the dark v.1

Miryam of Magdala finds the stone rolled away.

She goes and tell Kefa (Peter) and Yochanan (John) vv. 1-2

Kefa and Yochanan come to the tomb vv. 3-9

Miriam remains at the tomb and sees two angels vv.11-13

Yeshua speaks to Miryam, but she doesn't recognize Him at first vv.14-15

Miryam recognizes Yeshua and Yeshua speaks to her again. He tells her about His imminent ascension vv.16-17

Miryam tells the disciples what Yeshua said v.18

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" "Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her. John 20:16-18 (NKJV)

The Second Account in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

We will see that the second event at the tomb is recorded in three books. These are called the synoptic books because they share a lot of the same stories. Although there are slight differences in the stories surrounding what I call the return to the tomb, all three appear to be talking about going to the tomb on our Sunday morning of the Gregorian calendar. When we put the synoptic records together, we come to understand that the women leave and possibly arrive while it is still dark and that the sun rises while they are there. We also don't see Yeshua there. Instead, one of the angels speaks to the women. We also see other women added to the group in each of the books. Also, when they meet Yeshua after leaving the tomb, Yeshua appears to them and tells them He is going to Galilee. He doesn't talk about His ascension at this time.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke

In the gospel of Matthew, it says that that Miryam of Magdala and another Miryam came before light on the first day of the week which is our Sunday morning before sunrise. An angel told the women that Yeshua was not there, but had risen from the dead. Yeshua meets them after they leave the tomb and says He is going to Galilee.

The account in Mark includes both stories. After he tells us about the event on our Sunday morning, he tells us briefly about Miryam of Magdala's encounter the night before. In the account on our Sunday morning, both Miryams and it also says that Slomit was there. They were there in the early morning and they see an angel who tells them that Yeshua is not there and that He is going to Galilee. After this, Mark begins another account and says that Miryam was the first to see Yeshua. She saw Him early the first day of the week (that would be our Saturday after sunset in Jewish time).

The account in Luke is a little more specific about who was there on Sunday morning. It says that the group included Miryam of Magdala, Miryam the mother of Yaakov, Yochanah, and others. They were there in the early morning of the first day of the week which is our Sunday morning. They see two angels and the angels tell them that Yeshua is not there.

Summary of the Second Account in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

The second account is when they came back early the next morning; our Sunday morning (the synoptic gospels). Yeshua is not there.

Matthew 28

After the Sabbath before light the 1st day of the week (our Sunday morning) v.1

Miryam of Magdala and another Miryam were there v.1

An angel had rolled away the stone v.2

The angel spoke to the women v.5

The angel says that Yeshua is not there v.6

"He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Matt 28:6 (NKJV)

Yeshua meets them on the way to see the disciples v.9

Yeshua says to tell the disciples He is going to Galilee vv.7, 10

Mark 16

After the Sabbath in the early morning of the 1st day of the week (our Sunday morning) v.1

Miryam of Magdala and another Miryam, and Slomit were there v.1

They saw an angel (young man) v.5

The angel says that Yeshua is not there v.6

"But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him." Mark 16:6 (NKJV)

They are told Yeshua is going to Galilee v.7

They fled and talked to no one v. 8

Mark also briefly records Yochanan's Story and he says that Miryam was the first one to see Yeshua. **“Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene.”** Mark 16:9 (NKJV) see vv. 9-10 (Again, early the first day of the week in Jewish time is our Saturday after sunset.)

Luke 24

In the early morning of the first day (our Sunday morning).

Two angels; they spoke to them v.4

The angels say that Yeshua is not there vv. 5-6

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here.” Luke 24:5-6 (NKJV)

They told the disciples v.9

Miryam of Magdala, Joanna, Miryam, and other women were there v.10

Peter went back to the tomb v.12

As We Can See

If we are to recover the truths of the gospels, we need to move past tradition and be honest about what the Bible is saying. For some it will be to just ignore the cultural context of the gospels; for others it will be to conscientiously explain what most likely happened and continue the traditions already established; and for some it will be to try to establish new traditions based on the scriptures. I think celebrating the Passover would be a natural first step for those who want to observe the death and resurrection of Yeshua in a more accurate way. There can be nothing wrong with celebrating a feast (Passover) that is tied so close to our faith. The messianic insights are very instructive and we see in them true comparative connection between the freeing of Israel from the Egyptians and the Messiah Yeshua freeing us from sin.

It is really interesting how God worked out the timing of events to coincide with Passover. Yeshua dies to set us free at the time of the Passover and as Yochanan the Immerser puts it: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29 (NKJV). Yeshua was our Passover lamb who gave Himself for us! Fixing the date of His death on a Friday is problematic because Passover moves around. The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar and is typically 29 days in length. The celebration of a Jewish Passover would preempt any necessity to observe a fixed Friday event and would be a more accurate observance. That's what I observe the Passover and I believe that honors God more. Shaul (Paul) says we should observe the Passover, “So let us celebrate the Seder not with leftover hametz, the hametz of wickedness and evil, but with the matzah of purity and truth;” 1 Corinthians 5:8 CJB. The word Seder refers to the Passover.⁴

There are a couple of things we can do with Easter. First, celebrating a “Resurrection Weekend” would seem to be a better way to go especially because of Easter's pagan associations. I think of it as getting rid of a bad association and making a better tradition. Out with the bad; in with the good as the saying goes. Perhaps, that would be the most difficult challenge to address with those who have been so entrenched with faulty tradition.

Another thing that could be observed is a Saturday evening resurrection instead of a Sunday resurrection. For those who meet on Sunday, the resurrection could still be celebrated with the understanding that it took place Saturday evening. Sunday morning could be a continuation of the celebration because in Jewish reckoning, our Sunday morning is still the first day of the week (that began on our Saturday evening).

There will always be some who would object to changing tradition, but I believe giving people the truth in some form is the best approach. I have always believed that telling the truth is the best policy. Why try to cover up the events surrounding the death and resurrection when the actual Jewish timing of the events can add such rich insights to our faith in the Jewish Messiah Yeshua.

⁴ The Complete Jewish Bible (CJB) uses a more authentic context because Stern understands the Jewish culture better.