

Luke 23:54

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.

Analysis

And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on. Luke provides crucial chronological context for understanding the urgency of Jesus's burial. **That day was the preparation** (ἡμέρα ἦν παρασκευῆς, *hēmera ēn paraskeuēs*)—*paraskeuē* (παρασκευή) means preparation day, specifically the day before Sabbath (Friday). Jews called Friday 'preparation day' because all Sabbath meals and necessities had to be prepared before sundown, when Sabbath began and all work ceased.

The sabbath drew on (σάββατον ἐπέφωσκεν, *sabbaton epephōsken*) uses *epiphōskō* (ἐπιφώσκω), meaning to dawn, to grow light, or to draw near. While typically used for dawn, here it indicates the approaching Sabbath. Jewish days began at sundown, so Sabbath 'dawned' at approximately 6 PM Friday. The imperfect tense *epephōsken* (was drawing on) suggests approaching but not yet arrived—Joseph completed burial before Sabbath began. Mark 15:42 makes this explicit: 'when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath.'

This timing is theologically significant. Jesus died at the 'ninth hour' (3 PM, v. 44-46), the very moment the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple for the Passover meal that evening. His burial before Sabbath fulfilled the law's requirement (Deuteronomy 21:23) and prevented His body's corruption (Psalm 16:10, Acts 2:27). He rested in the tomb on Sabbath, the seventh day, echoing God's rest after creation (Genesis 2:2). He rose on the first day (Sunday), inaugurating new creation. The Sabbath between crucifixion and resurrection

represents the old covenant's end and new covenant's imminent dawn. Jesus's body rested while Satan thought he'd won—but Sunday was coming.

Historical Context

Friday as preparation day was universally recognized in Judaism. Strict Sabbath observance prohibited any work from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, including travel beyond Sabbath limits (approximately 2,000 cubits or 3,000 feet), carrying burdens, cooking, or handling corpses. Failure to complete burial before Sabbath would have left Jesus's body exposed overnight, violating Jewish law and piety. This urgency drove Joseph's quick action—he had perhaps three hours to secure Pilate's permission, retrieve the body, transport it to the tomb, wrap it, and seal the tomb.

That this Sabbath was also Passover Sabbath (Nisan 15) added special solemnity. Passover celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egypt when the lamb's blood on doorposts protected from the death angel (Exodus 12). Jesus, the true Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), died on preparation day (Nisan 14) when Passover lambs were slaughtered, and rested in the tomb during Passover Sabbath. John's Gospel emphasizes this timing repeatedly (John 19:14, 31, 42).

The three-day chronology (Friday afternoon burial, Saturday in tomb, Sunday morning resurrection) fulfilled Jesus's prediction that He would be 'three days and three nights in the heart of the earth' (Matthew 12:40). By Jewish reckoning, any part of a day counted as a whole day—Friday (partial), Saturday (full), Sunday (partial) equals three days. Early Christian creedal statements enshrined this timing: 'crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, buried, on the third day rose again.' The chronological precision of Gospel accounts argues for eyewitness testimony and historical reliability.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's burial before Sabbath fulfill Old Testament law and foreshadow new covenant truths?
2. What theological significance does Jesus resting in the tomb on Sabbath carry for understanding redemptive history?
3. How does the precise chronology of crucifixion, burial, and resurrection strengthen confidence in the Gospel accounts' historical reliability?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἡμέρα	ἦν	παρασκευή	καὶ	σάββατον	ἐπέφωσκεν
And	that day	was	the preparation	And	the sabbath	drew on
G2532	G2250	G2258	G3904	G2532	G4521	G2020

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 27:62 (Parallel theme): Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,

John 19:31 (Parallel theme): 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.

Mark 15:42 (Parallel theme): And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath,