

## In Accordance With the Scriptures: The Prophesied Resurrection of Jesus

The Apostle Paul makes an interesting comment in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 [ESV], saying,

***<sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.***

I admit it. Many times I have read these verses, and many times I have quoted this passage myself, but it was not until this past week while preparing for this morning's lesson that I really ever gave it any in-depth analysis. I had always just taken it for granted and assumed that there was a specific verse or passage of Scripture in the Old Testament Paul was referencing when he wrote that Jesus was raised on the third day ***"in accordance with the Scriptures."*** So I thought to myself, "Hey, that sounds like a good idea for an 'Easter' sermon." Piece of cake, right? So imagine my surprise when I went and looked diligently and thoroughly throughout my Old Testament only to discover that there is no verse or passage that specifically spoke of the Messiah being raised from the dead on the third day!

But wait a minute! How could this be? I was stunned! Was Paul, the handpicked-by-the-Lord-Himself Apostle to the Gentiles, somehow wrong? Did he make a mistake?

There is a reason the Spirit of God inspired Paul to write to Timothy, ***"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth"*** in 2 Timothy 2:15 [ESV]. This was one of those occasions. And I felt as if God was saying to me, "Okay, David, let's see if you can figure this one out! You've got My word in front of you, so do some digging!" So I began investigating, and it did not take me long to figure out that I was not the only person in this boat! Many people with much better minds than I possess have also struggled with this passage of Scripture throughout the centuries. So let me share with you some of their conclusions, and they are many and varied, indeed.

One of the theories went like this. Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:18 [ESV], ***"For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'"*** The first quote Paul gives is from the Old Testament *Book of Deuteronomy*, chapter 25 verse 4. The second quotation comes from Luke 10:7. Paul calls both of these ***"Scripture."*** By the time Paul writes to Timothy in approximately AD 66, Luke's writing was already verified as Scripture. Paul was writing from Macedonia the first time to Timothy

in Ephesus and the second time from Rome. Luke's writing had spread over the Roman Empire.

The Apostle Peter wrote his first letter to God's elect...dispersed in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. His second letter is not addressed to a specific group but it is dispersed for many to read and to be kept by the church which Paul describes as the **"pillar and ground of truth."** In the letter Peter states, **<sup>14</sup>Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace. <sup>15</sup>And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, <sup>16</sup>as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. <sup>17</sup>You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. <sup>18</sup>But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.** (2 Peter 3:14-18 [ESV]) Note, **"as they do other Scriptures."** This would mean that Peter, having read Paul's writings, counted his material on the same level as **"other Scripture."** So we have internal verification by the Holy Spirit that the writings that refer to the Jesus being raised on the third day as being "Scriptural."

Now this is all fine and true, but it does not explain Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 15, which was written before Luke or 2 Peter. So let us dig deeper.

Another thought was that maybe it has to do with the fact that Jesus would be raised from the dead and that the mention of the third day is not relating to prophecy at all. In other words, the **"accordance with the Scriptures"** part may refer to His dying for our sins, being buried and not being left in the grave, but not the third day.

I had considered this, but it seems to me to be a very weak, dodgy type of argument. Additionally, the phrase **"accordance with the Scriptures"** occurs **twice**, so it seems to me that Paul is making the case and even stressing the point that the being dead for three days is also prophesied in the Scriptures. To bolster this, we also have the words of Jesus Himself in Luke 18 when He was speaking with the Apostles about His coming crucifixion. Listen to what Jesus Himself said: **<sup>31</sup>And taking the twelve, He said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. <sup>32</sup>For He will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. <sup>33</sup>And after flogging Him, they will kill Him, and on the third day He will rise."** (Luke 18:31-33 [ESV]) Jesus said here in Luke 18 that it was **prophesied** He would be dead for three days. And this was not the only time the Lord spoke of being raised on the third day to fulfill prophecy. He also did so in Matthew 16:21

[ESV]: ***“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”*** And after Jesus was dead, the chief priests asked Pilate to let them seal the grave because they remembered ***“how that impostor said, while He was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’”*** (Matthew 27:63 [ESV]) Hmmm. So we know for sure Paul was not mistaken. Back to sifting and digging!

Now I did stumble upon a passage in Hosea that speaks about a resurrection. Listen closely. ***“After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him.”*** (Hosea 6:2 [ESV]) Hosea 6:2 is often given as **the** Old Testament reference for Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15, but the context of Hosea 6 does not seem to be dealing with Christ. In fact, making this verse a Messianic prophecy really is a stretch. It is speaking of Israel, and instead of the Lord being stricken, verse one speaks of the Lord striking Israel. Also, every other Messianic prophecy is always in the singular, not plural, as this clearly is. But since this is the only third day resurrection passage in the Old Testament, it is all that most use to determine this would be **the** Scripture to which Paul refers. Yes, it **IS** about the resurrection of Israel; and Jesus, as an Israelite, was the Firstfruits of that resurrection. Since this is the only place in the Old Testament that talks about being raised up on the third day, it seems (maybe) that it is the only thing 1 Corinthians 15:4 could be talking about. Christ was the first to be raised of the house of Israel, which meant in a sense that Israel's resurrection happened on the third day.

Another explanation I ran across was this: It was a “general rule of thumb” that in the fourth day after death the body began to decay. Psalm 16 says that Jesus' body would not decay. To the Jew, this meant that He would not be dead for four days. For no decay to have occurred, He would have to come back to life in three days (or less). Therefore, according to this explanation, the minds of those Jews reading Psalm 16 were thinking in terms of 3 days.

My biggest problem with this explanation is although it may be true about this supposed “general rule of thumb,” I have not been able to verify this. It seems to me to be another very weak and unsatisfying answer.

Still others turn to Jesus' comments in Matthew 12:40 [ESV] for their explanation of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus said, ***“For just 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.”*** Thus, the best way to understand this verse, they say, would be not only in relation to what the Lord said and others heard Him say, but also the sequence of events.

Once again, this does not fit in with the timeline established with Paul's writing to the church in Corinth in approximately AD 57. I do not believe Jesus is claiming the story of Jonah and the whale is a Messianic prophecy. It definitely has

Messianic **applicability**, as can be seen in how Jesus used it, but it is **not** a Messianic prophecy. In fact, it is **anti**-Messianic in that Jonah suffered for his own sins, and he was condemned to go into the belly of the beast. Jesus was just the opposite. Jesus knew no sin, and yet He was condemned to go into the belly of the Earth for the sins of others. Jonah **wanted** others to suffer. Jesus **longs** to save others from suffering. So since this is not a Messianic prophecy, then it cannot be the answer to our question regarding 1 Corinthians 15. So more digging!

Finally, I ran across this explanation for Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15. This theory states that they do not believe Paul is referring to specific texts when he makes his statements in 1 Corinthians 15. Instead, they believe that he is saying something akin to what Jesus said in Luke 24:44-47 [ESV]: ***44Then He said to them, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."*** ***45Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,*** ***46and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,*** ***47and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."***

The resurrection took place on the third day ***"according to the Scriptures."*** During His ministry, Jesus had predicted the third-day timing of His resurrection several times (John 2.19, Matthew 26.61, Mark. 15.58). It is more difficult to identify a specific Old Testament passage to which the "third day" description might apply. Thus, the resurrection of Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of the Messianic promise of the Old Testament. In other words, this explanation states that Paul and Jesus are saying that \*everything\* written in the Hebrew Scriptures points to Jesus. Neither Jesus nor Paul quotes specific passages to confirm that Jesus would rise from the dead on the third day, which is a most central statement of our faith. Although some really like this explanation, to me it still seems to be lacking.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-18 [ESV], ***17"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18For truly, I say to you, until Heaven and Earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."*** Therefore, it is absolutely true that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law of Moses, but I am not sure that this explanation is altogether satisfactory, either, although it is probably the best we have heard so far. And I believe it is very much on the right track.

During this journey of discovery, a few passages of Scripture kept standing out in the back of my mind: Luke 18:31-33, Luke 24:44-47 and what we just read, Matthew 5:17-18. But what really struck me about these was the commentary Luke gives us in verse 34 of Luke 18 when coupled with Luke's commentary in

verse 45 of Luke 24: **“But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”** These Apostles may not have been formally educated men, but they were very much familiar with and understanding of Scripture. They heard Jesus say on more than one occasion that He would be raised from the day on the third day following His death according to Scripture, yet they, too, were unfamiliar with where this was found. But as we will see, they soon found out where it was, for as Luke tells us in Luke 24:45 [ESV], **“Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”** Just as Jesus opened up the minds of His apostles following His resurrection, so, too, must He have opened up Paul’s mind to understand how He fulfilled every dot and every iota, every minutia, of the Law of Moses completely. And it is the events of the Passover Week that confirm Jesus indeed was correct in saying, **“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead”** in Luke 24:46 [ESV].

In Leviticus 23:5-6 [ESV] we read about the first two days of that solemn Passover Week. **<sup>5</sup>In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD’s Passover. <sup>6</sup>And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.**

As with any puzzle or riddle, once you have all the pieces the answer seems so obvious. Just let your mind grasp this truth: *The fourteenth day of the Jewish month of Nisan was the slaying of the Passover lamb, and the fifteenth day was the Feast of Unleavened Bread.* Our next question is: What happened on the sixteenth day of the month? The sheaves of the firstfruits were offered on the sixteenth day of the month. That service was first celebrated when the children of Israel came into the Promised Land. God commanded it in these words: **<sup>10</sup>“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, <sup>11</sup>and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.’”** (Leviticus 23:10-11 [ESV])

The sequence of Passover Week events now appears in sharp focus, and we will list them in the exact order they are revealed in the Scriptures.

1. *Fourteenth day* – The slaying of the Passover lamb. 2. *Fifteenth day* – The Feast of Unleavened Bread. 3. *Sixteenth day* – The firstfruits of harvest presented to the Lord.

Josephus, the Jewish historian of the First Century, confirms what I have just stated. "Nisan ... is the beginning of our year, on the *fourteenth day* of the lunar month ... and which was called the Passover. ... The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the Passover, and falls on the *fifteenth day* of the month, and continues seven days.... But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is

the *sixteenth day* of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth.... They also at His anticipation of the firstfruits of the earth, sacrifice a lamb, as a burnt offering unto God.” (Book III, Chapter X, par. 5, pp. 79-80)

You may be wondering how these facts relate to the time of Christ's death and resurrection. Here is where the beauty of the Bible reveals itself, and why I loved this treasure hunt God sent me on this past week so very much! Jesus was the One to Whom all those types and ceremonies pointed. He was the true Passover Lamb. That is why John cried out, **“Behold, the Lamb of God!”** in John 1:36. Paul showed how Jesus fulfilled the Passover in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 [ESV]: ***<sup>7</sup>Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup>Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.***

This is exactly why Jesus died on the fourteenth of the Jewish month of Nisan. He did it to fulfill the Scriptures. Paul declared, **“that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.”** He **had** to die on the same day that the Passover lamb died in order to meet the prophetic type and to establish His identity as the true Passover Lamb. The sheaf of firstfruits was to be offered to the Lord before the people ate of the harvest of the land. Please remember that the Lord had commanded them to offer the firstfruits of the harvest **“on the day after the Sabbath”** in Leviticus 23:11. It was indeed on the day following the yearly Sabbath of unleavened bread that the wave sheaf was offered, and the new harvest began to be eaten by the people that very same day.

But just as surely as Jesus died on a certain day according to the Scriptures, He also **“was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”** (1 Corinthians 15:4 [ESV]). He not only was our Passover, but He was *also the Firstfruits!* And Paul ties the firstfruits specifically to the resurrection: **“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”** (1 Corinthians 15:20 [ESV]). Again in verse 23 [ESV] of that chapter, Paul writes, **“But each in his own order: Christ the Firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ.”**

No wonder, then, that Paul wrote so confidently about the resurrection on the third day according to the Scriptures. No wonder that Jesus stated this so emphatically time after time! Christ rose from the dead as the Firstfruits of those that slept. He was the antitype of the wave sheaf, and His resurrection took place on the very day that the wave sheaf was to be presented before the Lord.

We can now understand why Jesus and His followers used the expression **“third day”** more than any other to describe the resurrection. Prophecy had decreed hundreds of years earlier that He would be the fulfillment of the types and shadows surrounding the Passover observance. As the Firstfruits, it was essential for Christ to be “harvested” and “presented” before the Lord **“on the”**

**day after the Sabbath.**” In the year of the crucifixion the Passover Sabbath coincided with the weekly Sabbath, making it “**a high day**” (John 19:31). It was the next day after that Sabbath that Jesus arose from the grave – on Sunday.

When Mary saw Him in the garden after His resurrection, Jesus said, “**Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.'**” (John 20:17 [ESV]) Why did Jesus bid Mary not to hold Him or delay Him (as the Greek text implies)? Because He **had** to ascend that same day to present Himself before the Father as the Firstfruits from the dead!

The biblical proof of those three successive days during Passover Week answers definitively how Jesus was resurrected on the third day, “**in accordance with the Scriptures.**” He **had** to die on Friday to fulfill the Scriptures concerning His death as the Passover Lamb. He **had** to be resurrected on the third day after His death to meet the Scriptural type of the firstfruits. Only three days can be involved in the time sequence, or the word of God is broken and Jesus could not have been the Promised Messiah. Down to the tiniest of minutia Jesus fulfilled **all** Scripture, **all** prophecy, and **all** of the Law of Moses! The proof of the resurrection of Jesus just gets stronger as the years pass by!