

The Third Day According to the Scriptures

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Synopsis

The problem addressed stems from 1 Cor 15:4b. To which Scriptures is Paul referring when he says that the Christ ‘was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures’? Our focus is on the ‘third day’.

It is established that scholarship does not provide a satisfactory answer. We follow Karl Lehmann, who attempted to show that there was a theme in the ‘third day’ references within the OT. Lehmann’s suggested theme was the day of salvation. We nuance his theme, and suggest the ‘day of resurrection’. This theme is derived from the fourteen narrative and the one prophetic reference which speak of ‘the third day’. Within the narrative examples, the first element of the pattern is the recurrence of a climactic reversal on the third day. The second element is the prominence of reversals from death to life. The third, less prominent element is the pattern of reversals from life to death. The fourth, speculative element is the hint of a judicial nature to such deaths.

We consider separately the twenty-four references to ‘three days’ which do not also speak of ‘the third day’. The time margin ‘three days’ is seen to convey the idea of ‘sufficient time for certainty’.

From these findings, we argue that it is fitting that the Christ should be raised on the third day, since it is the day of resurrection in the OT. We also find that Christ’s ‘three-day’ period ‘in the heart of the earth’ represents sufficient time to be sure that he was dead, and underlines the amazing nature of his escape. Our major conclusion in 1 Cor 15:4b is that Paul has the Scriptures in general in mind, with a special focus on Hosea 6:2. Implications from this study are drawn for apologetics, for the book of Esther, and for our understanding of the relevant OT passages.

How might we explain Paul's contention that Christ was 'raised on the third day according to the Scriptures'? (1 Cor 15:4b) To which Scriptures might he be referring, regarding the 'third day'?

The Nicene Creed says that 'on the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures'. Millions of Christians affirm this about Jesus, and have done so for centuries. But perhaps we do it without much thought. What does it mean?

The reference of course is 1 Cor 15:4b. At this point in 1 Corinthians, Paul is coming to the end of his argument. He gives a summary of his gospel (1 Cor 15:3-11), which leads to a climactic argument concerning the resurrection (1 Cor 15:12-58). Our text comes in the midst of the gospel summary, and is of note for at least three reasons. First, it is important because of its location. It stands as part of Paul's nine-verse summary of Christianity's core – Christianity's 'things of first importance'¹ (1 Cor 15:3). Second, it is the earliest detailed statement about the resurrection of Jesus (mid 50s).² From these first two points then, our text is a most significant one. As such, the question we now raise deserves serious consideration.

The question at hand

For our third point is that this text is the subject of difficulty for scholars. The difficulty lies in finding the referent of 'according to the Scriptures'. It is an obvious difficulty. How can Paul claim that Christ rose on the third day in accordance with

¹ With Thiselton, ἐν πρώτοις in 1 Cor 15:3 should be taken as having logical rather than temporal force. So the NIV, NRSV, ESV rightly translate 'of first importance'. See A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans, 2000), 1186.

² Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 31-32.

the Scriptures?’ To which Scriptures is he referring? This is the big question which our project will seek to address, our focus being directed toward ‘the third day’.

It is a question which despite its difficulty has received relatively little scholarly attention. The commentaries on 1 Corinthians and Luke³ are forced to say something, but have added little for many years. This dearth of material explains our sparse and somewhat dated bibliography. It would be an understandable dearth if a convincing consensus had been reached, but the reality is that there is no real consensus, and no suggestions which are without difficulty. Thus our present project seems overdue, especially since no one has attempted an exhaustive survey of the relevant OT data.

We will enter the discussion with the help of Gordon Fee, who surveys five approaches regarding ‘according to the Scriptures’ in 1 Cor 15:4b: (a) that it modifies ‘on the third day’, and not ‘he was raised’,⁴ and it refers to some specific OT texts, most frequently Hosea 6:2;

- (b) that it refers either to early Christian attempts to write passion and resurrection narratives or to Testimony Books containing OT citations that were interpreted prophetically as referring to the third day; (c) that it reflects a popular Jewish belief that corruption set in only after the third day, so that Jesus was raised on the third day to fulfil Ps. 16:9-11 (LXX) that his body would not suffer “corruption”; (d) that it modifies only the verb “he was raised” and does not include “on the third day”; and
- (e) that it has the same force here that it did in 1 Cor 15:3,

³ By virtue of Luke 24:46-47.

⁴ G. Fee, *First Corinthians*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 727, does not state explicitly that this point excludes the view that ‘according to the Scriptures’ modifies ‘he was raised’, but it is implied. We include it, because it is central to the viewpoint.

asserting that the OT as a whole bears witness to the resurrection on the third day.⁵

Regarding (a), this position raises the question as to which OT Scriptures speak of the ‘third day’. This is the major question for the present project.

Regarding (b), Fee correctly writes that ‘even if such books existed, this scarcely removes the difficulty, since one must still find appropriate OT texts that might have been included.’⁶ This position suggests that Paul means something other than the OT, when he speaks of the ‘Scriptures’ in 1 Cor 15:4b. But even if this is the case, Jesus himself sees his resurrection on the third day predicted in the Scriptures (Luke 24:46-47), by which he must mean the OT. So there is still the difficulty of which OT Scriptures attest to a third day resurrection.

Regarding (c), this view can explain why Jesus had to rise ‘*at least* by the third day’ – the argument here shows that if Jesus were still dead on the fourth day, he would have ‘seen decay’ (Ps 16:9). But this view can’t explain why Jesus had to rise *precisely* on the third day. For the first or the second days can’t be ruled out by reference to Psalm 16. But in the sayings of Jesus which almost certainly produced the 1 Cor 15:4b tradition⁷ (e.g. Matt 16:21, 17:23, 20:19, Luke 9:22, 18:33, 24:7, 24:46), Jesus predicted that he would rise *on the third day precisely*. So while the argument behind this view helps us a lot, we need to say more.

Regarding (d), B. Metzger provides the alternative translation: ‘and that he was raised in accordance with Scriptures, on the third day’⁸ But the view that ‘according to the Scriptures’ modifies the entire preceding phrase is more consistent

⁵ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 727. Position (c) is expounded by D. Hill, ‘On the Third Day’, *ExpT* 78 (1966/67), 266-67.

⁶ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 727.

⁷ P. Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity*. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 182.

⁸ B. Metzger, ‘A Suggestion Concerning the Meaning of 1 Cor xv. 4b’, *Journal of Theological Studies*. 8 (1957): 118-119. Metzger, together with S. McCasland, ‘The Scripture Basis of “On the Third Day”’. *JBL* 48 (1929): 134-135, do not find any origin for the ‘third day’ resurrection of the Christ in the OT Scriptures.

than Metzger's alternative. Verse 3 tells us ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφάς, 'that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures'. So in verse 3, 'according to the Scriptures' clearly modifies all that has gone before. The grammatical construction is identical in 4b ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς 'that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures'. Thus consistency argues that 'according to the Scriptures' in 15:4b modifies 'on the third day', the phrase which immediately precedes it.

Further, while Metzger's translation is grammatically possible,⁹ it is not preferable. Paul chose to directly connect the two phrases 'according to the Scriptures' (κατὰ τὰς γραφάς) and 'on the third day' (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ), when he could have separated them. For example the Greek could have been ordered thus: 'he was raised, according to the Scriptures, on the third day', or thus: 'according to the Scriptures, he was raised, on the third day'. Both of these would separate 'on the third day' from 'according to the Scriptures', and lean a little towards Metzger's translation. But Paul chose neither of these possibilities. So if Paul is careful in his grammatical construction, then we should lean away from Metzger's view.

What is more, if there were a teaching in the OT about a 'third day' resurrection, this would be very significant in defending the Christian claim. This would explain why Paul would consider a resurrection on the third day so important.¹⁰ However, Metzger's view appears to be that the day of Jesus' resurrection is not of particular importance, even though Jesus himself prophesied that he would rise on the third day. In Metzger's understanding, the emphasis is not so much on the day it

⁹ Metzger, 'Suggestion', 118-123 uses the parallels to 1 Macc 7:16 to argue for the possibility of his translation.

¹⁰ Paul Barnett, *1 Corinthians* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 275, demonstrates that Jesus did in fact rise on the third day. He first asserts that the Jewish day began at sunset. 'Thus Christ died and was buried on Friday afternoon (day one); he remained in the tomb Friday sunset to Saturday sunset (day two); he was raised alive sometime during Saturday night before the arrival of the women on Sunday morning (day 3)'.

occurs, but on the event itself. The date on which it happened contains no particular biblical or theological weight. But why then did Paul bother inserting the phrase ‘on the third day’ in this seminal section, if it is not important? It becomes a footnote which has strayed onto the contents page. Metzger’s translation cannot well answer the question as to why ‘on the third day’ appears at all.

Even if Metzger is accepted, this still begs the question of Paul’s inclusion of the phrase. If we can find a stream of OT tradition that lends weight to positions (a) or (e), we should set aside Metzger’s proposal as unnecessary.

Regarding (e), the position holds that ‘according to the Scriptures’ modifies ‘he rose from the dead’ *and* ‘on the third day’. As with position (a), ‘according to the Scriptures’ modifies ‘on the third day’. Our discussion of positions (b) through (d) should have made it clear that this is the preferable grammatical position. But this conclusion has historically presented exegetical problems. Broadly speaking, commentators have struggled to determine the Scriptures to which Paul is referring.

Of those who seek to find biblical support for the assertion that Christ was raised on the third day, many turn to Hosea 6:2 as the sole Scripture in mind: ‘After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence’.¹¹ Confronted with the reality of an apostate Israel, Hosea promises that one day Yahweh will renew his people. However the people at this point are Israel, and not the Christ. So in isolation from the completed OT canon, it is not clear how the Messiah might be in view as the one who will be raised on the third day. Nevertheless, C. Evans points to this verse as Paul’s sole source. He dismisses Jonah

¹¹ For example, C. Senft and S. Kistemaker. See Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1195, for details. Examples of this position in the English language include C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet and Co., 1952), 77, 103, J. Wijngaards, ‘Death and Resurrection in Covenantal Context (Hos. vi. 2)’, *VT* 17 (1967): 226-38, C. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 47-50, B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 60-66, G. Delling, ‘ἡμέρα’, *TDNT* 2: 949, G. Delling, ‘τρεῖς’, *TDNT*, 8:216-225, M. Black, ‘The “Son of Man” Passion Sayings in the Gospel Tradition’, *ZNW* 40 (1969): 1-8.

1:17 on the basis that the three-day sojourn of Jonah is probably a late addition, and Matthew's use of the story is 'ad hoc' (Matt 12:40).¹² C. H. Dodd is also dismissive of Jonah as possible background.¹³ He attempts to identify the Christ with the people of God, thus linking the Christ to the prophecy of Hos 6:2.¹⁴ Whether he is successful is beyond the scope of this project. But in brief, the question can be raised as to whether an identity can be forged that makes predictive prophecies about Israel by necessity also predictive prophecies about the Christ. That aside, the fact that neither Dodd nor Evans embrace Matthew 12:40 is grounds enough to look for a more complete answer.

Other scholars suggest 2 Kgs 20:5 (the promise of healing to Hezekiah, 'on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord.')

¹⁵ But this and the Jonah reference are less convincing than Hos 6:2, since both occur in historical narratives, rather than in predictive prophecy. As such, the human authors do not look to be predicting a future event at all, much less the resurrection of the Messiah. It is only when one considers the narratives in the context of the OT in which they sit that these verses gain greater persuasive power for our ends.

With this in mind, it is Karl Lehmann who has the most persuasive approach. He sees a *pattern* of divine action on the third day in such passages as Exod 19:11, 16 (cf. also Gen 22:4; 2 Kgs 20:5, 8; Esth 5:1; Hos 6:2), and argues that this pattern is the substance of Paul's thinking in 1 Cor 15:4b.¹⁶ His suggestion for the pattern follows certain rabbinic writers who treat Hosea 6:2 and other passages (e.g. Gen 22:4, 42:18, Esth 5:1, Jonah 2:1) as teaching that 'The Holy One [...] never leaves the righteous in

¹² Evans, *Resurrection*, 49.

¹³ Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 77.

¹⁴ Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 103.

¹⁵ Fee, *First Epistle*, 727.

¹⁶ K. Lehmann, *Auferweckt am dritten Tag nach der Schrift*, (2nd ed.; Freiberg: Herder, 1969), 176-181, 262-90. See also Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1197.

distress more than three days'.¹⁷ The third day is thus the day of salvation for the righteous in this view. This strand of rabbinic teaching has been traced by H. McArthur to at least the second century AD.¹⁸ However, for its strengths, the theme suggested by Lehmann and the rabbinic writers has the problem that the examples cited are arbitrarily chosen, and 'others can be found where the third day is the day of disaster, or where God's intervention comes after a longer or shorter time.'¹⁹ Under the weight of this critique, most scholars reject Lehmann's position.

But where does that leave us? C. K. Barrett writes,

Hos vi. 2 is not very convincing; Jonah ii 1 f. is used in Matt. xii. 40, but no other New Testament writer shows a similar interest in Jonah and the whale; 2 Kgs xx. 5; Lev. xxiii. 11 are not more helpful [...] The story of the resurrection of Jesus has no exact parallel or explicit forecast in the Old Testament, but early Christian writers found some passages (e.g. Ps. xvi. 10; Isa liv. 7) relevant. It is probably best here too to suppose that the resurrection experience and faith came first; then the conviction that the resurrection must have been foretold; then the documentation.²⁰

¹⁷ H. McArthur, 'On the Third Day', *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971/72): 84, cites two parts of Midrash Rabbah, one from Gen 22:4, one from Gen 41:7, and one from Esth 5:1 as constituting the Rabbinic position on 'three days' and 'the third day'. He also cites the Midrash on Psalms, Psalm 22:5, and Yalkut Shimeoni to Joshua II. 16. This precise quotation may be found in Midrash Rabbah on Genesis 2 (trans. H. Freedman. London: Soncino Press, 1983), 843. Note the alternative rendering in Midrash Rabbah on Esther and Song of Songs (trans. M. Simon. London: Soncino Press, 1983), 112: 'Israel are never left in dire distress more than three days.' For the rabbinic comment on Gen 22:4, see J. Neusner, ed. *The Components of the Rabbinic Documents: From the Whole to the Parts IX. Genesis Rabbah Part Three*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 37.

¹⁸ McArthur, 'Third Day', 86.

¹⁹ H. Richards, *The First Easter: What Really Happened?* (Oxford: Twenty-third Publications, 1983), 104.

²⁰ C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. (London: A&C Black, 1971), 340.

That is, Barrett, like many NT scholars,²¹ finds no convincing OT prediction or set of OT predictions which demonstrate an awareness of the Messiah's resurrection on the third day.

All told, the scholarly world is in disarray on this subject.²² H. Richards shows wisdom when he includes this question in a list of 'Difficulties Remaining'.²³ What is more, because of the placement of Paul's 'third day' claim within his 'things of first importance', this problem is of a high order in current Christian thought. Even if the reader is unpersuaded of our attempt to solve the problem (which will follow below), we hope that the need for more work to be done on this subject has been successfully conveyed.

Towards a Solution: Bolstering Lehmann's Approach

Can we find a way through this mess? We believe that Lehmann's approach can be harnessed to find a solution. First, we will defend the approach of looking for a 'theme' in the 'third day' narratives, as Lehmann did. Second, we will question whether Lehmann chose the right theme.

So first, to defend Lehmann's method, consider a science experiment, repeated twenty times. If the conditions of the experiment are the same each time, and the result is the same, then given similar conditions, one can predict, with a degree of accuracy, what the result will be. In the same way, should an expression appear with considerable regularity in the OT, in circumstances which bear numerous common

²¹ This is also the view of N. T. Wright. He does not think that the idea of bodily resurrection was present until the 3rd century BC, which rules out the major passages we have considered. See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. (London: SPCK, 2003), 202.

²² All the commentaries on 1 Corinthians, and also on Luke are obliged to say something on the problem. However, there is little said in other commentaries that is not caught in the summary above. See for example, D. Garland, *1 Corinthians*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 684-688, A. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1193-97, and H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 255-256.

²³ H. Richards, *The First Easter: What Really Happened?* (Oxford: Twenty-third Publications, 1983), 104.

characteristics, after a while, the term itself carries those characteristics with it. The thesis of this paper is that this very thing is the case with ‘the third day’.

Second, we need to perform an exhaustive survey to assess and perhaps improve on Lehmann’s theme. We therefore intend to survey all the passages which mention ‘three days’ or ‘the third day’ in the OT. The data will be divided into two categories. First, those passages which involve the time margin ‘three days’. Second, those passages which involve the time margin ‘third day’.

Other themes suggested for ‘the third day’ or ‘three days’

There is no one consensus theme in the scholarship for an event on the ‘third day’ or for a period of ‘three days’. Rather, there are numerous views, often supported with no more than a pure assertion. They are found in both the NT and OT scholarship, and as such they rarely interact with each other. In fact, even those suggested in OT scholarship rarely interact by means of debate. We will survey six such views, before progressing to argue for a particular conclusion.

Considering the three day duration, J. B. Bauer drew conclusions from his 1958 study of the temporal implications of the words ‘three days’, as they are used throughout the OT. His conclusion was that the phrase ‘three days’ implies **either a longer** (Josh 2:16, 1 Sam 20:5, 19, Jonah 3:3, 2 Chron 20:25), **or shorter** (Josh 1:11, 2 Sam 20:4, 2 Kgs 20:8, Hos 6:2, Ezra 8:32, Neh 2:11) **time span**, depending on the particular circumstances in the context.²⁴

G. M. Landes’ 1967 study ‘The “Three Days and Three Nights” Motif in Jonah 2:1’ emphasizes the **journey motif** behind the ‘three days’ theme. The Scriptures he presents are Exod 3:18, 5:3, 8:27, 15:22, Num 10:33, Gen 22:4, Josh

²⁴ G. Landes, ‘The “Three Days and Three Nights” motif in Jonah 2:1’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1967): 447, cf. J. B. Bauer, ‘Drei Tage’, *Biblica* 39 (1958):354-58.

9:17, 1 Sam 30:1, Josh 2:16, 2 Sam 20:4, 2Ki 2:17, Ezra 10:7-9 and Jonah 3:3.²⁵

After identifying this motif, he discusses the Numerian myth, “The Descent of Inanna to the Nether World”, where the words ‘three days and three nights’ are intended to denote the time taken to travel the ‘chthonic depths to the underworld.’²⁶

His introduction (presumably based on this evidence, although this is not stated), contends that ‘the expression “three days and three nights” reflects the conception that death is permanent only after a body has shown no signs of animation for a period of three days, the idea being that **until that time had elapsed, the soul was conceived as still lingering near the individual**, encouraging the hope of revival.’²⁷

G. Wenham gives a third view, with the following comment on Gen 22:4: **‘Three days is a typical period of preparation for something important.’**²⁸ He cites Gen 31:22, 40:20, 42:18, Exod 3:18 and Exod 19:11, 16 as evidence. V. Hamilton comments on the same verse, and associates the phrase ‘the third day’ with **‘some ominous event’**²⁹. He cites Gen 34:25, 40:20, 42:18 and Exod 19:11, 16 for his evidence. J. Durham says of the phrase ‘on the third day’, that it is ‘nearly always [...] used with a **sense of rising anticipation.**’³⁰ He gives no evidence for this assertion. We saw above the suggestion of rabbinic writers that the third day represented the **day of salvation for the righteous**. Evidence for this view included Hosea 6:2, Gen 22:4, 42:18, Esth 5:1, and Jonah 2:1.

Our problem with these suggestions is that they have not considered all the OT data. Wenham and Hamilton confine themselves to Genesis and one passage in Exodus. For their purposes (commentaries on Genesis), this is understandable,

²⁵ Landes, ‘Jonah 2:1’, 448.

²⁶ Landes, ‘Jonah 2:1’, 449.

²⁷ Landes, ‘Jonah 2:1’, 446.

²⁸ G. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, (Waco: Word Books, 1994), 106.

²⁹ V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 18-50*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 107.

³⁰ J. Durham, *Exodus*. (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 264.

although having included Exodus, they might have gone further. For our purposes, we want to consider the whole OT, so we need to consider additional data. Durham gives us a pure assertion. Landes' position is argued in more depth than these first three, but he is still not broad enough in covering the biblical data. Landes' link to the Sumerian myth is highly speculative. Therefore an exhaustive survey may provide a more persuasive synthesis of possible 'third day' and 'three days' themes.

Survey of OT References to 'Third day' and 'Three days'

Our first survey will consider the OT references which involve the time margin 'three days'. This will be followed by a survey of references which involve the time margin, 'third day'. Some controls will then be introduced by surveying references to 'second day', 'fourth day', and finally 'next day'.

There are 69 verses in the OT which speak of the third day, or of three days.³¹ (Gen 1:13, 22:4, 30:36, 31:22, 34:25, 40:12, 13, 18, 19, 20, 42:17, 18; Exod 3:18, 5:3, 8:27, 10:22, 23, 15:22, 19:11, 15, 16; Lev 7:17, 18, 19:6, 7; Num 7:24, 10:33, 19:12, 19, 29:20, 31:19, 33:8; Josh 1:11, 2:16, 2:22, 3:2, 9:16, 17; Judg 14:14, 19:4, 20:30; 1Sam 9:20, 30:1, 30:12, 13; 2 Sam 1:2, 20:4, 24:13; 1 Kgs 3:18, 12:5, 12:12; 2 Kgs 2:17, 20:5, 8; 1 Chron 12:39, 21:12; 2 Chron 10:5, 12, 20:25; Ezra 8:15, 32, 10:8, 9; Neh 2:11; Esth 4:16, 5:1; Hos 6:2; Jonah 1:17, 3:3).

These verses may be divided into forty-three separate units or passages. Twenty-four of these involve the time margin, 'three days'.

³¹ This excludes dates. For example, we have excluded Ezra 6:15 'The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.'

Passages which involve the time margin ‘three days’

1. In Gen 30:36, Laban puts a **דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים** ‘three-day journey’ between himself and Jacob after making the deal regarding speckled and spotted lambs (30:32).
2. Exod 3:18, 5:3, and 8:27 speak of the coming Israelite three-day journey into the desert, where the Israelites desire to ‘sacrifice to the LORD our God’ (3:18). All of these verses use the phrase **דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים** ‘three-day journey’ to describe the desired excursion.
3. In Exod 10:22 and 23, Moses brings the plague of darkness on Egypt for three days. The phrase used in both 10:22 and 10:23 is **שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים** ‘for three days’.
4. In Exod 15:22, Israel ‘traveled in the desert without finding water’ for three days. The phrase used is **שְׁלֹשֶׁת-יָמִים** ‘(for) three days’. It seems that their lives were in danger, so that they ‘grumbled against Moses, saying “what are we to drink?”’ (15:24) Moses cried out to Yahweh, and God answered by showing him a way to make the water sweet. Note also that Num 33:8 recalls this same story.
5. Lev 7:17 and 18 are a little different in that the genre is law rather than historical narrative. The law in question regards the fellowship offering. In 7:17, if any meat of the sacrifice is left **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** ‘on the third day’, it must be burned up. In 7:18, if any meat is eaten **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** ‘on the third day’, it will not be accepted. ‘The person

who eats any of it will be responsible' (7:18). In Lev 19:6-7, we find out that the punishment for this crime includes expulsion from the people.

6. In Num 10:33, the ark of Yahweh is searching out a resting place for the people by means of a **דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים** 'three-day journey'.
7. In Josh 1:11, the Israelites are preparing to cross the Jordan River into the promised land. The phrase used is **בְּעוֹד שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים** 'yet three days'. The preparatory aspect of the three days is seen in the instruction to 'get' the 'supplies ready' (1:11). The end of the three days is promised to be the time when the Israelites will 'cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own' (1:12).
8. In Josh 3:2, an event is recounted three days after the Israelites arrived at the banks of the Jordan. The phrase used is **מִקְצֵה שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים** 'at the end of three days'. The event is that 'the officers went throughout the camp', telling the people to follow the ark of the covenant when they see it. The people are told to 'consecrate' themselves, 'for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you' (3:5).
9. In Josh 2:16 and 2:22, the two spies are trying to escape from Jericho. They were told by Rahab the prostitute to hide for three days, until their pursuers return, and only then to go on their way. In both 2:16 and 2:22, the phrase used is **שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים** '(for) three days'. The spies heed Rahab's advice, and they escape. The conclusion is that 'they

stayed [...] until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them' (2:21).

10. In Josh 9:16, it is three days after the Israelites made a treaty with the Gibeonites, that the Israelites find out the Gibeonites are neighbours.

The phrase used is מִקְצֵה שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים 'after three days'.

11. In Judg 14:14, the Philistines cannot answer Samson's riddle שְׁלֹשֶׁת

יָמִים '(for) three days'. On the fourth day, the Philistines threaten Samson's wife with death, if she will not explain the riddle to them.

12. In Judg 19:4, שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים 'three days' are mentioned in passing, as the Levite man stays with his father-in-law, first for three days, and then for two more days. On the fifth day, he sets out with his concubine, and his concubine is raped and killed that night. No significant events occur during the three day period.

13. In 1Sam 9:20, Kish's donkeys had been lost הַיּוֹם שְׁלֹשֶׁת הַיָּמִים 'three days ago' (a strange construction), when Saul meets Samuel. Verses 5-7 make it clear that Saul and his servant were in trouble by this time – 'the food in our sacks is gone' (9:7), and 'my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us' (9:5). But this potentially terminal moment is resolved: Saul is informed that the whole desire of Israel is focused on him and his father's family. The implication of the narrative is that Saul has been declared future king of Israel.

14. In 1 Sam 30:12 and 13, an Egyptian slave of an Amalekite is found three days after he was abandoned by his master. In 30:12, he had not

eaten or drunk לִילּוֹת וּשְׁלֵשָׁה יָמִים וּשְׁלֵשָׁה לַיְלֹת 'for three days and three nights'. In 30:13, the Egyptian himself says that he was abandoned when he became ill הַיּוֹם שְׁלֵשָׁה 'three days (ago)'. The slave had been part of an Amalekite raid on the Negev and on Ziklag (30:1), which had carried off the families of David and his men. That his life is in danger is clear from verse 15, where he begs David: 'Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master'. He agrees to lead David to his master in exchange for his life.

15. In 2 Sam 20:4, all the men of Israel had just deserted David to follow Sheba son of Bicri. David told Amasa to summon the men of Judah within שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים 'three days', and to be present himself. But Amasa took longer than the three days set (20:5). As a result he was killed by Joab, seemingly for this disobedience (20:10).
16. In 2 Sam 24:13, three days is the duration of plague that David selects as God's retribution. The phrase used is שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים 'three days'. For God demanded retribution after David took a census of the people. At the 'end of the time designated', seventy-thousand had died (24:15). Then David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar he had bought (24:25), God withdrew his hand of punishment, and the plague stopped. Note that this story is repeated in 1 Chron 21:12.
17. In 2 Kgs 2:17, שְׁלֹשָׁה-יָמִים 'three days' is the duration of the search for Elijah after he was taken in the whirlwind. Elijah is not found, because he is gone.

18. Ezra 8:15 describes the **יָמֵים שְׁלֹשָׁה** 'three days' of rest which Ezra's men took at the canal that flows towards Ahava. Ezra 8:32 mentions a rest of **יָמֵים שְׁלֹשָׁה** 'three days' at Jerusalem for the same men. The latter rest is described immediately after a verse where Ezra praises God for protecting the men 'from enemies and bandits along the way' (8:31). They were carrying articles of silver and gold of great value (8:26-27), so safe passage is the main thought in this narrative.
19. In Ezra 10:8-9, three days are allotted for all the exiles within Judah and Jerusalem to assemble. The phrase **לְשִׁלֻשֶׁת הַיָּמִים** 'within three days' is used in both 10:8 and 10:9. The purpose of the assembly is to deal with the problem of marriages to foreign women. Anyone who does not appear within three days 'would forfeit all his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles' (10:8).
20. In Neh 2:11, Nehemiah sets out after staying in Jerusalem **יָמֵים שְׁלֹשָׁה** 'three days'.
21. In 1 Chron 12:39, there are **יָמֵים שְׁלֹשָׁה** 'three days' of eating and drinking for David and his men, after they came to Hebron determined to make David king over all Israel.
22. In 2 Chron 20:25, Jehoshaphat and his men take **יָמֵים שְׁלֹשָׁה** 'three days' to collect the plunder after defeating the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah. There is an event recorded on the fourth day (20:26).

23. Jonah 1:17 has Jonah in the belly of the fish for **שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וְשְׁלֹשָׁה**

לַיְלֹת ‘three days and three nights’. Jonah prays to God at an unspecified time during his time in the fish, and he describes his location as ‘the depths of the grave’ (2:2). The language is that of imminent death: ‘the earth barred me in forever’ (2:6), ‘my life was ebbing away’ (2:7). Yet he is confident that he will return to God, and sacrifice at the temple: ‘I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you’ (2:9). Jonah is proven right, as the fish vomits him out onto dry land (2:10).

24. Jonah 3:3 mentions the fact that a visit to Nineveh required **שְׁלֹשָׁה**

יָמִים ‘three days’.

Passages which involve the time margin ‘third day’

1. Gen 1:13 stands out from the other passages on a few counts. First, the Hebrew of **יּוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי**, ‘third day’ lacks the article. Every other passage with this time margin contains this phrase *with* the article. Second, this passage forms part of a list, where each day is differentiated from the one before and the one after. This leads to the climax on the seventh day. In particular, on this third day, the sky and the land are formed and named. The vegetation, including seed-bearing fruit is created according to its kinds. The section concludes with the phrase, ‘and there was evening and there was morning’. Therefore, third, through the lens of O. O’Donovan’s *Resurrection and Moral Order*, a teleological reading of the order in this passage

suggests itself.³² That is, we believe that this passage is offering the *purpose* under God's hand for various parts of the creation. The land is 'ordered' in such a design that plants grow on it. The sky is 'ordered' in such a design that birds fly in it. The time of evening through to morning (night) is ordered in such a design that work does not occur (so God does no work from evening through to morning, a model for our pattern of work). This is to see the order of Genesis 1 as broadly *telic*, and not chronological, as it is usually taken.³³ A significant point to draw from this is that the word 'day' is likely used here differently to its use in the historical narratives.

These major differences from the historical narratives are sufficient warrant to separate this passage from the historical narratives in our final synthesis.

2. In Gen 22:4, the 'third day' is the day when Abraham goes up to sacrifice Isaac. The phrase בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי 'on the third day' is used. On that day, Abraham intended to obey God's command to offer Isaac as a 'burnt offering' (22:2). Abraham took out a knife to 'slay his son' (22:10), but the angel of the LORD told him not to 'lay a hand on the boy'. The sharp change in God's command from 'slaying' to 'not laying a hand on the boy' is well described by Hebrews as ἐκ νεκρῶν

³² O. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 45-50.

³³ This reading has numerous advantages. First, a telic reading of this passage enables Genesis to answer *moral* questions which a chronological account does not. Since the purpose of Genesis pertains to the questions of *how we should live* rather than how the universe was chronologically created, this reading fits the purpose of Genesis better. There is something inappropriate about caging birds on the ground, when those birds are designed to fly in the air. Second, a side benefit of this reading is that it does not need to defend itself against certain scientific contradictions. For example, we can explain why the earth is created before the sun in the account. The reason is that the sun is (teleologically) ordered to serve the earth, by giving it light. We are not forced to conclude which came first chronologically, so it is possible on this reading that the earth is younger than the sun, but that the sun was created *for* the earth.

ἐγείρειν ‘a raising from the dead’, ἐν παραβολῇ ‘figuratively speaking’ (Heb 11:19).

3. In Gen 31:22, Jacob had fled from Laban after the LORD told him to return to the land of his fathers and relatives (31:3). It was בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי ‘on the third day’ after Jacob fled that Laban was told of Jacob’s flight. He took his relatives with him and ‘pursued Jacob’ (31:23). There was a threat in Laban’s action, for he warned Jacob that ‘he had the power to harm’ him (31:29).
4. In Gen 34:25, a slaughter occurs בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי ‘on the third day’ after the Hivite males were circumcised. The context is that Shechem the Hivite had defiled Jacob’s daughter Dinah, and so Jacob’s sons acted ‘deceitfully’ in insisting that all the Hivites be circumcised (34:13). This was the condition under which Dinah was to be given to Shechem. But on the third day after this mass circumcision, Simeon and Levi ‘took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male’ (34:25). It is clear that this slaughter was intended as judicial retribution with respect of Shechem’s action, since the episode finishes with the Simeon and Levi’s defense of their action: ‘should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?’ (34:31)
5. Gen 40:12, 13, 18, 19 and 20 all speak of the coming judgment upon Pharaoh’s cup-bearer and baker. 40:13 and 40:19 use the phrase בְּעוֹר יָמַי ‘yet three days’, 40:12 and 40:18 use the phrase שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים ‘three days’, and 40:20 uses the phrase בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי ‘on the third day’. It is for the last verse that the passage is included in this

list. Both the cup-bearer and the baker had been thrown into jail with Joseph. They each had dreams, which Joseph interpreted for them. The meaning of the dreams was that Pharaoh would ‘lift up’ the cup-bearer’s head and ‘restore’ him to his position ‘within three days’. Pharaoh would also ‘lift off’ the baker’s head and ‘hang’ him ‘on a tree’. The birds would eat away his flesh. On the third day, both their heads were lifted up in the presence of Pharaoh’s officials, as Joseph had said. One was ‘restored’, and the other was ‘hanged’.

The nature of these verdicts is judicial, in that the baker is hung for his prior indiscretion, while the cup-bearer is cleared of his indiscretion. As Gen 40:1 tells us, they had ‘offended their master, the king of Egypt’. The eating away of flesh, hung on a tree, is a sign of the curse which is on the baker (Deut 21:23, 28:26, 1 Kgs 16:4, 21:24)

6. In Gen 42:17 and 18, Joseph puts his brothers in prison for three days, after they came to him to ask for grain. The phrase used in 42:17 is **שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים** ‘(for) three days’, referring to the time the brothers were locked up. The phrase in 42:18 is **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** ‘on the third day’, the day when Joseph spoke to them. This last verse has the form required in this survey. When Joseph spoke, a death threat was implied, for Joseph said, ‘do this and you will live’ (42:18). At the same time as showing the level of the threat, this verse also shows that the brothers’ lives will be spared.
7. Exod 19:11, 15 and 16 speak of the third day after the people camped at Mount Sinai. In 19:11, the people are told to be ready **לְיוֹם**

הַשְּׁלִישִׁי ‘for the third day’. In 19:15, they are told again to prepare לְשִׁלֻשֶׁת יָמִים ‘for the third day’. In 19:16, the phrase used is בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי ‘on the third day’. It on this ‘third day’ that God appears in the sight of the people. God warns Moses that ‘whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death’ (19:12). ‘He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live.’ (19:13). They cannot ascend, or else God will ‘break out against them’ (19:24)

Despite this warning, Moses and Aaron are themselves called to ascend the mountain, and to speak with God (19:24). They are exempt from this death threat. Moses is singled out, for reasons made clear in verse 9: ‘I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.’ Moses and Aaron get to speak with God in God’s presence, while the others will die if they enter God’s presence.

8. Num 19:12 and 19:19 is a little different, in that the genre is law, and not historical narrative. The law commands a ritual cleansing for those who have had contact with death (Num 19:11). In both verses the phrase used is בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי ‘on the third day’. According to most translations (e.g. NIV, ESV) the person must be cleansed with water on both the third and seventh days. However, J. Milgrom contends that the better rendering is ‘he shall cleanse himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean’, so that ‘he is aspersed with the purificatory waters on the third day only.’³⁴ This understanding is

³⁴ J. Milgrom, *Numbers*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 161.

quite plausible. Whatever the correct understanding, if the ritual is not carried out, the man does not become clean, and he must be cut off from Israel (19:13).

Num 31:19 is a story where this law is obeyed. The phrase again is **הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בַּיּוֹם** ‘on the third day’. In this narrative, Moses is ordering his men just home from battle to obey the law of Num 19:12 and 19.

9. In Josh 9:17, the third day is the day of decision for the Israelite leaders regarding the deceptive Gibeonites. It is the third day after they set out, that they come to the Gibeonite cities. The phrase used is **הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בַּיּוֹם** ‘on the third day’. The decision is to spare the Gibeonite lives rather than to kill them. ‘But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the LORD, the God of Israel’ (9:18). The threat of death was certainly there in the language of ‘attack’ in this verse. This is underlined in 9:26, where we read that ‘Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them’.
10. In Judg 20:30, Gibeah, in Benjamin, had been responsible for raping and murdering a Levite’s concubine. The Levite had asked Israel to ‘give’ their ‘verdict’ (20:7). In response, ‘the tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What about this awful crime that was committed among you? Now surrender those wicked men of Gibeah so that we may put them to death and purge the evil from Israel’ (20:13-14). But instead, Benjamin went to war against Israel. On the first two days of the battle, Benjamin were victorious, and they

struck down many soldiers in the Israelite army. However, בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי ‘on the third day’, God gave the Benjamite army to be ‘cut down’ (20:42). The narrative also emphasizes that Israelite lives were saved on the third day, for the Benjamites said on this day, ‘We are defeating them as before’ (20:32). In 20:31, ‘about thirty men fell’ from Israelite numbers, before the battle went in Israel’s favour.

11. 1 Sam 30:1 speaks of the day when David and his men discover that Ziklag had been burned, and that their wives and children taken off by the Amalekite. It was בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי ‘on the third day’ after David had been dismissed from fighting with King Achish against the Hebrews. On that third day, the people speak of killing David, in their grief at losing their families, ‘the men were talking of stoning him’ (30:6). In response to this threat, David calls on the priest to bring the ephod, and they inquire of God what to do next. God says that David’s men will overtake the raiding party, so 600 men go with him in the chase. Thus David escapes possible death.

12. In 2 Sam 1:2, David is staying in Ziklag for two days after defeating the Amalekites. בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי ‘on the third day’ of this rest, a man from Saul’s camp arrives and reports the death of Saul and Jonathon. He is put to death for his part in killing Saul: As David says, ‘Your blood be on your own head. Your own mouth testified against you when you said, ‘I killed the LORD’s anointed (1:16). As such, his death is clearly a judicial punishment.

13. 1 Kgs 3:18 occurs within the famous story regarding Solomon’s wisdom in judging the two prostitutes who were fighting over a baby.

The phrase used in 1 Kgs 3:18 is **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** 'on the third day'.

This third day is the day when the second of the prostitutes had her baby. It is the third day after the first prostitute had her baby. That night, (so it is claimed), one woman's son 'died because she lay on him' (1 Kgs 3:19). Then, according to the first woman, 'she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep.' (1 Kgs 3:20). Note that this is not an event of judicial verdict.

14. In 1Ki 12:5 and 12:12, the story involves Rehoboam's decision about his future reign. The phrase used in 1 Kgs 12:5 is **עַד שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים** 'yet three days', the time that Rehoboam asks for his deliberations. In 12:12, the phrase is **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** 'on the third day', the day where his verdict is given. He was asked to lighten the heavy yoke which his Father had placed on the people. 'On the third day', he gave his decision: 'My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions' (1 Kgs 12:14). As a result, the ten northern tribes of Israel split from the two southern tribes of Judah. The story is repeated in 2 Chron. 10:5 and 10:12.

15. In 2 Kgs 20:5 and 20:8, the story is Hezekiah's healing. Both verses use the phrase **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** 'on the third day'. Hezekiah had been told by Isaiah the prophet that he would not recover from his illness (20:1). But he prayed to God and wept bitterly (20:3), so God sent Isaiah back to change the prognosis. He will be so well healed that he

will be able to go to the temple ‘on the third day’ (20:5), he will live another fifteen years, and God will protect him and Jerusalem from Assyria (20:6).

16. In Esth 4:16, Esther asks for **שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים** ‘three days’ of fasting, after which she will go to King Xerxes. Then in 5:1, **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** ‘on the third day, she goes to the king, risking her life. As Esther wrote to her cousin, Mordecai,

‘All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life.’ (Esth 4:11)

So the third day in this story is the day when life and death are decided for Esther. She is spared (5:2)

As an aside, this narrative has implications for the way the Hebrews counted days. Note that while 4:16 implies that Esther went to the king *after* three days and three nights of fasting, 5:1 still says that Esther went to the king *on the third day*. This language may appear strange to us. We would not speak of an event both occurring ‘after three days’ and also ‘on the third day’. However, it appears that this was part of the idiom of the Hebrew language. We posit that ‘after three days and three nights’ can mean ‘after the sun had set twice’.

This is supported by the fact that the Jewish day finished at nightfall, a point which is clear in Judg 14:18, and asserted by P. Barnett.³⁵

17. Hos 6:2 speaks of Israel being raised up **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** ‘on the third day’. Given the importance of this passage, and its different genre (prophetic prediction), we will leave this passage, and look at it in some detail after we have synthesised the historical narrative passages.

Two further passages occur in lists where ‘second day’ and ‘fourth day’ are also mentioned, and where there is no important difference between what happens on the second, third and fourth day (Num 7:24, Num 29:20). Thus they do not contribute anything distinctive to a ‘third day’ theme.³⁶

It is interesting, but unnecessary to this paper to consider the ‘third day’ references in the historical narratives of the New Testament.³⁷

Synthesising the Data

Let us now consider the scholarly understandings of ‘third day’ and ‘three days’ which we outlined above. In terms of Landes’ suggestion of a ‘journey motif’, there are four explicit ‘three-day journeys’ in our first data set (Gen 30:36, Exod 3:18, Ex 15:22, Num 10:33). Notably these are all in the Pentateuch. A further two might be described as implicit three-day journeys (Jonah 1:17, 3:3). So Landes’ suggestion of a ‘journey motif’ is present in the data. But when it comes to Landes’ other citations, they are unpersuasive. He included Josh 2:16, where the spies are hiding,

³⁵ P. Barnett, *1 Corinthians*. (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 275.

³⁶ In Num 7:24, the leader of Zebulun brings an offering on the third day. It is the same offering that the leader of Issachar brought on the second day, and the same offering that the leader of Reuben brought on the fourth day. So there is no distinctiveness about ‘the third day’ in this passage. The same is true in Num 29:20 – on each progressive day of the assembly, one less bull is presented in the sacrifice than the previous day. On the third day, 11 bulls were prepared for sacrifice, while there were 12 on the second day, and 10 on the fourth day.

³⁷ For a brief discussion of ‘the third day’ in John 2:1, see D. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 167-168. Acts 27:19 is interesting in that Paul and his companions are delivered from likely death on the third day. This is a neat continuation of one of the themes we have identified in the OT data. Few if any commentaries on the book of Acts make comment on this point.

not journeying. He cited 2 Kgs 2:17, which involves a search, not a journey. He cited 1 Sam 30:1 and 2 Sam 20:4, which involve a command to assemble within three days, not a command to journey for three days. Such a command will imply a three-day journey for some, but not for all, since many will not need to journey far to arrive at the assembly point. He cited Gen 22:4, Josh 9:17 and 1 Sam 30:1, which speak of arriving at a place ‘on the third day’. It is true that a three-day journey is implied in these three passages, but the arrival is the focus, not the journey. These last three citations also expand his sample, so that he must include all references to ‘on the third day’, as well as the references to a three day period. Thus these last three references widen his sample size from 23 separate narrative passages (from our first list) to 37 (the narrative passages from both lists which we surveyed). Therefore, even if we include these three references to an arrival ‘on the third day’, Landes has found only nine out of thirty-seven passages which can be described as representing a journey. This is significant, but not overwhelming. We can do better.

Turning to Bauer’s suggestion of a ‘longer or shorter time span’, he offers ten passages, which come from both of the data sets which we surveyed.³⁸ He adds an additional passage (1 Sam 20:5 ff speaks of ‘the evening of the day after tomorrow’, which is three days later, since the day finishes at sunset). Thus he presents a frequency of ten out of thirty-eight occurrences for his theme. Of these ten, a few are questionable. It is very debatable in Neh 2:11 (isolated from other three-day texts) whether the three-day rest is meant to communicate a short rest or a long one, or whether nothing more is communicated that the historical length of the rest³⁹. This is the same for Ezra 8:32. So Bauer’s theme occurs in only eight out of thirty-eight passages, a frequency which is not greatly compelling.

³⁸ Landes, ‘Jonah 2:1’, 448.

³⁹ F. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 113 comments on the use of ‘three days’ here and in Ezra 8:15, 32 only to defend the likely historicity of a three-day rest.

In terms of Wenham's suggestion that three days is typical of preparation for something important, Wenham himself only suggests five passages as evidence (Gen 31:22, 40:20, 42:18, Exod 3:18, Exod 19:11). To Wenham's citations, we should add Josh 1:11 and Josh 3:2, which describes the preparation to cross the Jordan into the promised land. Wenham's citations speak both of events 'on the third day', and of three-day periods. Thus it also seems necessary to measure Wenham's sample against all the 37 narrative passages which we have surveyed above. Wenham's theme then includes only 7 of 37 references, and so does not constitute a prominent pattern. To be fair to Wenham, his theme is much more prominent within the book of Genesis, which was his focus.

Turning to Hamilton's suggested theme, 'some ominous event', this is a good suggestion for the time margin 'third day'. The flaw is that 'some ominous event' is too vague. As we will discuss below, there are many deaths or death-threats in the 'third day' data, all of which are 'ominous events'. In these cases, more should be said of the event than that it was 'ominous'. In terms of the other data set, where the time margin is 'three days', Hamilton's suggestion is less convincing, being true in perhaps 6 or 7 of the 24 passages (Exod 10:22, Exod 15:22, Josh 1:11?, Josh 9:16?, Judg 14:14, 2 Sam 20:4?, 2 Sam 24:13). However, so many biblical events are 'ominous', that this moderate frequency does not seem noteworthy. In fairness to Hamilton, as with Wenham, we should note that his focus is the book of Genesis, in which context his conclusion is more robust.

J. Durham's claim that 'the third day' time margin marks 'rising anticipation' is close to the mark. As we show below, events on the third day usually contain either a death or a death threat resolved on the third day. As such, these narratives tend to contain a rising anticipation until the death occurs, or until the death threat is resolved.

Durham's claim is thus correct, but not precise enough. One problem with his lack of precision is that he does not communicate that the drama is usually resolved on the third day. Another is that he does not communicate that life and death are in the balance so often.

Lastly, there are strengths in the rabbinic view that the 'third day' is a day of salvation for the righteous. But more needs to be said, given the fact that four of the fourteen narrative passages contain deaths on the third day (Gen 34:25, 40:12, 2 Sam 1:2, 1 Kgs 3:18).

In short, the scholarly suggestions are either flawed, or they are a subset of our suggestions below. With that we need to turn to our own suggestions.

The theme of 'three days': 'Sufficient time for certainty'

The first answer which we suggest is that the time margin 'three days' carries a notion of 'sufficient time for certainty'. That is, three days is a period which represents a 'safety margin'. Events can be considered firmly established once they have been established for three days. Let us consider two explicit examples of this theme.

First, the three-day journey which the Israelites must make before sacrificing in the wilderness is explicitly requested so as to be out of sight of the Egyptians (Exod 8:26-27). It represents sufficient time traveling to be certain that no Egyptians will be present. Second, in Josh 2:16, 22, three days in hiding is explicitly said to be sufficient for the two spies to be certain that their pursuers had gone.

These two examples are not significant in a data set of twenty-four. But there are very many more examples which are implicit in the various narratives. When Laban moved Jacob's flocks a three-day journey from his own flocks (Gen 30:36), it was implied that the distance was sufficient to be sure that the two men's flocks

would not interbreed and form more speckled offspring (which would then belong to Jacob).⁴⁰ The reason Pharaoh waited three days to respond to the plague of darkness is not stated, but given the other examples in this pattern, the feeling is that Pharaoh was now sure that the darkness would not subside without some kind of action (Exod 10:22). The Israelites began grumbling after three days of not finding water. The implication is that this time period was sufficient to be sure that they were in trouble (Exod 15:22). When three days passed after the treaty with the Gibeonites, the feeling of the narrative is that sufficient time had passed for the treaty to be firmly established, and thus binding (Josh 9:16). When the Philistines could not answer Samson's riddle for three days, the implication is that they will never answer it. Three days is sufficient to be sure of their failure. Thus they turn to desperate measures on the fourth day (Judg 14:14-15). In the narrative regarding Saul and the lost donkeys, it is implied that three days is sufficient for Saul's father to be worried for the safety of his son. His 'lostness' would now be seen as enduring (1 Sam 9:20 cf. 9:5). In the story of the lost Egyptian slave (1 Sam 30:12), the statement that the slave was abandoned 'three days ago' implies that he has been permanently abandoned. In the story of Elijah's disappearance, three days is sufficient to imply that Elijah is permanently gone (2 Kgs 2:17). Ezra and his men wait for three days (Ezra 8:32) after they had arrived in Jerusalem. Having been fearful of 'enemies on the road' (8:22), the three days appear to be sufficient for confidence that they have not been followed, and will not be attacked. Later in the book of Ezra, Ezra sets three days for the people to assemble in Ezra 10:8-9. It is assumed that if the people have not assembled by that time, their absence is permanent.

To this evidence, we could add the passage suggested by Bauer, 1 Sam 20:5, where David hides 'until the evening of the day after tomorrow'. This three day

⁴⁰ V. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 283.

waiting period represents excellent evidence for our theme, since three days is explicitly sufficient to determine Saul's attitude towards David (1 Sam 20:6-7). However, to avoid biasing our sample of passages, we will not include this passage in our percentage summary below.

Our pattern can also be drawn upon for contrast in other stories involving three-day periods. In a key example for this project, Jonah's three days and nights in the whale are sufficient to establish the expectation that Jonah would not escape. This provides an expectation which is shattered when Jonah does escape, underlining the surprising nature of his deliverance (Jonah 1:17). In a more speculative way, perhaps we can comment on the plunder which took Jehoshapat's men three days to collect (2 Chron 20:25). Perhaps the 'sufficient for certainty' theme would lead the reader to expect that three days should be more than enough to search out and take the spoils of war. If so, the rhetorical point would be that the amount of plunder was unbelievably large.

Even excluding this last example, and excluding Bauer's example, thirteen of the twenty-three⁴¹ narrative examples fit under this heading of 'sufficient for certainty'. This is enough of a pattern that an astute reader would notice it. It is also fairly easily the best pattern we have found to explain the large number of OT references with time margin 'three days'. As such we believe it should be accepted.

The theme of 'third day': a climactic reversal, usually involving a death of judicial punishment, or the escape from likely death

Turning to the second group of data (with the time margin 'third day'), there were seventeen passages. However, we have already argued the need to treat Gen 1:13 separately, due its different genre, lack of article in the phrase 'third day', and

⁴¹ This excludes Lev 7:17, being part of the 'law' genre.

likely different use of the word 'day'. We will also remove Hos 6:2 and Num 19:12 from our summary treatment, because of their different genres, that of prophetic prediction and law respectively. This leaves us with fourteen passages in the genre of historical narrative.

The most general point appears to be that all fourteen passages have a climactic resolution on the third day, under the broad heading of a 'reversal'.

Of the fourteen, nine passages narrate the sparing of human life in the context of threatened death 'on the third day' (Gen 22:4, 40:12, 42:17, Exod 19:11, Josh 9:17, Judg 20:30, 1 Sam 30:1, 2 Kgs 20:5, Esth 4:16). These constitute a climactic reversal from death to life. Four passages have not just the threat of death but death itself on that day (Gen 34:25, 40:12, 2 Sam 1:2, 1 Kgs 3:18). These constitute a climactic reversal from life to death. Of the remaining two passages, the subjects of Rehoboam expect a lighter yoke, but in the climax, this is reversed into a heavier yoke on the third day (1 Kgs 12:5, 12). In Gen 31:22, Laban sets out, seemingly to attack Jacob on the third day. This can be seen as a reversal in that Laban and Jacob were previously at peace with each other. It may also be seen as the climax resulting from Jacob's flight.

The second point is to underline that nearly all the passages involve someone's death, or an escape from death (12 out of 14). Under this heading, we note that three of the four deaths are judicial punishments, in that they are executed with respect of a prior offense (Gen 34:25, 40:12, 2 Sam 1:2). So there is a hint that the reversal can involve a judicial death. Thus our first suggestion for the 'third day' theme is this: a climactic reversal, usually involving a death of judicial punishment, or the escape from likely death.

The third point we wish to make is that this theme is so overwhelming in the data that the careful OT reader will look for life and death reversals in the ‘third day’ passages where life and death are not explicitly in the balance. For example, the careful OT reader will have the feeling that Jacob’s life was in danger, as Laban set out to chase him (Gen 31:22), since the chase began on the third day. There is implicit support for this in Laban’s explicit threat of harm in 31:29, but the ‘third day’ time margin strengthens this considerably. In the story of Rehoboam’s verdict, the ‘third day’ time margin gives the sense that lives are in the balance as Rehoboam declares that ‘his little finger is thicker’ than his ‘father’s waist’ (1 Kgs 12:20). Again, there is implicit support for this in the death that quickly followed Rehoboam’s decision (12:18) and in the war that nearly broke out (12:21-24).

The two themes are not mutually exclusive

Before progressing, we should underline that the two separate themes we have identified in the ‘three days’ and ‘third day’ passages are not mutually exclusive. The two different time margins have much in common, and should not be totally divorced from one another.

This is clear first of all in that some of the passages we surveyed contained both the ‘third day’ and the ‘three days’ time margin (e.g. Gen 40, Josh 9).

Second, our themes also overlap in that there are numerous passages in the first survey which fit the theme of the second, and vice versa. Consider these examples from the first survey which fit the theme of the second: Israel are rescued from likely death from thirst after three days (Exod 15:22). The spies escape a likely death after hiding for three days (Josh 2:16). The Egyptian slave is spared, rather than killed after a three-day period (1 Sam 30:12). 2 Sam 20:4 contains a judicial death sentence after a three-day period. Jonah is saved from death after a three-day period

(Jonah 1:17). Consider also these examples from the second survey which fit the pattern of the first: In Gen 34:25, Simeon and Levi can be seen to attack the Hivites on the third day in order to give sufficient time for the circumcisions to be completed. The three-day time period before cleansing in Num 19:12 can be seen as ‘sufficient time for certainty’ that due punishment has been borne, or ‘sufficient time for certainty’ that uncleanness is ready to be expunged.

Third, our two themes overlap in that they can be integrated conceptually. So we have seen that a three-day period often functions as a requisite period for certainty regarding a given outcome. However, this does not exclude a climactic reversal at the end of the three-day period. Indeed, in many narratives, precisely this occurs, and a climactic reversal follows a period which represented some kind of ‘safety margin’. See for example Gen 34:25, Exod 15:22, Josh 2:16, 1 Sam 30:12, Jonah 1:17,.

‘Third Day’ is not the only device used to narrate life and death events

The reader should not understand from our synthesis that the ‘third day’ time margin is the *only* device which the OT uses to narrate life and death events. A few examples should make this clear. First, in Gen 32-33 a day-night-day time sequence is used to narrate the climax and reversal where Jacob’s life is spared by Esau (Gen 32:1, 32:13, 32:22, 32:31-33:4) . Second, in 1 Kgs 18:43, a seven-fold return of Elijah’s servant to look at the sea is the device used to show climax and reversal, where God sends rain and lives are saved from famine. Third, in 2 Kgs 19:35, God intervenes directly through an angel ‘that night’ to save the city of Jerusalem from death at the hands of Sennacherib. This is another climax and reversal involving lives being saved. Thus the OT has an arsenal of narrative techniques which convey

climactic reversals of somebody's fate, from death to life. The point we are making is that the time margin 'third day' is a very significant component of this arsenal.

We turn now to consider the time margins 'two days', 'four days', 'second day', and 'fourth day', in order to establish a control against which our findings on 'three days' and 'third day' can be measured.

'The Second Day' and 'Two Days'

While the OT has 69 references to the 'third day' or 'three days' (excluding those used in dates), there are only 14 references to the 'second day' or 'two days' (Gen 1:8, Exod 16:29, Num 7:18, Num 9:22, 11:19, 29:17, Josh 6:14, 10:32, Judg 20:24, 2 Sam. 1:1, Esth 7:2, 9:27, Ezek 43:22, Hos 6:2).

Gen 1:8 speaks of the second of the seven creation days. We have discussed our view of the creation days above. In particular, we discussed the distinctive use of 'day' at this point. It is sufficient to repeat that the climax of this narrative is the seventh day, not the second (or third) day. In Exod 16:29, Moses tells the Israelites that they will be given bread 'for two days'. This reference serves to explain how God is enforcing the Sabbath (the seventh day rest) in his distribution of manna. The two-day supply of bread highlights a seven-day pattern, since the extra bread is given the day before the Sabbath in order that the Israelites rest on the seventh day. Num 7:18 and 29:17 occur in lists where 'third day' and 'fourth day' are also mentioned, and where there is no important difference between what happens on the second, third and fourth days (Num 7:24, Num 29:20). The twelfth day is the climax of the list in Num 7:24, while the seventh day is the climax in Num 29:20. In Josh 6:14, 'the second day' is referring to one of the days when the Israelites circled Jericho as part of their siege. It is mentioned to highlight that this was the regular practice for the Israelites for the first six days of the siege, with the climax being the seventh day, not

the second. As such, there is nothing distinctive about the second day, for the distinction rests with the seventh day. In Josh 10:32, Joshua takes the city of Lachish on the second day.⁴² He puts everyone in the city to the sword. During this narrative, the point seems to be the speed with which Joshua is conquering. The speedy two-day conquest contrasts with the seven days which it took to conquer Jericho (Josh 6:15). Judg 20:24 is part of the story where the Benjamites were being attacked because Gibeah had raped and murdered the Levite's concubine. But the climax here is not the second day. Rather, the second day is the same as the first day, when the Benjamite army overcame the Israelites. It is the third day when the Benjamites are defeated, thus the distinction is with the third day. In 2 Sam 1:1, no event is mentioned at all on the second day, merely that David stayed two days in Ziklag. The two days mentioned in this verse highlight the next story, which occurs 'on the third day' (2 Sam 1:2). In Ezek 43:22, a male goat, a young bull and a ram are to be offered as sacrifices on the second day. This is also to occur every day for seven days (43:25). As such, there is nothing distinctive about the second day, but the distinction is with the seventh day. We will discuss Hos 6:2 below, given its different genre, but the point to note is that the phrase 'after two days' in Hos 6:2 is used as a foil for the statement that 'on the third day he will raise us up'.

In summary, all these references focus attention *away* from the second day or the two-day period, and toward the third, seventh or twelfth day. We are left with only four references to consider.

⁴² M. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*. (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1981), 182, does not comment on 'the second day' at this point. The rhetorical use of numbers is not part of his interest. The same is true of T. Butler, *Joshua*. (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 118-119, whose interest is in the historical veracity of the account. This point could be made over and over again with respect of the different passages I am considering, in terms of the rhetorical use of time margins. Commentaries are interested in historicity, authorship, characterization, redaction, and many other things, but almost never in the rhetorical impact of numerical time margins. Further examples, somewhat randomly, include A. Cundall and L. Morris, *Judges and Ruth* (Leicester: IVP, 1968), 166, R. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (Waco: Word Publishers, 1987), 153-159, J. Baldwin, *Esther* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), 91, 109. It does not seem necessary or prudent to extend this list further.

In Num 11:19, we read the following saying: ‘You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days.’ Clearly no event on the second day is being described. Num 9:22 is similar. In Esth 7:2, the second day is the day when Esther petitions the king for her life and the life of her people. It may be the case that her deliverance should be seen as a swift one in light of the preponderance of three day events in the OT (two days being less than three). The same applies to the subsequent military deliverance which is celebrated at Purim (Esth 9:27). Whether or not this is true, it should be clear that the references to ‘second day’ and ‘two days’ do not present a theme of their own, but often have rhetorical impact through their relation to three and seven day periods or events. Further, the relative scarcity of ‘two days’ and ‘second day’ relative to ‘three days’ and ‘third day’ (14 verses 69) is sufficient by itself to underscore the importance of the time margins ‘three days’ and ‘third day’.

‘The Fourth Day’ and ‘Four Days’

When it comes to the ‘fourth day’, or ‘four days’, there are only 8 references, excluding references to dates: (Gen 1:19, Num 7:30, 29:23, Judg 11:40, 14:15, 19:5, 2 Chron 20:26, Ezra 8:33). Gen 1:19 is the fourth day within the creation account, where the emphasis falls on the seventh day. Num 7:30 and 29:23 occur in lists where ‘third day’ and ‘fifth day’ are also mentioned, and where there is no important difference between what happens on the third, fourth and fifth day. The twelfth day is the climax of the list in Num 7:30, while the seventh day is the climax in Num 29:23. In Judg 11:40, the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite is commemorated for four days each year, since she was sacrificed because of the oath of her father (Judg 11:30-31). It is hard to perceive any rhetorical effect in this use of ‘four days’. In Judg 14:15, the fourth day is the day Samson’s wife is threatened with death if she does not answer

the riddle which Samson has set for the Philistines. This ‘fourth day’ event brings the previous three day period into relief, as we argued above. Judg 19:5 tells of the Levite, who stayed with his father-in-law first three days, then four, then five, before finally leaving the night after the fifth day. The emphasis falls perhaps on the five-day stay, or perhaps on the three day initial stay, but certainly not on the fourth day. In 2 Chron 20:26, the fourth day is the day when Jehoshaphat and his men give praise to God for the victory and spoils they have just won, after they had defeated Moab and Ammon. Again, the reference to the fourth day comes immediately after a ‘three-day’ event (2 Chron 20:25), and we suggested above how this time margin might work rhetorically in the narrative. In Ezra 8:33, the fourth day occurs after a rest of three days, the latter time margin being the significant one. We also discussed the rhetorical effect of this three day reference above.

These passages are striking in their scarcity relative to the ‘third day’ events, and by the fact that they are often used to bring three-day or seven-day periods into focus.

The same points could be made regarding the fifth and sixth days. Thus the third day stands out markedly as a day of great theological significance in the OT. Even if the reader rejects our suggestions for the ‘third day’ and ‘three days’ themes, some explanation is required for the preponderance of ‘three days’ and ‘third day’ time margins relative to that of ‘two days’, ‘second day’, ‘fourth day’ and ‘four days’.

In critique, the reader may be tempted to ask why there any references at all to ‘second day’, or ‘fourth day’, if God (or the human authors) intended a bold theology of the third day? Our first answer is that the ‘third day’ pattern should not disqualify God from allowing some events to occur on the second or fourth days. Nor should it disqualify the authors from recording events on the second or fourth days. Our second

answer is that the relative preponderance of ‘three days’ and ‘third day’ time margins is sufficient to gain the reader’s attention – a complete monopoly of references is not necessary to achieve the desired result.

Answering some objections

What should we make of these patterns? Perhaps nothing. Some possible objections need to be dealt with before we can conclude with confidence. The reader might contend that when a narrative provides a time margin – any time margin – then we expect an event. Further, in Hebrew narrative, we often expect a climactic event. Further still, most climactic events in the OT salvation history will tend to be life and death matters. So perhaps the ‘third day’ pattern above is a pattern found throughout the OT with time margins, and we should not make anything of it with this time margin. A similar argument could be made against our finding with the ‘three days’ time margin.

To address this question, we surveyed all the references to מחרת ‘the next day’, contained in historical narrative (Gen 19:34, Exod 9:6, 18:13, 32:6, 30, Num 11:32, 16:41, 17:8, 33:3, Josh 5:11, Judg 6:38, 9:42, 21:4, 1 Sam 5:3, 11:11, 18:10, 20:27, 30:17, 31:8, 2 Sam 11:12, 2 Kgs 8:15, 1 Chron 10:8, 29:21, Jonah 4:7). These provide a good sample of random events which have a time margin. Of the twenty-four passages covered by this survey, all but two (Exod 18:13, 2 Sam 11:12) could be described as climactic in some way. Twelve could be described as ‘climactic reversals’ (Exod 9:6, Exod 32:6, Num 16:41, Judg 9:42, Judg 21:4, 1 Sam 5:3, 11:11, 18:10, 20:27, 30:17, 2 Kgs 8:15, Jonah 4:7). A further five recorded human death (Num 16: 41, Judg 9:42, 1 Sam 11:9, 30:17, 2 Kgs 8:15). In three passages, a death threat was present (Josh 5:11, 1 Sam 18:10, 1 Sam 20:27). Two of these three death threats were resolved that same day (Josh 5:11, 1 Sam 18:10).

There are five points to make related to this survey. First, the large number of ‘climactic’ events underlines that any passage with a time margin is likely to mark a significant event. Second it is clear that many such significant OT events are ‘reversals’, and many are life and death events. Thus we saw 12 passages which were ‘reversals’, and 8 examples of life and death events, out of 24 passages sampled. Third, this survey underscores that ‘third day’ time margins are *doubly* significant. This is illustrated by the 12 out of 14 ‘third day’ life and death events, considerably more frequent than 8 out of 24 such events on the ‘next day’. Fourth, we note that the other elements of the ‘third day’ data do not stand out. It is a close run thing that 5 out of 24 ‘next day’ passages record human death, compared with 4 out of 14 ‘third day’ passages, so the life to death theme on the third day does not stand out as much as the death to life theme. Also, the hint that the ‘third day’ deaths are particularly judicial is no more than a hint, since there are 2 out of 5 implicit ‘next day’ judicial sentences compared with 3 out of 4 such events explicit on the ‘third day’. Fifth, the most significant result is that 9 out of 14 ‘third day’ passages have a death threat removed on that day, while this is true for only 2 out of 24 of the ‘next day’ passages.

This last point is sufficient to dispose of the objection that the ‘third day’ data is no different from data with any other time margin. Further, it helps us to focus on where ‘the third day’ material stands out relative to other material (with a time margin) in the OT. Based on this survey, we can confidently say that the most striking element of the ‘third day’ passages is the idea of ‘death threat removed’. This part of the ‘third day’ data would be particularly highlighted in a reader’s mind, because these relatively unusual events, of the same character, keep happening ‘on the third day’. This is a partial vindication of the rabbinic motif that the third day is the day of salvation for the righteous. It is a vindication, since the ‘day of salvation’ theme well

captures the ‘third day’ reversals from death to life. The vindication is only partial, because this salvation is not always for the ‘righteous’, as the Genesis Rabbah⁴³ has it, nor for ‘Israel’ as the Esther Rabbah⁴⁴ has it. Rather, the Egyptian cup-bearer is saved on the third day (Gen 40), as is the Egyptian slave (1 Sam 30), as are the Gibeonites (Josh 9). Therefore it is better to say that the data points to salvation for members of all nations on the third day.

However, we should not exclude the pattern of death from the ‘third day’ pattern, since the deaths on the third day would no doubt stick in the reader’s mind as part of the ‘third day’ phenomenon. They are numerous enough (within the ‘third day’ sample) to make an impact, once the reader has noticed that ‘the third day’ is a significant marker of associated content. The hint that 3 out of 4 deaths are judicial may also stay in a reader’s mind.

In summary, we have not only disposed of this objection for the ‘third day’ time margin, but we have established that the ‘third day’ pattern stands out within the OT, and that this pattern has four elements, in descending order of importance. **The first element of the pattern is the recurrence of a climactic reversal on the third day. The second element is the prominence of reversals from death to life. The third, less prominent element is the pattern of reversals from life to death. The fourth, speculative element is the hint of a judicial nature to such deaths.**

Turning to the ‘three days’ time margin, it is hard to find a single alternate time margin to use as a control. We considered again our surveys of ‘the next day’, ‘two days’, and ‘four days’, and we could not find any passage which explicitly conveyed the idea of ‘sufficient for certainty’. However, ‘the next day’ is not a period in time, but a point in time, and ‘two days’ and ‘four days’ provide a limited sample

⁴³ Rabbah on Genesis 2, 843.

⁴⁴ Rabbah on Esther, 112.

size. Therefore this consideration provides evidence – but only *limited* evidence - that the ‘sufficient for certainty’ is an unusual idea, in terms of its association with time margins.

But we must address another objection before we continue. One might ask whether the prevalence of the use of ‘three’ in the OT merely represents the love of the number three in the contemporary Ancient Near East. For three is a significant number for the religions of the ANE. ‘Triads of gods are found in Babylonia (Anu, Bel, Ea), Egypt (Isis, Osiris, Horus) and Greece (Zeus, Poseidon, Hades), corresponding to the realms of heaven, earth and the underworld’⁴⁵. A possible reason for this can be found in R. Harris’ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. It is suggested that ‘as the number of the smallest plurality, three was appropriate as representing an innermost circle of friends or followers’.⁴⁶ Since the number two in Hebrew and other ANE languages is dual, the number three is the first number with plurality, and this may help to explain this religious usage, and also other usages. The implication, a critic might say, is that the OT authors were conscious of various rhetorical possibilities surrounding the number three, thus making the number prominent in their writings.

But even if we concede that the *reason* for the use of three may be grounded in the ANE love of the number, this does not negate our conclusion. The *literary result* of the frequent and focussed use of the number three is to draw attention to the characteristics associated with the phrases ‘third day’ and ‘three days’. This is true irrespective of the ANE use of the number three, or the reasons for that usage.

A further objection we wish to address comes from the major work on biblical numerology by John Davis. In *Biblical Numerology*, Davis argues that the only

⁴⁵ P. Jenson, ‘שָׁלוֹשׁ / שְׁלֹשָׁה’, *NIDOTTE*, 4:144-145.

⁴⁶ R. Harris, ‘shalosh’, *TWOT* 2:933.

number in the biblical literature which conveys symbolism is the number seven.⁴⁷ He states that seven ‘is the only number which appears to be used symbolically with any consistency in the contemporary extra-biblical literature’. He argues that since Scripture does not explicitly divulge the symbolic meaning of any number, the only valid method is to sample every occurrence of a number. Thus he says of the number three,

When all the occurrences of the number three are studied, the most one could say for its symbolism is that it conveys the idea of “completeness”. This number may have conveyed this concept because of the nature of common triads with which everyone was familiar.⁴⁸

He goes on to dismiss those who make more of the number three’s symbolism in the bible:

J. Edwin Gartill, for example, says that three is the number of “...union, approval, approbation, co-ordination, completeness, and perfection.” [...] It appears that there are almost as many different interpretations of the number three as there are interpreters [...] The system of symbolic numbers, as used in the Christian church must be regarded as a post-Apostolic development. Most of the meanings adopted today for the symbolic numbers are those that were proposed by the Church Fathers. And one should remember that Augustine, along with the other fathers, was strongly influenced by the early Gnostic

⁴⁷ J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology: A Basic Study of the use of Numbers in the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 115-124.

⁴⁸ Davis, *Biblical Numerology*, 120.

heresies and Pythagorean theories with regard to symbolic numerology.⁴⁹

We may therefore seem to disagree with Davis, by suggesting a theme behind the phrase ‘third day’ and ‘three days’? How can we avoid Davis’ critique? First, we note that our question is different from his. He considered only the symbolism of the number three, while we have limited ourselves to a much narrower set - ‘three days’ and ‘the third day’. Second, we have avoided his critique of being selective, by sampling *every* occurrence of these two phrases. Third, the results in our sample are much more striking than for the cardinal number three considered alone. One place to see this is in the frequency of usage. For the cardinal numbers two, three and four, the Old Testament frequency (in the Hebrew) is 772⁵⁰, 605⁵¹ and 456⁵² respectively. This is a distribution we would expect, with the smaller numbers used more frequently than the larger numbers. This was not the case with third day and three days, as we have already shown. The respective frequencies of two, three and four in our study was 14, 69, and 8. On this basis alone our case for symbolism is very much stronger than the case for the cardinal number three. Fourth, Davis’ suggestion that three conveys the idea of ‘completeness’ is close to our suggestion that ‘three days’ can imply ‘sufficient time for certainty’. The ‘sufficient time for certainty’ motif often means that there has been sufficient time to be sure that an event is *complete*. Thus Davis can be seen to support our thesis.

⁴⁹ Davis, *Biblical Numerology*, 121.

⁵⁰ E. Goodrick and J. Kohlenberger III, *Zondervan NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 1503.

⁵¹ E. Goodrick and J. Kohlenberger III, *Exhaustive Concordance*, 1501.

⁵² E. Goodrick and J. Kohlenberger III, *Exhaustive Concordance*, 1370.

Further consideration of ‘the third day’

Having cleared some objections, it is worth restating our finding regarding ‘the third day’ before considering it further. We have found that there is a pattern in the way that OT historical narratives use the term ‘on the third day’. The first element of the pattern is the recurrence of a climactic reversal on the third day. The second element is the prominence of reversals from death to life. The third, less prominent element is the pattern of reversals from life to death. The fourth, speculative element is the hint of a judicial nature to such deaths.

Can we be more concise than this? When these four factors are considered together, the concept of ‘resurrection day’ presents itself as a good way to describe this data, by way of analogy. To be clear, we are not speaking about identity at this point. But the resurrection day, as depicted in Daniel 12:1-3 has common elements with our ‘third day’ pattern.

‘At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people-- everyone whose name is found written in the book-- will be delivered. ² Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

At the resurrection the leading emphasis is that of a climactic reversal, since the dead are permanently animated. Further, it is a day of salvation, since many are

saved from death, and are given everlasting life (12:2). However the outcome is not good for all people, as some awake to ‘shame and everlasting contempt’ (12:2). There is a hint of a judicial result here, since those who rise to shame are also the ones who have not ‘led many to righteousness’. All of these items may also be asserted of our ‘third day’ data, considered as a group.

To illustrate, consider the story of the cup-bearer and the baker (Gen 40). By analogy, we may say that Genesis 40 is ‘resurrection-like’, where the cup-bearer represents the resurrection to life, in that he is rescued from death. The baker represents the resurrection to shame and contempt, in that he is sentenced to death on account of his offending the king of Egypt (Gen. 40:1).

Hosea 6:2

Having done this work with the ‘third day’ and ‘three days’ narratives, we can now turn to the prophetic prediction made in Hosea 6:2, which we have left to one side until now.

Hosea 6:2 comes after a chapter of judgment directed at Ephraim and Judah. Future judgment was promised against Ephraim in 5:9. Judah’s leaders were promised God’s wrath in 5:10. In 5:14, God says that he will tear Ephraim and Judah to pieces like a lion. Our passage comes as a promise looking beyond that time of judgment. Hosea says:

Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn
us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and
he will bind us up. ² After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live
before him. (Hos 6:1-2)

We note four arguments that קוּם in verse 2 should have the sense of raising from the dead. First, קוּם can validly be used in this way, since it means ‘raising from the dead’ in Ps 88:10, Is 26:19, Amos 5:2 and elsewhere. Second, the promise that the LORD would tear Ephraim like a lion has the sense of death about it, since one does not normally survive being torn by a lion. Thus a resurrection is required to revive the corpse. Third, the connection between the verb קוּם ‘raise up’ in 2b and חַיָּה ‘live’ in 2c suggests a prior death, unless the opposition in 2c is focussed on ‘before him’.

So D. Stuart helpfully says of this verse:

“The first two verbs (חַיָּה, piel, and קוּם, hiphil) here in chiastic parallel, clearly denote coming back to life from the dead, a theme already expressed in 2:2, and analogous (as in 2:1–3) to Ezek 37:6, 10, 12–14. The attempts of Wolff (117–18) and others to eliminate the concept of resurrection from the verse are unsuccessful.⁵³

Fourth, the parallel poetry is important for our purposes, because the pattern in verse 1 can be used in verse 2 to show that the emphasis falls on what will happen on the third day, rather than on the second day. Consider the first line, ‘he has torn us, that he may heal us’. The preliminary statement is that ‘he has torn us’, while the climactic prediction is that he will ‘heal us’. Similarly in the second line, the preliminary statement is that ‘he has struck us down’, while the climactic prediction is that ‘he will bind us up’. If we follow this pattern into verse 2, the preliminary

⁵³ D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*. (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 108. Note that Hos 2:1-3 in the MT (to which Stuart refers) maps onto Hosea 1:10-2:1 in the NIV.

statement is ‘after two days he will revive us’, while the climactic prediction is ‘on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him’. The reference to two days thus serves to bring attention to the main point, which is the point about the third day. This follows a pattern which we have observed in the narrative sections of the OT, namely that the second day is often used to highlight events on the third day.

Given that the focus rests here on the third day, the OT narrative associations of the ‘third day’ come to rest on this passage. Thus we can incorporate all the work we have done so far, the implication being that this passage is speaking about a climactic reversal from death to life. Thus a resurrection from the dead comes firmly into view in this passage.

These considerations seem sufficient to negate H. Wolff’s assertion that ‘these verses concern one who has been wounded but is still alive.’⁵⁴ Our preliminary work with the OT historical narratives does much to bolster the argument of Stuart in this regard.

The Resurrection of the Christ on the Third Day

So how does this help us to understand Paul’s claim in 1 Cor 15:4b, that the Christ had to rise on the third day, according to the Scriptures? In light of our study from Genesis to Jonah, ‘three days’ conveys the idea of ‘sufficient time for certainty’. That is, first, the three days in the tomb were sufficient to be sure that Jesus was dead. Second, the resurrection of Jesus exemplifies the OT pattern of God’s involvement with people ‘on the third day’. Here is another climactic reversal from death to life on the third day. Here is the most important element of a pattern which culminates in a theological sense in Daniel 12:1-3.

⁵⁴ H. Wolff, *Hosea*. (trans. G. Stansell. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 117-118.

Κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς ‘according to the Scriptures’ in 1 Cor 15:4b should therefore not be understood to say that the Old Testament *predicts* the resurrection of the Christ on the third day. Rather we understand Paul’s teaching to mean that Jesus’ third day resurrection is in perfect harmony with the Old Testament. His third day resurrection is part of a pattern of ‘third day’ reversals from death to life. So rather than a prediction, we might speak of a *suggestion* which the Old Testament makes. If an astute OT reader were asked ‘when do you think the Christ would rise’, he would not say ‘certainly on the third day’, but rather, ‘I suppose the third day fits the pattern best’.

Our thesis that the ‘third day’ in 1 Cor 15:4b works by analogy with the OT historical narratives is strengthened by Matthew 12:40. Jesus there draws the analogy between the three days and nights of Jonah and the three days and nights of Jesus’ burial. Jesus points to an analogy, not to a prophetic prediction, with respect of the third day. This underscores that there is more than Hosea 6:2 behind the OT’s suggestion of Christ’s third day resurrection. This project has underlined that there are many other OT analogies that Jesus could also have chosen (contra Dodd and Evans).

In the end, however, Hosea 6:2 stands out from the other testimonies. Hosea gives us an explicit link between resurrection and the third day, where the narratives only give us a link by analogy. Hosea 6:2 draws upon and enriches the ‘third day’ narrative theme in a way which we might say Paul has copied.

Our conclusion is therefore that the third day resurrection of Christ is suggested by the OT Scriptures in general, with a special focus on Hosea 6:2.

Implications of this Study

What implications might we take from this study? First and most obviously, we have given a coherent answer to the referent of ‘according to the Scriptures’ in 1 Cor 15:4b. We have shown that it is not necessary or preferable to follow Metzger’s interpretation of the verse. Rather, the OT Scriptures in general, with a special focus on Hosea 6:2, testify that the ‘third day’ is the day of resurrection.

Second, our study gives added warrant to the Christian case apologetically. For we have shown that a significant part of the claim about Jesus was grounded in a ‘fitting’ way in advance of his coming. It is a very important testable claim that the Old Testament paves the way for understanding the person and work of Jesus. It is very important that this OT foundation agrees with the eyewitness accounts of his life, death and resurrection. This is a testable conclusion of a kind not available in any other religion. We have sought to bolster this claim. As such we have sought to bolster the case to accept Christ and to reject other religions or worldviews.

Third, we have contributed to the understanding of the resurrection saying about Jonah in Matthew 12:40. It is not necessary to follow Landes when he says that Jonah’s three days in the whale illustrated a journey to the ‘chthonic depths of the underworld’.⁵⁵ Neither is it necessary to transfer this understanding to Christ. The point is simply that both Jonah and Jesus spent enough time in the ‘heart of the earth’ that one could be sure they were dead. Except in both cases this is the wrong conclusion.

Fourth, we have shown how the theme surrounding ‘three days’ can be used with effect to draw out rhetorical meaning from some Old Testament historical narratives. As an important example, debate has long raged over the manner in which

⁵⁵ Landes, ‘Jonah 2:1’, 449.

Esther contributes to the biblical canon.⁵⁶ Our study shows one way that Esther's location in the canon can draw out its theology, since Esther's 'third day' and 'three days' time margins are informed by those time margins in the rest of the OT, and by the resurrection of Jesus.

Fifth, Esther's participation in the 'third day' time margin data might be used to bolster its place in the canon. If it could be shown that ancient extra-biblical sources do not link the 'third day' time margin with concepts of 'climactic reversal from death to life', this would constitute an argument for Esther's place in the canon. For Esther would then contribute to an OT theme in a fashion unknown outside the bible.

⁵⁶ See, for example, B. Webb, *Five Festal Garments*. (Leicester: Apollos, 2000), 126.

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