

# The Third Day: Resurrection Patterns in the Hebrew Bible

by Paul Sumner



“If a man dies, will he live again?”

(Job 14:14)

“The righteous has a refuge when he dies.”

(Proverbs 14:32b)

“Let us return to YHVH...he will raise us up on the third day.”

(Hosea 6:1, 2)

IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15, Paul makes a perplexing statement about Yeshua: "He was buried and raised on the third day [te hemera te trite] according to the Scriptures" (v. 4).

It's perplexing because there is no explicit prediction in the Hebrew Bible about the Messiah dying and rising on the third day. Where did Paul get the idea? Did he have a different version of the Tanakh than we have? Did he make it up from his own imagination in order to deceive people ignorant of the Bible?

Paul is actually alluding to comments made by Yeshua.

Then [Yeshua] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day [te trite hemera]" (Luke 24:46).

Yeshua repeatedly predicted he would die and lie in the earth for three days and three nights before being raised up by God (Matthew 12:40; 16:21; 17:23).

This passage then is the source of Paul's statement. But it doesn't solve the puzzle. Where is it *written* in Scripture about the Messiah rising on the third day?

### **To Open What is Written**

Since no passage *literally* contains this idea, we must look for other ways in which the prophecy may be "written."

Note that Yeshua "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." He didn't merely quote chapter and verse proof-texts. He expanded their understanding of biblical truths in ways previously closed. He was interpreting the Bible to them.

That's what we must do as well. But since we don't have records of what he specifically taught his disciples on this subject, we have to proceed carefully. Our interpretations must remain proposals, nothing more. We can't be dogmatic about our puzzle solutions.

I propose a partial solution based on three observations.

The **first** is the pattern of events that occur on "the third day" in the Hebrew Bible.

The **second** is the biblical declaration that Israel as a people is God's son (Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1).

The **third** is that Yeshua identified himself with Israel. What is said about the nation can be applied to him.

## Third Day Events

In the following passages, notice what occurs on Yom Shlishi, the Third Day.

1) **On the third day** — "the earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit." (Genesis 1:12)

2) **On the third day** — "Abraham looked up and saw the place [Mount Moriah] from afar." There he intends to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering to God. Yet he assures his companions, "We will worship *and return*." (Genesis 22:4-5)

3) **On the third day** — Pharaoh releases his chief cupbearer from death-row. (Genesis 40:20-21)

4) **On the third day** — Joseph releases his brothers from prison in Egypt. (Genesis 42:17-18)

5) **On the third day** — The Israelites request Pharaoh's permission to make a three-day journey to offer sacrifice in the desert to God. (Exodus 3:18)

6) **On the third day** — Plague Nine, the Plague of Darkness, in Egypt ends, "though the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings." (Exodus 10:22)

7) **On the third day** — God descends to Mount Sinai in fire with the sound of a shofar. He then reveals The Ten Words, Israel's constitution of new life as a nation after their resurrection from the death of slavery in Egypt. (Exodus 19:16-19)

8) **On the third day** — Israelites are to purify themselves with water after being in contact with the dead. (Numbers 19:12)

9) **On the third day** — After coming to the river and preparing themselves, the Israelites cross the Jordan "to enter and possess the land that the LORD [their] God is giving to [them] as a possession." (Joshua 1:11; 3:2)

10) **On the third day** — Joshua's spies emerge from hiding from the Jerichoites, then return to their commander. (Joshua 2:16, 22)

11) **On the third day** — after asking God for release, King Hezekiah is healed of his fatal disease and offers thanks in the temple. (2 Kings 20:5)

12) **On the third day** — Jonah is expelled from the fish belly. (Jonah 1:17/2:1 Heb) (Matt 12:40; cf. Matt 16:21; 17:23)

13) **On the third day** — After fasting, Esther puts on royal apparel and enters the palace of the Persian king in order to thwart a death-plot against her people, the Jews. (Esther 4:16; 5:1)

Note also similar events in the **third** year:

14) **In the third year [day]** — a famine during David's reign ends. (2 Samuel 21:1). [Years often parallel days; 40 years = 40 days in wilderness.]

15) **In the third year [day]** — a famine called for by Elijah the prophet ends. (1 Kings 18:1)

### **Summary of Third Day Patterns**

In this patterns we see the following:

The two days leading up to the third day are a time of

- concealment, seclusion, "burial" (#3, 4, 6, 8, 12, 14, 15)
- preparation to serve or meet God (1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13)
- testing, discerning, approaching a verdict: death or acquittal (3, 4, 6, 11, 12, 14, 15)

The third day is one of

- emergence from circumstances of lifelessness (prison, captivity, famine, illness, or ocean fish)

- testing situations when a life is put on the line but obedience wins unexpected reversal and deliverance
- appearance of new life after concealment or death
- sprouting life from the new earth
- revival, healing, or restoration of life

Thus the third day is a transition moment of release from realms of death or emergence of new life.

## **God Kills His Son, Then Raises Him**

There is a third day passage that can be more directly connected to Yeshua. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Israel is God's son.

Exodus 4:22 — "Thus says the LORD, 'Israel is my son, my first-born.'"

Deuteronomy 14:1 — "You are the sons of the LORD your God."

But over time, family presumption takes over. "Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have revolted against me" (Isaiah 1:2).

The prophet Hosea likewise reminds the nation of their familial identity. Speaking with God's voice, he says: "When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (11:1). This reminder amplifies the pathos of the divine decision: Israel was born a son by emerging from Egypt. **Now Israel, the son of God, must die.**

This will occur because of his unrelenting rebellion against his Father. In blood-freezing detail, God promises ultimate chastisement of his children:

I will be like a lion to Ephraim,  
 And like a young lion to the house of Judah.  
 I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away ...  
 I will go away and return to my place  
 Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face.  
 (Hosea 13:7-8; 5:14-15)

Such a prophecy shocks us. What could be more horrifying than death at the hands of your father? Fatal prophecies however often contain hope. For not

even death at the terrible hands of his Father can utterly separate Israel from God.

Hosea consoles:

Come, let us return to the LORD.

For he has torn us, but he will heal us;

He has wounded us, but he will bandage us.

He will revive us after two days;

**He will raise us up on the third day**

That we may live before him....

He will come to us like the rain,

Like the spring rain watering the [dead] earth.

(Hosea 6:1-3)

Jewish translators of the Hebrew Bible into the Aramaic *targums*, saw in Hosea 6:2 an allusion to future resurrection: "He will give us life in the days of consolations that will come. **On the day of resurrection of the dead, he will raise us up and we shall live before him**" (Targum of the Minor Prophets). In another passage, God explicitly promises deliverance for Son-Israel.

I will ransom them from the power of Sheol;

I will redeem them **from death** [mi-mavet].

O Death, where are your thorns?

O Sheol, where is your sting? (Hosea 13:14)

After his son's death, the Father will raise him from the grave (the place of separation) on the third day. God's new life will be like spring rain.

## **Messiah is Israel Too**

In the ideology of the Tanakh, the Mashiach dwells within the defining circle of the name "Israel" [compare Isaiah 44:1-2 with 49:5-7]. There is a larger Israel and an inner Israel. Mashiach is inner Israel; he too is God's son.

As a family member, he experiences their sorrow, though not for his own sins. He suffers the chastisement due everyone else. "He was wounded because of our sins, crushed because of our iniquities ... the LORD visited upon him the

guilt of all of us" (Isaiah 53:5-6). This doesn't happen by accident: "the LORD was *pleased* to crush him" (v. 10).

So severe is the crushing that he dies: "He was cut off from the land of the living" (v. 8).

But even if he perishes (like his people) — being torn and crushed and murdered by the lion-God — he also basks in the life-warmth of the other, ultimate promises of God: "He will raise [me] up on the third day ... He will ransom [me] from death" — like his people.

Repeatedly, Yeshua foretold he was destined for suffering and death. Like the prophets of old, he would be rejected by the religious and political heads of Israel. Donning the mantle of the Servant of the LORD, he would become "the Despised One [bazoh nefesh], the One Abhorred [meta'ev] by the nation" (Isaiah 49:7).

But he knew there was more beyond the rejection and killing. He knew the entire Scripture. He knew the third day was coming.

### Where is it Written?

The scriptures about revival events on the Third Day and those about Son-Israel's revival on the third day all form a pattern.

God orchestrates dramatic things after two days. When the powers of *tohu vavohu*, chaos and void, darkness and death, seem indomitable, he disrupts them and establishes order. When all seems hopeless, he is the hope giver. The first two days don't tell the whole story. On the third, he writes the conclusion.

Is this **third day pattern** part of what Yeshua meant when he said "Thus it is written"? Is this what he opened the minds of his disciples to see? Perhaps.

We learn from careful study elsewhere that the spirit of prophecy breathes in ways we don't immediately comprehend. Prophecy is not mere pre-telling of events with indisputable dates and names. It's often an act of weaving patterns deep into the fabric of Scripture, only to one day see them appear in bold relief under new light.