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THE DATE OF THE CRUCIFIXION.

By JAMES SIMPSON, Esq.

THE importance of this supreme date of history invests with interest every endeavour to shed light upon a matter which has hitherto baffled the most learned and expert investigators.

Mr. Alpheus Davison, in the April *Quarterly Statement*, makes brief allusion to a parenthetical clause in John xix, 31, which (speaking of the day next following the Crucifixion) states, according to the A.V., that "that sabbath day was an high day." This passage has not perhaps received sufficient attention. The A.V. is certainly inaccurate; and the R.V., though more literal, is not satisfactory; it is: "for the day of that sabbath was a high day."

It may be interesting to compare some other versions with these:—

The Twentieth Century N.T. has briefly: "for that Sabbath was a great day"; while the Rheims (Douay) rendering of the Vulgate has "for that was a great Sabbath day." Both of these (like the two preceding) are paraphrases rather than translations; for the Vulgate has: "erat enim magnus dies ille Sabbati;" faithfully translating the original Greek, except in attaching the demonstrative pronoun to *dies* instead of to *Sabbati*.

The Greek is as follows: "ἦν γὰρ μεγάλη ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνου τοῦ σαββάτου," which when literally rendered says: "for great was the day of that sabbath." Here *sabbath* is genitive, and is disconnected both from *day* and *great*; and the latter word qualifies *day*, and not *sabbath*.

Hence, in the Dutch version (Elzevier, Leyden, 1663), we properly read: "want die dagh des Sabbaths was groot," for *that day of the Sabbath was great*; yet here again the demonstrative is wrongly attached to *day*. [In the margin is: *Anders*, "want de dagh van dien Sabbath was een groot dagh;" which errs only in supplying *een dagh* unnecessarily.]

Two early Latin texts render as follows:—

1. Munich MS. Lat. 6224: "Erat autē magnus dies illius sabbati," *Moreover great was the day of that sabbath*—a very faithful translation;

2. Vienna Cod. Lat. 502: "erat enī magnus dies sabbati."

With the former of these agrees the translation of Theodore Beza (c. 1560), save in the use of *enim* in lieu of *autem*.

It is unnecessary to quote other versions. The Italian of Deodati and the Irish of Archbishop O'Domhnuill rightly follow the Vulgate in retaining *Sabbath* in the genitive, but err with it in giving the demonstrative to *day*; while the Spanish both of Valera and S. Miguel paraphrase thus: "*since it* (or *that*) *was the great day of the Sabbath*," a curious inversion of the meaning. Apart from these last it is strange that our English A.V. should depart most violently from the apparent sense of the passage: (1) in suppressing the genitive case altogether; (2) in supplying *day* after *sabbath* and making *that* qualify both words; (3) by translating *μεγάλη* *high* in place of *great*; (4) in attaching that adjective directly to a noun (*day*) instead of to the verb *was*, and thus obscuring the emphasis which in the Greek rests upon it. All of which errors are avoided by translating literally: "*for great was the day of that sabbath*."

Now "great" may refer, not to the *importance* of that sabbath (or *sabbatism*), but to its *duration*. If, for example, the Crucifixion took place on Thursday, the Preparation of the Passover (John xix, 14), the sabbatism immediately following would extend over 48 hours, and would naturally and properly be designated "great." The clause in which it is so called is introduced as explanatory of the urgency of the Jews that the bodies should be removed. Underlying the symbolical and spiritual significance of the paschal and all other purificatory precepts of the Mosaic Law was the simple principle of hygienic sanitation. Even Pilate would acknowledge the reasonableness of the Jews' request, the more especially when the alternative was the exposure of the bodies for two whole days instead of one.

Assuming meanwhile that the Crucifixion took place on a Thursday, let us see in what years the 14th Nisan could fall upon that week-day.

In Ch. Ed. Caspari's valuable *Chron. and Geog. Introduction to the Life of Christ* (1868) the author gives a table (from Wurm) of the

Vernal New Moons from A.D. 28 to A.D. 36 with the resulting epochs of 1st Nisan according to that authority. It is as follows:—

A.D.	Time of New Moon.	Day of Week.	1st Nisan, according to Phase.	Day of Week.
	H. M.			
28	15 March, 2 16 A.M. ..	2	[<i>began</i>] 16 March ..	3
28	13 April, 4 10 P.M. ..	3	15 April ..	5
29	2 " 7 42 " ..	7	4 " ..	2
30	22 March, 8 8 " ..	4	24 March ..	6
31	12 " 12 56 A.M. ..	2	13 " ..	3
31	10 April, 2 0 P.M. ..	3	12 April ..	5
32	29 March, 10 57 " ..	7	31 March ..	2
33	19 " 1 16 " ..	5	21 " ..	7
33	17 April, 9 30 " ..	6	19 April ..	1
34	9 March, 9 2 A.M. ..	3	11 March ..	5
34	7 April, 6 42 P.M. ..	4	9 April ..	6
35	28 March, 6 19 A.M. ..	2	30 March ..	4
36	16 " 5 53 P.M. ..	6	18 " ..	1
36	15 April, 5 15 A.M. ..	1	16 April ..	2

The times of New Moons here given may be relied on as agreeing with other estimates within about an hour; but the interval allowed to the *beginning* of 1 Nisan seems in one or two cases to be longer than is necessary, since it is considered that the crescent moon can usually be seen about 24 hours or a little more after conjunction. But taking the table as it stands, the years in which 1 Nisan *began* (and therefore 14 Nisan *ended*) on Thursday, were A.D. 28, 31, and 34.

That the dates in Wurm's second column are those of the *commencement* of 1 Nisan at sunset is strongly insisted on by Caspari; this accords with Wurm's expressed opinion that from 24 to 48 hours should be added to the moon's phase; and is confirmed by the first entry in the table. For if 16 March meant the *currency* and *termination* of 1 Nisan, then only $15\frac{3}{4}$ hours are allowed from conjunction; within which time the new moon could not, according to his rule, or in almost any circumstances, be visible.

Of those who believe that 34 may have been the year of the Passion some adopt the April moon as the Paschal one; considering the March moon to have been too early, and that this year must have been intercalary since a rule existed forbidding intercalation in the following year (35) because it was a sabbatic one. But

(1) this rule, like that restricting the Feast-day to certain days of the week, may only have been introduced by the Sanhedrim of Tiberias, *cir.* A.D. 200; and (2) the March full moon fell so near the equinoctial point that the latter might by the Jews have been supposed to precede it. There is also the pointed testimony of John xviii, 18, 25, as to the coldness of the season, implying an *early* occurrence of the Passover in the year of the Passion. As for the years 28 and 31, in which 14 Nisan also fell on Thursday, the former is certainly, and the latter probably, too early to be reconcilable with other data upon which the chronology of the life of Christ depends.

The writer has elsewhere argued in favour of the year 34 as being that of Christ's Passion, founding upon (1) The date of Herod's appointment over Galilee by Antipater—end of 47, or beginning of 46, B.C.; (2) Herod's age at that time—25, and at his death—*over* 70; (3) Christ's birth therefore not before B.C. 1, and probably in September; (4) The Baptist's Call in the 15th of Tiberius—between August, 28 and August, 29; (5) Christ's Baptism probably in December, 29; (6) His Ministry of four years (see Luke xiii, 7, 8), much of which time He spent in Judaea (John ii, 13-iv, 3; v, 1-35; vii, 1, 10; and many other passages, including Luke iv, 42, where important early MSS. read *Judaea* and not *Galilee*); (7) The testimony of antiquity that the 15th of Tiberius was current during the consulship of the two Gemini—A.D. 29; (8) The connection between the imprisonment of John and the war between Herod Antipas and Aretas; and Herod's disastrous defeat, which was only about to be avenged by orders of Tiberius when the emperor's death took place in March, 37; (9) The survival, at the time when Paul wrote 1 Cor. xv, 6, of the great majority (only '*τινες*' being excepted) of 'above 500' witnesses of the risen Christ—a survival possible after about 18 years, but not after 25 to 30.

It remains to be considered whether Mr. Davison may not be right in assigning *Wednesday*, rather than Thursday, as the day of the Crucifixion.

Now, from the new moon on 9th March, 34, at 9.2 A.M., to sunset of 11th March Wurm allows nearly 57 hours for the first appearance of the crescent moon at Jerusalem—surely an excessive interval. The time elapsed to the sunset of the preceding day, Wednesday, 10th March, nearly 33 hours, appears—even from the

second entry in Wurm's table, where barely 26 hours are allowed—to be amply sufficient. It would thus seem that in that year, the Feast-day (15th Nisan), even according to the traditional mode of fixing it, would fall on Thursday, 25th March, and the Preparation therefor, and therefore the day of the Crucifixion (John xix, 14), on Wednesday, 24th March.

Mr. Davison, on the authority of a learned ex-Rabbi, informs us that after the Captivity of Judah, and down to New Testament times, the existence of different modes of fixing the beginning of Nisan, by different sections of the Jews some of whom made use of astronomical knowledge derived from Babylon, caused a difference of *one to three days* in the observance of the Paschal festival. It seems natural to suppose that the astronomical party would fix upon an earlier and not a later day than the traditionalists; and since almost nine hours elapsed between new moon of 9th March and sunset of that day, they might probably fix the beginning of Nisan on that evening, and would therefore eat the Passover at sunset of Tuesday, 23rd March, *the day and hour of full moon* (as Sir Charles Watson informs us in the *October Quarterly Statement*), *the beginning of the Jewish day on which fell the Vernal Equinox, and the precise moment at which Christ Himself sat down to eat the Passover with His disciples.*

If it may be further conjectured that another party among the Jews, of ultra-traditional views, deferred their observance of the Passover to the evening of Thursday, 25th March (the date approved by Wurm), then *to them* Friday, the 26th, would be the Paschal sabbath, and thus, in a sense, the sabbath of the festival might be held to continue from Tuesday evening until it united on Friday evening with the rest of the ordinary weekly sabbath. Great, indeed, would be the “day” or duration of that sabbatism; and the necessity the Jews were under of having the bodies removed from the cross would become the more apparent.

The Table of Paschal Full Moons given in Sir Charles Watson's paper is of much value. It will be noticed that that of March, 34 (he does not give the April moon of that year, or of A.D. 28, 31, and 33), is the only one which appears to coincide *closely* with the time of the Paschal Supper, if we may depend upon the times as given to the *nearest* hour. (If the *minutes*, which Sir Charles has omitted, are reliable, they might with advantage have been added.) The said full moon happened at the close of one Jewish day and

the beginning of another—the third and fourth of the week, corresponding to the greater part of Tuesday and Wednesday; and if the tradition which he cites at foot of page 276 was observed in the time of Christ (which is doubtful), then by some Jews Tuesday, and by some Wednesday might be regarded as the 15th Nisan; with the curious result that, by different parties among the Jews, four different successive days, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday would be observed as the Paschal Sabbath; to be immediately followed (1) by the weekly sabbath acknowledged by all, and (2) by the newly-instituted Christian Sabbath of the first day of the week—a sabbath, if Mr. Davison's opinion as to the hour of Christ's Resurrection be correct, which might or ought properly to be observed from 6 P.M. of the preceding evening.

This new sabbath, again, was immediately followed by four different days—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday—each of which would be observed, by the different parties, as the Sabbath closing the Paschal solemnities—that of 21st Nisan; and thus we have the remarkable concatenation of *ten* successive days observed, or at least which conceivably might have been observed as sabbaths in this year but perhaps in no other which can be reasonably assigned as that of our Lord's Crucifixion, Burial, and Resurrection.

Caspari shows that it is quite unsafe to be guided by the Calendar of the modern Jews introduced by the Sanhedrim of Tiberias about A.D. 200, as it in many respects differs from that described in tradition; for, according to tradition, the 15th of Nisan, and consequently also the 1st, could fall upon *any* day of the week.

He also gives from Eusebius a quotation from Anatolius of Laodicea (3rd century) which cites from an ancient Jewish Commentary written in the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus the rule that at the Paschal festival the sun as well as the moon must necessarily have passed the equinoctial point. It would therefore be interesting to know the exact hour, as well as day, of the Vernal Equinox, not only in the year 34, but in every other year which could possibly have been that of the Passion. This essential information as to the epochs of new and full moons and the time of the equinox in those years—which one might naturally expect to find in every Bible Dictionary—is strangely difficult to collect even from several special treatises dealing with the chronology of our Saviour's life.