

Mark 16:1; Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1

“When Was Yeshua Actually Resurrected?”

“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him” (Mark 16:1).

One of the major claims present, throughout Christian history, is that the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah taking place on the first day of the week, somehow validates a transfer of the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday, or invalidates the institution of the seventh-day Sabbath. All three of the Synoptic Gospels have something to say about what happened regarding the timing of Yeshua’s resurrection (**Mark 16:1; Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1**).¹ While each of the Gospel records incorporates some variance of details involving the events, in our evaluation of the seventh-day Sabbath from the Apostolic Scriptures, our focus will mainly be on what different commentators and examiners—on Mark, Matthew, and Luke separately—have said about the timing of Yeshua’s resurrection, and the subsequent discovery of the empty tomb.

Was Yeshua the Messiah actually resurrected from the dead on Sunday morning? Or, was the empty tomb what was found empty on Sunday morning, subsequent to an actual Saturday evening resurrection? What other issues are perhaps interconnected to what is seen?

Mark 16:1 Previously in Mark’s record, it has been noted, “When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath...” (Mark 15:42), as being the time that Joseph of Arimathea received permission from Pontius Pilate to take the body of Yeshua, and place it in his own tomb (Mark 15:43-47). While there is debate over whether this was the weekly Sabbath impending, or, per a Thursday crucifixion scenario, a High Sabbath getting ready to start on the full day of Friday (cf. John 19:31), the body of Yeshua had to have been hastily wrapped, and taken to the tomb, before the Sabbath began.

“Mary Magdalene and Mary the *mother* of Joseph were looking on to see where He was laid” (Mark 15:47), as they would be the ones who would later go to the tomb to prepare Yeshua’s body for a more formal internment. This was an internment in an above ground sepulcher, and not a ground burial. While Jews did not commonly practice embalming or mummification, there was a ritual washing and anointing of the corpse to be conducted, with the body dressed in a shroud of white linen. Spices of some sort could be employed, as a means to counteract the inevitable stench associated with decomposition. At a later time, probably after one year, the bones of the deceased would then be taken and placed in an ossuary, a smaller container, in an adjunct chamber of the tomb.²

Mark records, “When *Shabbat* was over, Miriam of Magdala, Miriam the mother of Jacob, and Salome bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Yeshua’s body” (TLV). This is frequently thought to have taken place around 6:00 P.M. on Saturday evening, although questions are often posed regarding what the intention of the two Marys actually was. Was it their intention to go to the tomb as soon as they could, following the end of the Sabbath, and then they were delayed for some reason? Or did they purchase and prepare the spices, as soon as the Sabbath was over, with the intention of going to the tomb at first light on Sunday morning?

Noting the Greek *diagenomenou tou Sabbatou* (διαγενομένου τοῦ σαββάτου), “when the sabbath was past” (RSV), C.E.B. Cranfield labels this as “after sunset on the Saturday, when the new Jewish day had begun.”³ R.T. France goes a little further in stating, “As sabbath finished at sunset on the Saturday, the phrase διαγενομένου τοῦ σαββάτου probably refers to the Saturday evening, the first

¹ Kohlenberger, *NIV Integrated Study Bible*, pp 1276-1277.

² For a further review, consult the articles “burial” and “burial sites,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, pp 103-105.

³ Cranfield, *Mark*, 463.

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time after Jesus' hasty burial when it would be possible to buy perfume."⁴ These two views recognize that the Marys would have purchased the spices and perfumes for the formal burial preparations on Saturday evening, as soon as the Sabbath was over. Larry W. Hurtado more generally says, in slight contrast, "The purchase of the spices and the desire to perform this burial rite means that they had no expectation of a resurrection of Jesus. They waited until after Sabbath, going early on the Sunday morning (v. 2) because the strict rules of Sabbath observance made it improper to perform such rites on the holy day."⁵ His comment could be taken in the direction of the spices and perfumes being purchased on Sunday morning.

In his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, with his CJB having "When *Shabbat* was over," David H. Stern states, "Mark means *Motza'ei-Shabbat* (the 'going-out of Sabbath'), that is, Saturday evening, when *Shabbat* was over (see 1:32N). At *Pesach* season this would be after 7 PM."⁶

From Mark's record, it is logical for readers to conclude that the two Marys purchased spices as soon as the weekly Sabbath was over on Saturday evening. It is further stated by Mark, "And very early on the first of the week [*tē mia tōn sabbatōn*, τῆ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων], the sun having risen, they came upon the tomb" (Mark 6:2, LITV). The emphasis of John 20:1 is actually, "Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb." No reason is stated in Mark's Gospel as to why the Marys did not proceed to go to the tomb on Saturday evening, even while it was dark, as the ritual washing and anointing of a corpse could take place with the presence of torches or other lights. But to be sure, events taking place in association with the close of the seventh-day Sabbath on Saturday, and further taking place on the first day of the week or Sunday, hardly have to be concluded as supporting the transfer of the Sabbath to Sunday. If anything, the fact that the Marys had to wait for weekly Sabbath to be over, in order to prepare Yeshua's body for formal internment, should be instead approached as upholding the institution of *Shabbat*.

"Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave" (Matthew 28:1).

Matthew 28:1 Yeshua the Messiah had explicitly been teaching that He was going to be killed, and then He would rise again on the third day (Matthew 16:21; 20:17-19). All readers of Matthew's account are agreed that by the morning of the first day of the week or Sunday, that Yeshua had risen from the dead, and that an empty tomb was discovered. But was Yeshua the Messiah actually resurrected from the dead on Sunday morning, or did His resurrection take place some time before this? While it is not easily seen in most English translations of Matthew 28:1, there are enough clues present for us to question Yeshua's "Sunday morning resurrection"—and hence use such an event to give an undue influence of the first day of the week as either a "new Sabbath" or so-called "Lord's Day" (cf. Revelation 1:10).

There has been a very small amount of Messianic discussion on Matthew 28:1, and how *Opse de sabbatōn, tē epiphōskousē eis mian sabbatōn* (Ὁψὲ δὲ σαββάτων, τῆ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων) is to be approached. Among Messianic Bible versions, it is rendered as "After *Shabbat*, as the next day was dawning" (CJB), and "Now after *Shabbat*, as it began to dawn on the first day of the week" (TLV), respectively. In his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, David H. Stern unnecessarily complicates things by rendering Greek source language terms with Hebrew terms. He raises some useful points, though, but then opts for the traditional Christian position of Yeshua being resurrected on Sunday morning:

⁴ France, *Mark*, 676.

⁵ Hurtado, 281.

⁶ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 101.

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"[L]iterally [this is], 'And late of the *Shabbatot*, at the drawing on toward [number] one of the *Shabbatot* [=weeks].' Jewish days begin at sundown, so that 'the first day of the week' includes Saturday night, *Motza'ei-Shabbat* ('the going out of *Shabbat*'); see Act 20:7&N, 1C 16:2&N. But here the reference is definitely to Sunday morning."⁷

Various Christian examiners will recognize how the clause *Opse de sabbatōn* ('ὄψε δὲ σαββάτων) in Matthew 28:1 can mean "late on the Sabbath," meaning Saturday evening as the weekly Sabbath was coming to a close.⁸ It needs to be recognized how the preposition *opse* (ὄψε), when employed with a genitive (case indicating possession), can indeed mean:

- "late in the day" (*LS*).⁹
- "pert. specif. to the period between late afternoon and darkness, late in the day, evening" (*BDAG*).¹⁰
- "late..ὄψε σαββάτων [*opse sabbatōn*], after the close of the Sabbath, Mt. 28:1" (Mounce and Mounce).¹¹

It is to be noted that there are several resources which offer an alternative translation for *Opse de sabbatōn*, other than the more customary "Now after the Sabbath":

- "Now late on the sabbath day" (American Standard Version).
- "Late on the sabbath" (*Lattimore*).
- "But late of [the] sabbaths" (Marshall).¹²

While there are commentators who will note, that at least lexically, *Opse de sabbatōn* can be rendered as "late on the Sabbath," they will then disagree, mainly because of the statement which follows: *tē epiphōskousē eis mian sabbatōn* (τῆ ἐπιφωσκούση εἰς μίαν σαββάτων). Donald A. Hagner is one who concludes,

"Although ὄψε, literally means 'evening,' ὄψε δὲ σαββάτων here means 'and after the sabbath'...as the following phrase, τῆ ἐπιφωσκούση εἰς μίαν σαββάτων, 'at the dawning on the first (day) of the seven (i.e., week),' indicates (cf. 1 Cor 16:2). The time indicated is thus early Sunday morning."¹³

It is hardly to be avoided how the verb *epiphōskō* (ἐπιφώσκω) can properly mean "to grow towards or become daylight, shine forth, dawn, break, perh. draw on," but with the *BDAG* entry also noting the clause in question to be "as the first day of the week dawned or drew near."¹⁴ There is no denying how lexically speaking, the rendering of "as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week," is valid. But it is hardly necessary that "dawn toward" be required to be Sunday morning in this case. In Luke 23:54, for example, we read "It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin," *kai sabbaton epephōskēn* (καὶ σάββατον ἐπέφωσκεν), involving a "dawning" actually taking place in the evening as the Sabbath would begin. For Matthew 28:1 to indicate that the Sabbath was over, and the new day would begin at dawn, would require there to be a Roman time reckoning employed¹⁵—something a bit out of the ordinary for what is commonly regarded as the most Jewish of the Gospels!

Did Yeshua the Messiah resurrect from the dead on Saturday evening, in the twilight period as the Sabbath was closing? Or, did Yeshua the Messiah resurrect from the dead on Sunday morning, with the Marys subsequently finding His empty tomb? Mark 16:1 implies that when the Sabbath

⁷ Ibid., 85.

⁸ Carson, in *EXP*, 8:587; Boring, in *NIB*, 8:498; Nolland, *Matthew*, 1245; France, *Matthew*, 1095.

⁹ *LS*, 582.

¹⁰ *BDAG*, 746.

¹¹ William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, eds., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 2011), 1129.

¹² Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear KJV-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 101.

¹³ Hagner, *Matthew*, 33b:868.

¹⁴ *BDAG*, 386.

¹⁵ Morris, *Matthew*, 734 fn#3.

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was over on Saturday evening, the Marys procured the necessary spices to anoint the Lord's body: "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him." The record of Luke 24:1 says that the Marys arrived at the empty tomb ready to prepare the Lord's body for a proper interment, by Sunday morning: "But on the first day of the week, at early dawn [*orthrou batheōs*, ὄρθρου βαθέως], they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared."

When it is recognized from Matthew 28:1 that "late on the Sabbath" as it was "dawning toward" or "drawing toward" the first day of the week or Sunday, was most probably Saturday evening, then the placement of the earthquake which took place at the Messiah's resurrection can be properly weighed: "And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it" (Matthew 28:2). In its entry for the verb *epiphōskō*, AMG actually explains,

"In the evening of the Sabbath when the Jewish day was drawing on towards the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went (or better, set out). It does not appear that they actually came at this time to visit the sepulcher, perhaps being delayed by the great earthquake (Matt. 28:2) which preceded our Lord's resurrection."¹⁶

The intention of the Marys was to procure the spices to prepare Yeshua's body for burial as soon as the Sabbath was over, and presumably begin their work with some kind of lamps or torches present. There was an earthquake (Matthew 28:2), and so they instead arrived at the empty tomb by Sunday morning, finding it empty (Matthew 28:6). Yeshua the Messiah would have actually been resurrected in the period of *Opse de sabbatōn* or "late on the sabbath day" (American Standard Version). There is no textual support in favor of a transference of the institution of the Sabbath here from Saturday to Sunday, or the establishment of a new "Lord's Day" on Sunday.

Additional passages in the Apostolic Scriptures do need to be weighed, as to whether or not the empty tomb discovered on Sunday morning validated some kind of new gathering of the Believers, or not, taking place on the first day of the week, with the seventh-day Sabbath being phased out (i.e., Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). While today's Messianic people—even those who believe that Yeshua the Messiah was resurrected on Sunday morning—are not widely convinced that the seventh-day Sabbath has been abolished for the post-resurrection era, we do need to fairly recognize that many Christian people observing religious activities on Sunday, do so precisely because of the empty tomb of Yeshua discovered on the first day of the week. Most evangelical Protestant traditions which have observed a "Sunday Sabbath" of sorts, or have given spiritual importance to the first day of the week, have hardly done so out of being influenced by pagan practices which would later influence the Roman Empire. We should take some appropriate cues from Craig S. Keener here:

"The tradition is too early to be influenced by Mithraism...which did not spread widely in the Roman world until the next century...[T]his simply was the day Jesus' followers found the empty tomb, the day after the Sabbath. Sunday became the 'Lord's Day' because of the discovery of the empty tomb..."¹⁷

"But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared" (Luke 24:1).

Luke 24:1 Luke's record completes the chronology of what happened surrounding the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah. Following the death of Yeshua, His body was taken to a tomb, and following this was some Sabbath period (cf. John 19:31):

¹⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 645.

¹⁷ Keener, *Matthew*, 698.

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“Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment” (Luke 23:55-56).

To review what has been asserted by the witnesses of Mark, Matthew, and Luke:

MARK	MATTHEW	LUKE
When <i>Shabbat</i> was over, Miriam of Magdala, Miriam the mother of Jacob, and Salome bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Yeshua’s body (Mark 16:1, TLV).	Now after <i>Shabbat</i> , as it began to dawn on the first day of the week, Miriam of Magdala and the other Miriam came to look at the tomb (Matthew 28:1, TLV). <i>or:</i> Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first <i>day</i> of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre (Matthew 28:1, American Standard Version).	Now on the first day of the week, at daybreak, the women came to the tomb, carrying the spices they had prepared (Luke 24:1, TLV).

Even with there being disagreement among examiners and readers, as to whether Yeshua was actually resurrected on twilight on Saturday evening, or resurrected on Sunday morning (cf. Matthew 28:1)—all are in agreement on how by Sunday morning, *Tē de mia tōn sabbatōn* (Τῆ δε μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων), “But on the first of the week” (PME), that the Marys had arrived at the empty tomb at *orthrou batheōs* (ὄρθρου βαθέως), “early dawn” or “very early in the morning” (NIV).

But does the discovery of the empty tomb by the first day of the week or Sunday indicate anything important, *beyond* that of the Lord Yeshua being resurrected from the dead? Is the first day of the week given a different status in the post-resurrection era? There are various Luke commentators who choose to be silent on the issue of the Sabbath versus the future employment of the first day of the week by the emerging Christian Church of the Second Century C.E. There are a few, though, who have issued a number of thoughts which need to be noted.

Robert H. Stein immediately asserts how, “Shortly the first day of the week replaced the Sabbath as the main day of worship for the church (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev. 1:10).”¹⁸ Walter L. Liefeld goes even further than this, adding a number of editorial remarks, stating, “This became the day of Christian worship (cf. Acts 20:7). The change from the traditional and biblical Sabbath is in itself a strong evidence of the Resurrection because it shows the strength of the disciples’ conviction about what happened on that day.”¹⁹ One who may go the furthest, among a selection of Luke resources, is Michael Wilcox, from the reflective commentary *The Message of Luke*:

“Both in Genesis and in Revelation we find the pattern of the working week, with the work completed on the sixth day and with a rest on the seventh, and the same pattern is clearly discernible here at the centre of history. On the sixth day, Friday, the work of redemption is accomplished (23:54; cf. Jn. 19:30). On the seventh day ‘they rested according to the commandment’ (23:56). But then ‘on the first day’ (24:1) a new week began. It was the first day of a new era, a new creation. A whole new world was coming into being on that first Christian Sunday.”²⁰

Today’s Messianic people are likely to disagree with the conclusions of commentators on Luke who believe that the discovery, of the empty tomb of Yeshua, is clear evidence of a transfer of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* to Sunday or the first day of the week, or the establishment of

¹⁸ Stein, 604.

¹⁹ Liefeld, in *EXP*, 8:1047.

²⁰ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), pp 205-206.

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some new "Lord's Day" commemoration on Sunday. But, what today's Messianic people cannot ignore is how these commentators place an importance on Sunday because of Biblical events, and not because of any solar veneration in the Roman Empire that may have taken place on the first day of the week. They believe that the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament itself provides enough clues for the first day of the week or Sunday having spiritual importance, and it is on this basis that we have to engage with further passages (i.e., Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10) to see if such a conclusion has merit.