

# ACCORDING TO WHAT SCRIPTURES? Examining Paul's References in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

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*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)*

*παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφάς καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς*

## The Problem

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul lists two things that Christ did that were done “according to the Scriptures”: He “died for our sins according to the Scriptures” and “**He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.**”<sup>[1]</sup> This raises the question of exactly which are the Scriptures to which Paul is referring.

**Scholars and commentators universally assume that Paul is referring to the Old Testament Scriptures;** after all, since the Gospel books had not yet been published, let alone accepted as Scripture, to what else *could* he be referring?

**Is there a problem with this?** Certainly there is no difficulty in finding a passage in the Old Testament that speaks of Christ dying for our sins. It is clearly spoken of in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, which includes the following:

<sup>4</sup> *Surely He has borne our sicknesses  
And carried our pains;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten by God, and afflicted.*

<sup>5</sup> *But **He was pierced through for our transgressions,***

**He was bruised for our iniquities;  
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,  
And by His stripes we are healed.**

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And **the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.**

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He opened not His mouth;  
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,  
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
So He opened not His mouth.

<sup>8</sup> He was taken from prison and from judgment,  
And who will declare His generation?  
For He was cut off from the land of the living;  
**For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.**

<sup>9</sup> And **he made His grave with the wicked—  
But with the rich at His death,**  
Because He had done no violence,  
Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

<sup>10</sup> Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;  
He has put Him to grief.  
When **You make His soul an offering for sin,**  
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,  
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

<sup>11</sup> From the labor of His soul He shall see light and be satisfied.  
By His knowledge **My righteous Servant shall justify many,**  
**For He shall bear their iniquities.**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,  
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,  
Because He poured out His soul unto death,

*And He was numbered with the transgressors,  
And **He bore the sin of many,**  
And made intercession for the transgressors.*

Christ's dying for the sins of the people is clearly foretold here. Even His burial is foretold. **But what about this: "He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures"? What do the scholars and commentators do with this?**

**John MacArthur**, in his commentary on this verse, sends us to his comments on other verses ("*See Luke 24:25-27; Acts 2:25-31 26:22,23*"[\[2\]](#)). Among them, MacArthur provides a veritable smorgasbord of Messianic prophecies - **but none that says that Christ will rise again the third day**. So MacArthur can certainly find prophecies of the resurrection of Christ, but none indicating that it will happen on the third day.

**David Guzik** takes the opposite tack, looking for references to "on the third day in the Old Testament," and he comes up with this:

*The plan for His resurrection is described in places like Hosea 6:2, Jonah 1:17, and Psalm 16:10. Another example is the scenario in Genesis 22 where Isaac, as a type of Jesus, is "raised" on the third day of their journey, at the beginning of which Abraham had reckoned his son dead.[\[3\]](#)*

Really?

*Here is **Hosea 6:2**: "Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. **After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up**, that we may live in His sight."*

*Here is **Jonah 1:17**: "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."*

*Here is **Psalm 16:10**: "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."*

**Hosea 6:2 is about the Israelites, not the Messiah, who was not "revived" after two days.** Jesus subsequently uses the account of Jonah as a sign of what

would happen to Him, but it is certainly not a foretelling that the Messiah would be raised after three days. And Psalm 16:10 is certainly about the resurrection of the Messiah, but **it says nothing about “the third day.”** And the desperate appeal to Isaac, who was never raised from the dead, suggests that this entire exercise is naught but a desperate attempt to locate passages in the Bible that refer to “the third day” and co-opt them to refer to the resurrection of Christ, regardless of the fact that ***they have nothing to do with the resurrection.***

Can **Simon Kistemaker** do any better? Here is his contribution:

*But do the Old Testament Scriptures teach his resurrection on the third day? **The answer is twofold.** There is no specific reference in any one text; yet, **a combination of passages provides sufficient evidence of the concept of the resurrection.** For example, we read that God will restore Israel on the third day (Hos. 6:2); Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17; Matt. 12:40). And Isaiah prophesies the resurrection of the Messiah (Isa. 53:10-12).[\[4\]](#)*

This is a farrago. First, the answer is not “**twofold**”; **the answer is, as he goes on to admit, is “no.”** Second, certainly “**a combination of passages provides sufficient evidence of the concept of the resurrection**” - indeed, many individual passages already do that - but we are not looking for “**evidence of the concept of the resurrection**” but *for evidence that the Messiah will be raised on the third day.* Third, the passages that failed to work for Guzik do not work for Kistemaker, either. **Creating a Frankenstein’s monster by stitching together mismatched parts that have nothing to do with each other is a mug’s game.**

Now, it is difficult to imagine that any fair-minded exegete would resort to such tactics were it not for the fact that Paul writes that “He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,” and if Scripture says no such thing, the Scripture written by Paul would be in error here.[\[5\]](#) **Yet the fact remains that there is no such statement anywhere in the Old Testament.**

## **The Solution**

Is Paul in error therefore? Not at all. ***The Scriptures to which he is referring is the New Testament, not the Old Testament,*** and our apologists would have

quickly realized this had they not uncritically followed, like proverbial lemmings marching off a cliff to drown in the sea, the claims of liberal scholars as to the late dates of publication of the Gospel books.

**We know that the Gospel books and the other New Testament books were actually published early and used immediately as Scripture.**<sup>[6]</sup> Around AD 64, Peter writes this:

*[C]onsider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother **Paul**, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in **all his epistles**, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do **also the rest of the Scriptures**. (2 Peter 3:15b-16)*

So within about fifteen years of Paul's first epistle, his letters had been collected and used and known to Peter's readers. Earlier still, **we find Paul quoting from The Gospel According to Luke:**

*For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Timothy 5:18)*

Inasmuch as the second quote is from Luke 10:7, not from the Old Testament, it seems clear that Paul was using this book as Scripture with his audience, and they had accepted it as Scripture.

And, even earlier, Paul had written this:

*For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in **the reading of the Old Testament**, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, **when Moses is read**, a veil lies on their heart. (2 Corinthians 3:14b-15)*

Since Paul uses the word "reading" here, he is clearly referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, but there would be no reason to call them "Old" Testament until there was a written "New" Testament. **The evidence seems conclusive, then, that some of the New Testament had already been published and accepted as Scripture, and used as such by Paul during his missionary travels.**

Furthermore, we recall this cryptic statement from 2 Corinthians 8:18:

*And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches.*

*συνεπέμψαμεν δὲ μετ' αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀδελφὸν οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ διὰ πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν*

The meaning of this is not readily apparent, but ἔπαινος ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ could be taken as an instrumental of cause[7], which would render the verse “And we have sent with him the brother **whose praise is because of the gospel** throughout all the churches.” The early church fathers Origen, Eusebius, Ephraem, Chrysostom, and Jerome all identify this brother as Luke[8], and in that case “whose praise is because of the gospel” would refer to the renown he had gained in the churches for writing the Gospel According to Luke[9].

We also note that Luke began accompanying Paul on his second missionary[10] journey in AD 50[11], which was just after the publication of the Gospel According to Luke. Perhaps that is why Paul took this Gentile believer along with him, and why it is the Gospel According to Luke that he quotes in 1 Timothy 5:18.

While there is no way to prove conclusively the possibilities raised in the previous paragraphs, **what remains fact is that Paul used the Gospel According to Luke with his readers and he expected them to accept it as Scripture.** The Gospel According to Luke[12] was certainly available to Paul, then, by the time he wrote 1 Corinthians, and the facts “*that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*” are all plainly taught in this Gospel account.

There is no need, therefore, to create a Frankenstein’s monster out of unrelated Old Testament texts in a vain gambit to find that to which Paul referred in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. **All that is needed is to break free of the thrall of liberal scholarship and understand that Paul was referring to a Gospel book, and not to the Old Testament.**

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## Endnotes

[1] There are three things if we suppose that the second “according to the

Scriptures” applies also to “He was buried.”

[2] Psalm 16:9-11; 22; 69; Isaiah 52:14-53:12, Zechariah 12:10, 13:7; Genesis 3:15; Numbers 21:6-9; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Daniel 9:26 (“and a host of other key messianic prophecies, particularly those that spoke of his death and resurrection.”) – it would have been nice if he had provided this alleged “host,” but he did not = Psalm 2:1-9, 89:3, 138:11 (only 8 vv.), Psalm 132:11, 2 Samuel 7:11-16, Psalm 13:30-37 (only 6 vv.). A number of these are not applicable to the facts listed by Paul, and a couple of them do not exist; Psalm 138 has only eight verses and Psalm 13 has only 6.

[3] Guzik, David, “1 Corinthians 15 - The Resurrection of Jesus and Our Resurrection.” Posted at <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-corinthians-15/>.

[4] Kistemaker, Simon J. *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993, p. 530-531. (Bolding and underlining added)

[5] It is supremely ironic that Kistemaker, by claiming that 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 is a pre-Pauline creed, already has made out that Paul has committed a blatant error. See

[6] Tors, John. “How Do We Know Which Books Belong in the Bible? The Question of Canonicity.” Posted at <https://truthinmydays.com/how-do-we-know-which-books-belong-in-the-bible-the-question-of-canonicity>.

[7] Brooks, James A. and Carlton J. Winbery. *Syntax of New Testament Greek*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979, pp. 43-44

[8] Wenham, John. *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992, p. 186.

[9] *ibid*, pp. 230-237

[10] This is where the “we” passages in the book of Acts begins, indicating that the author, Luke, has become a participant.

[11] House, H. Wayne. *Chronological and Background Charts of the New*

*Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1981, p. 130.

[\[12\]](#) The Gospel According to Matthew and the Gospel According to Mark had also already been published by that time.