



February 21, 2025

Three Days and Three Nights in the Heart of the Earth

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast of lower Alabama. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

In my ministry to God's family over the years I've conducted a lot of funerals, memorial services, graveside services, and private ceremonies when someone died.

With so many facing life threatening serious illnesses as we all age it was a profound reflection today to be reminded again of life, death, and the resurrection we all await for when we die.

One of the monumental events of the history of the universe was the death of one of the members of the God family. We will soon be again celebrating His death here in 7 weeks with the Passover service.

Much of the Christian world celebrates a festival named Easter which claims to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Where did that name come from?

One online site states: "The word "Easter" was derived from "Ishtar" the ancient pagan goddess of the Babylonian and Assyrian cultures, also known to the Phoenicians as "Astarte" - one of the titles of Beltis the queen of heaven - the wife of the sun god Baal.

Both "Ishtar" and "Astarte" are pronounced the same as "Easter" today. The name Astarte is not found specifically in Scripture. However, there are references

to the "queen of heaven" in Jeremiah 7:18 and also in Jeremiah 14:17-25. Various commentaries and dictionaries connect the "queen of heaven" with Astarte, the moon or moon goddess.

The JFB Commentary explains: "The Phoenicians called the moon Ashtoreth or Astarte: the wife of Baal or Moloch, the king of heaven."

Nowhere in Scripture is the resurrection of Jesus presented as a day to be celebrated with a convocation. Of course the event is recognized and acknowledged as very important in God's plan. The ancient wave sheaf ceremony appears to predict the resurrection of Christ as the first of the firstfruits and then the acceptance by His father on His first ascension to the third heaven on the first day of the week. (Lev. 23:10-11; John 20:1-17).

The timing of the celebration of modern Easter is connected with sunrise on a Sunday which follows a so-called Good Friday event claiming to be the day of the crucifixion of Jesus.

How confusing concerning the real timing of the events!

When one examines the details relating to the crucifixion and death of Jesus, placing His body in the tomb, and His resurrection, it becomes clear that Jesus was placed in the tomb just before sunset on what we call Wednesday afternoon (Passover day that year), just before the annual Sabbath of the first Day of Unleavened Bread (which began at sunset on Wednesday evening). He remained in the tomb Wednesday night, Thursday day (the high day Sabbath), Thursday night, Friday day (when the women purchased and prepared spices), Friday night and Saturday day (the weekly Sabbath during which the women rested). He left the tomb late on what we call Saturday afternoon. So, He was already risen from the tomb way before sunrise on what we call Sunday.

"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb."
(John 20:1-10)

John and Peter quickly came and found the tomb empty. The facts of the Scriptural record contradict the generally accepted "Friday crucifixion and Easter sunrise resurrection" scenario.

Several Scriptures record the prediction concerning the sign that Jesus gave about the time he would be in the tomb. Jesus Himself made the very specific statement *"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*
(Matthew 12:40)

Jesus also referred to the sign of the prophet Jonah in Matthew 16:4. Elaborate analyses are made by various commentators to privately interpret the expression "three days and three nights" as portions of three days - either night or day portions - and thus hold to an erroneous Friday crucifixion and a Sunday morning resurrection tradition. They interpret the period of "three days and three nights" to be a little bit of Friday afternoon, Friday night, all day Saturday, Saturday night and a little bit of Sunday morning. However, it is illogical to interpret the Hebrew of Jonah in the light of an unproven theory from New Testament times. Besides, remember, Jesus was already resurrected *before* daylight came on Sunday morning!

Note this explanation from The Companion Bible: "The fact that 'three days' is used by Hebrew idiom for any part of three days and three nights is not disputed; because that was the common way of reckoning, just as it was when used of years. Three or any number of years was used of any part of those years, as may be seen in the reckoning of the reigns of any of the kings of Israel and Judah. But when the number of 'nights' is stated *as well as* the number of 'days,' then the expression ceases to be an idiom, and becomes a literal statement of fact.

"Moreover, as the Hebrew day began at sunset, the day was reckoned from one sunset to another, the 'twelve hours in the day' (John 11.9) being reckoned from sunrise, and the twelve hours of the night from sunset. An evening-morning was thus used for a whole day of twenty-four hours, as in the first chapter of Genesis. Hence the expression 'a night and a day' in 2 Corinthians 11:25 denotes a complete day (Gr. nuchthemeron).

When Esther says (Est. 4.16) '*fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days,*' she defines her meaning as being three complete days, because she adds (being a Jewess) '*night or day.*' And when it is written that the fast ended on '*the third day*' (5.1), '*the third day*' must have succeeded and included the third night.... Hence, when it says that '*Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights*' (Jonah 1.17) it means exactly what it says, and that this can be the only meaning of the expression in Matthew 12.40; 16.4 (App. 144).

We'll review the specific details about the sequence of events next time...stay tuned.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



T. Scott Hoefker

Senior Pastor, CGM

Church of God Ministries (CGM)/(Minister iOS de la Iglesias de Dios)

tshoefker@cogministries.org / www.cogministries.org

P.O. Box 983, Daphne, AL, 36526-0983 / 251-930-1797 Offices