

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

clusion of the whole seems to be that there were two types of Non-jurors: one which commands our respect and pity, another which calls for pity without corresponding respect.



## The Third Day: an Expository Study for Eastertide.

BY REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.,  
*Vicar of Christ Church, Beckenham.*

“He hath been raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures.”—  
I COR. XV. 4, R.V.

SO writes St. Paul; so we repeat in all our creeds. Have we ever paused to ask ourselves why? “*Raised*”—yes, this is the citadel of our faith, the confidence of our hope; but why “*the third day*”? St. Paul sums up here the cardinal points of his Gospel in brief, but he finds room for this triviality. St. Peter preaches the fundamentals for the first time to a Gentile audience, yet he does not forget to mention it (Acts x. 40). It is only a slight numerical detail, yet somehow it has contrived to impress itself on the mind of the Church. The Athanasian Creed, in the midst of an elaborate and lengthy manifesto of Trinitarian doctrine, has a place for it; the Nicene Creed, battling keenly for the Deity of the Son, cannot apparently afford to omit it; while even the Apostles’ Creed—primitive, terse, and exclusive of so much that is weighty—still finds room for this tiny historic item.

1. *Now, when we come to examine the evidence more closely, we find that the weight laid upon the phrase comes from the Master Himself.* When challenged as to His authority after His drastic clearing of the Temple court, He names three days as the measure of His mystic “Temple-raising” (John ii. 19). When called upon to impress the nation with His *bona fides* as a religious teacher, He refers to Jonah and the three-day period

(Matt. xii. 40). When St. Peter's great confession has paved the way for a further self-revelation, Christ begins to tell of His coming Passion, and, linking with it, as always, the pledge of His Resurrection, He does not omit to name the space of time which shall elapse between the two events (Matt. xvi. 21, Mark viii. 31). So after the marvel of His Transfiguration: "they shall kill Him, and *the third day* He shall be raised up" (Matt. xvii. 23, Mark ix. 31, *cf.* Luke ix. 22); and in like manner He repeats the detail at the beginning of the final and fateful journey to Jerusalem (Matt. xx. 19, Mark x. 34, Luke xviii. 33). Thus on five critical and separate occasions the number three is conspicuous in Christ's Resurrection predictions. So Professor Findlay says: "Jesus appears to have seen a Scriptural necessity in the third day" ("Expositor's Greek Testament" on 1 Cor. xv. 4).

2. *But this is not all: the fact gripped the minds of His hearers.* The false witnesses at His trial alluded to it (Matt. xxvi. 61, Mark. xiv. 58); the mockers of Golgotha seized upon it and taunted Him with it (Matt. xxvii. 40, Mark xv. 29); the angels at the tomb reminded the women of it (Luke xxiv. 7); the despondent comrades, trudging heavily to Emmaus, pondered the significant figure (Luke xxiv. 21); and the Master Himself, later in the same evening, reminded the amazed assembly of His own oft-repeated words (Luke xxiv. 46). So we have no fewer than eighteen New Testament passages, and the invariable custom of our confessions of faith, to make us inquire whether there is any reason which makes the three-day period a significant one in the minds of men.

3. Now, there is a very considerable amount of evidence which goes to show that the third day after death was somewhat widely believed to be the time at which *every link between the body and the soul was finally dissolved*, when every spark of life was extinguished beyond hope of rekindling. "After death," writes a friend who knows Palestine well, "the body is buried at once, but the wailing is maintained for three days." This is

supplemented by striking evidence from John Lightfoot, who says: "All three days the mourner might do no servile work, no, not privately, and if anyone saluted him he was not to salute him again. . . . It is a tradition of Ben Kaphra's: the very height of mourning is not till the third day. For three days the spirit wanders about the sepulchre, expecting if it may return into the body; but when it sees that the form or aspect of the face is changed, then it hovers no more, but leaves the body to itself" (Lightfoot<sup>1</sup> on John xix. 39). Similarly, Herodotus tells us of bodies which were not embalmed till after three or four days had passed (Herod. ii. 89). So the Jews never accepted evidence of identification of a corpse after three days. ("Hastings' Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels," ii. 251). And, again, Latham, in "The Risen Master," dwells upon the significance of the three-day period, saying that what made the restoration of Lazarus seem so hopeless was that he had been four days in the tomb (p. 111).

4. Latham further proceeds to call attention to the fact that *so far back as the giving of the Law the same idea was in the air*. The man who contracted defilement through contact with a dead body was unclean for *three days*. The death-touch was accounted to last for that period, and then the cleansing began (Num. xix. 12). A slightly different idea, yet bearing the same general conception, is found in Lev. xix. 6. The flesh of the peace-offering was to be cooked and eaten, but was not to be kept beyond the third day. On that day death and corruption claimed it, and it was buried.

5. *Nor is the notion entirely a thing of the past*; and it may be of interest to give two modern illustrations, one from the East and the other from the West. The Rev. James Neil quotes an article in the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly*, and states that when a blood-feud arises among the fellaheen of Palestine, the man-slayer may take refuge from his pursuers, even when no place of sanctuary is near, by simply calling on the name of some man of power and rank, although the person in question

<sup>1</sup> Vol. xii., pp. 351, 353, Pitman's edition.

be absent: "I am an indweller of the tent of So-and-so." If this invocation is disregarded and the man slain, then the influential protector has the duty of raiding the offending village for three and one-third days. After that period the death-claim is over, and the people may return to their village without further fear of molestation ("Palestine Explored," p. 109). Our second illustration comes from a curious and unexpected source—the spiritualist tenets in regard to psychic phenomena. Mr. Vance Thompson, writing in *Nash's Magazine*, in the October number of last year, says in three separate passages that Dr. Baraduc claims to have established by radio-photography that the "astral" inhabits a corpse for three days after death. "Under ordinary circumstances, three days are considered necessary for the body to release the fluids of carnal sensibility"!

I have quoted the last two illustrations, one barbaric and the other perhaps fantastic, simply to prove that for some reason or other men in the past and in the present have associated the notion of three days with the final severance between the soul and the body. The origin of the idea was probably framed from the normal period within which physical decay sets in, though men appear to have conceived of that as a consequence, rather than as a cause of, the partition. At any rate, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ bears a fresh aspect of triumphant conquest in face of the positive convictions of mankind on the subject. "In His case restoration to life ensued, instead of the corruption of the corpse that sets in otherwise after this interval" (von Hofmann, cited in "Expositor's Greek Testament" on 1 Cor. xv. 4). Man's limit is no barrier to Divine omnipotence.

There is above the Falls of Niagara a rock jutting out into the river, which bears the significant name of Past Redemption Point. At that place the current becomes so rapid and overpowering that all hope of swimming or rowing against it has to be abandoned. The man who drifts past it is lost. Now, three days would appear to be the Past Redemption Point of human conceptions in regard to the body and death. It is the period

after which hopelessness and despair reign. There is no possibility of undoing the dread fact. The one we love is gone for ever—so man appears to have reasoned. But the Resurrection on the third day is God's reply to it. He neither endorses nor refutes man's fancy in regard to it, but He overrides it, and undercuts it, and triumphantly brings back His Son in the face of hopeless human despondency and pessimism.

And as a fact it is clear that an enormous impression was made by the third-day victory over the grave. The three thousand converts of Acts ii. soon swell to the five thousand of the fourth chapter; and it is not long before we read of "the great company of the priests," whose adhesion to the faith has followed the miracle of the third day (Acts vi. 7). The cold form has become instinct with life. Revival has come where there seemed no possibility of it. All things have become possible to the believing Church.

"Never beyond God's reach"—that is the message of the third day. Hosea's inspiring prophecy to a people, whose backsliding looked irremediable, has found its triumphant fulfilment, not only in physical fact, but in spiritual renewal. Torn and smitten, there is yet healing and restoration for them. "After three days He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him" (Hos. vi. 2). So the Cape of Storms of the spiritual voyager has become the Cape of Good Hope through the Easter dawning, and henceforward, when the Apostle desires to find an apt illustration of God's ability to save to the uttermost those who are spiritually lost, he can only pray for the renewal of the third-day conquest, that, having eyes divinely opened, men may experience "that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead" (Eph. i. 19, 20), and made the marred body of the Good Friday tragedy alive for evermore, to sit at His right hand in the Ascension glory.

