

Passover 2010-009 and 010
The Conclusion and the
Beginning:
Firstfruits and Resurrection

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

The point is that the Christian Gospel is not simply the facts of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, but those facts understood in accordance with what the Scriptures say.

In other words, the death of Jesus has to be understood in accordance with what Scripture teaches about it--who this Jesus was who died, why his death was so important, what kind of death it was, and what it accomplished.

Likewise, the burial and the resurrection have to be understood in the way that Scripture teaches--what exactly it teaches about his resurrection, why it was important, what it proved, and how it relates to his exaltation to glory.

This would mean that we must first be clear on who Jesus is.

If he is not God manifest in the flesh, if he is not the divine Son of God, then his death would be at best a martyrdom, a great act of love and devotion--but it would not have saved anyone, it would not have made atonement.

This would also mean that we would have to be clear on why he suffered and died.

Scripture teaches that it was for our sins that he died (he did not deserve to die), the just for the unjust.

His death was a vicarious substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the world.

And Scripture also teaches that his death was an atonement.

In other words, it was not just a physical death.

For the divine Son to die was the equivalent of the human race suffering the second death, eternal separation from God.

Christ, the eternal one, was separated from the Father spiritually on our behalf when he died on the cross.

This would also mean that there was a complete death, and so he was buried.

He did not swoon, or faint, or go into a coma to be revived.

He died, and was buried.

It was a real death.

And if it was a real death, this would also mean that it was a real resurrection, one who was dead actually coming back to life.

The resurrection proved that his death was an atoning sacrifice, that it accomplished what it was to accomplish, and that it authenticated all of Christ's claims.

In our Passover study we focused on how the Hebrew Scriptures prophesied the death of the Messiah. In his prophecies Isaiah focused mostly on the suffering servant Messiah, but did not specifically teach the doctrine of the bodily resurrection, not as [Psalm 16](#) and [Daniel 12](#) so clearly describe such. But for Isaiah to speak of the exaltation of the Messiah after a suffering and death certainly assumes some kind of restoration to life, and that restoration is clearly explained in many other passages of the Bible.

The Gospel narratives record the resurrection appearances of Jesus after his death and burial; and the apostles taught very plainly this truth of the Christ-event: that Jesus who suffered and died for our sins actually rose from the dead, physically and not just spiritually, and appeared to the disciples and to larger groups of people in his resurrected body.

That body was similar, but different.

And the resurrection itself authenticated everything that Jesus had claimed about himself, and about his death, namely, that he was the Son of God who came into the world to die and also to conquer sin, death, and the grave, and bring immortality and eternal life to all who believe in him.

It should come as no surprise that this doctrine has been attacked more than most in the Christian faith-- just the idea that Jesus came back from the dead is a stumbling block to many. Modern theologians have tried to argue that the early Church simply made up the doctrine to give people hope and comfort, and then made it the foundation of their living faith. Others suggest that Jesus may not have been dead, but in a coma, and the cold tomb may have revived him. But the Scripture makes it clear, that he was actually dead, and buried (under guard), and that he rose from the dead; and the apostles rightly based the Christian faith on his death and resurrection.

Without the resurrection, Jesus died a martyr, a good man, a sample to his followers, but not as a Savior, and not as the incarnate God.

With the resurrection we have the guarantee that his death was more than this, and that we will be saved, resurrected, and exalted to glory with him.

Only Jesus could say, "I was dead, and am alive for ever more; and I have the keys of death and Hades" ([Rev. 1](#)).

In the resurrected Christ, then, we have the answer to all of the problems and difficulties that this life can afford--Christ has overcome them, because death has lost its sting.

Perhaps the clearest presentation of the doctrine of the resurrection is found in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul defends and explains it to the church at Corinth.

There were those teaching that there is no resurrection of the dead.

But Paul begins the chapter by reminding them of the Gospel, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures (15:3,4).

Elsewhere Paul had preached strongly from the Old Testament (Ps. 16) that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead (see Acts 13:13-48; and 23:1-11).

He then proceeded to remind them of all the appearances that Jesus made to people after his resurrection, so that there were abundant witnesses to the fact.

The Lord also appeared to him, Paul, as well (v. 5).

Paul's grand theme is announced in verse 20: "*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*"

First, this statement is the answer to the issues raised in verses 6-19--that is why it begins with "**but.**"

Paul had gone down the list to state what the case might be if there were no resurrection of the dead--those who had died were gone forever, Christ would still be dead, their preaching would be useless, people would still be in their sins and without hope, and they who proclaimed it would be false witnesses.

This is what it would mean if Christ did not rise from the dead.

But Paul declares, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.”

He was seen by scores of witnesses; it was a proven fact.

And now the declaration of verse 20 affirms that those who died in the faith are not lost forever, Christ is alive forever, the preaching of the Gospel was true and life-giving, and that believers were indeed forgiven for their sins and had the assurance of eternal life.

Second, Paul says that the resurrection of Christ is a **first** fruit.

He is here alluding to the Israelite festival of giving the first fruit of the harvest to the LORD (Lev. 23:9-14).

When the spring crops began to grow, the devout Israelite would watch the fields for the first shoots of wheat.

They would be given to the LORD as a token thank offering, and viewed by the worshiper as a pledge that a great harvest of wheat was to follow--this was the first.

Paul clearly is using the agricultural festival as an illustration of the resurrection, for he talks about planting the body in the ground when it dies, and in season a glorious new body rises from the ground; Jesus was the first to rise, and his resurrection is the harbinger that a whole harvest of people being raised will follow in God's plan.

But for Paul this is more than an illustration, it is a divinely foretold illustration, what we call a “type.” Biblical typology is a form of prophecy; it uses people, places and things as divinely intended revelations of the greater truths to come, the fulfillments.

But one does not know the item is a type until the fulfillment comes; then looking back, we can see what God had in mind all along (manna, the sacrifices, the tabernacle, etc).

Paul already knew that the Passover was a type of Christ’s death, for he declared “*Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us*” (1 Cor. 5:7).

in Leviticus 23:11, after the instructions about Passover, the text says the first fruit is to be presented (waved) before the LORD on the morning after the Sabbath after the Passover (verses 4-8)--that is Sunday morning.

The Church rightly saw the first fruit being fulfilled in Christ's resurrection from the dead on the first day of the week, the morning after the Saturday after the Passover.

And if it is the first--then there is a great harvest to follow, at the end of the age (1 Thess. 4:16).

Third, Paul says that he is the first fruit of those who **sleep**.

This is a figure for death--falling asleep. It is the way believers refer to death as a temporary aspect of their journey to God.

Jesus himself used the expression to describe the death of Lazarus ([John 11](#)), and when his disciples did not get the point, he explained that Lazarus was dead. In [Acts 7:54-60](#) Stephen was put to death at the hands of an angry mob.

But the chapter ends calmly by saying "he fell asleep." His death was cruel and violent, but it was a falling asleep in the Lord because the Lord has conquered death.

The verb “to sleep” in Greek is *koimao* (pronounced *koi-mah-o*); in the language a word can be changed with certain suffixes, and there is a suffix that is used that makes a noun of place; it is the suffix *-terion*.

The word *koimeterion* is a “sleeping place”; we use it for our word “cemetery.”

Those who believe in Jesus do not fear death, for it is a falling asleep in Jesus until the resurrection morning when he appears and the dead in Christ rise and with all who remain alive are transferred into the glorious estate of his presence.

LEVITICUS 23

10. *"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.*

*11. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on **the day after the Sabbath** the priest shall wave it.*

Now on the first day of the week [Sunday], very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Lk 24.1-3

The Feast of Firstfruits was a celebration of the firstfruits of the barley harvest. This was its agricultural significance. But, (as we shall discover), this celebration was destined to take on a further deeper meaning.

The barley harvest was the first harvest celebration of the year. Then counting out fifty days from firstfruits came the Feast of Pentecost. This celebrated the beginning of the wheat harvest.

THE FESTIVAL OF FIRST FRUITS

In the process of revealing His plan of salvation for mankind, God established His annual Holy Days around the harvest seasons in the Middle East (Leviticus 23:9-16, Exodus 23:14-16). Just as His people harvested their crops around these three Festival seasons, God's Holy Days show us how He is harvesting people for eternal life in His Kingdom. The Holy Days have meanings that build upon each other. Together they progressively reveal how God works with humanity.

THE SPRING FEASTS ARE FULFILLED IN THE NEW COVENANT

In the three spring feasts we see the redemption story of our Saviour as it emerged into history nearly two millennia ago. Our Lord Jesus personally fulfilled all three of those spring feasts. They were accurately fulfilled down to the minute detail and on the very day of the lunar calendar they were due.

- 1.) Christ was crucified on Passover,
- 2.) in the grave on Unleavened Bread.
- 3.) In the case of the Feast of Firstfruits on the morrow after the sabbath of Passover something wonderful and unexpected happened.

Our Saviour once again fulfilled the feast. He rose from the dead on the first day of the week.

This was on the morrow after the sabbath following Passover.

Thus in His resurrection from the dead He fulfilled the Feast of Firstfruits.

Resurrection Sunday came on the very day in which the Feast of Firstfruits had been celebrated, (and foreshadowed), in the Old Covenant since the feast was given by YHVH/God through Moses to the covenant people as they gathered at Sinai.

THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS IS FULFILLED IN THE NEW COVENANT.

CHRIST IS RESURRECTED FROM THE DEAD RIGHT ON FIRSTFRUITS.

The Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled by Jesus in His resurrection. He was the "firstfruits from the dead".

1 Corinthians 15:20. *But now **Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***

21. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

22. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

*23. But each one in his own order: **Christ the firstfruits**, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.*

Jesus is called "the Firstfruits of those that rise from the dead". (I Corinthians 15:20)

Three days and nights after His crucifixion and early in the morning Jesus rose again from the grave.

The Resurrection of Jesus came on the first day of the week.

That day happened to be the 17th of Nisan, right on the Feast of Firstfruits.

Note that the sabbath or "high day" of the first day of the seven days of Unleavened Bread is then followed by a regular weekly seventh day sabbath, (or Saturday).

- 1.) Preparation Day - Passover Sacrificed
- 2.) Passover - Fulfillment Reviewed
- 3.) Unleavened Bread - Sinlessness Accepted
- 4.) Firstfruits - Resurrection

Firstfruits was the first day after the sabbath following Passover - The first Sunday after the first Sabbath that occurred after Passover.

So, we have on Wednesday Preparation Day, Thursday is Passover Sabbath, Friday is Unleavened Bread Sabbath, Saturday the regular weekly Sabbath and Sunday is the first day of the week - Firstfruits.

The risen Jesus Christ was seen that morning by Mary near the garden tomb. -John 20:10-18 Later He walked through the wall to visit with the disciples in a closed room.

Thomas felt the wound in His side and confirmed that He was not a ghost.

He was real. He had a spiritual body.

His spiritual body was solidly manifest in this world.

He could be touched and felt as a material body. -John 20:24-29

After His resurrection from the dead Jesus met up with James and John by the Sea of Galilee. They were out in their boat fishing. He had bread and was frying some fish for them there by the seashore. -John 21:3-14
Later He joined up with some disciples as they walked down from Jerusalem on the road to Emmaus. Altogether, over 500 people saw Him.

The fifteenth of Nisan begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is a high sabbath. It is a seven day feast to the Lord. The day following the sabbath during Passover is called the Feast of First Fruits (Leviticus 23:10-14).

UNDERSTANDING THE FESTIVAL CEREMONY

The observance was carried out in this manner, when the standing ripe harvest of barley was ready to be reaped. The celebrant would take one sheaf from the standing harvest and bring it to the priest. The lone sheaf was called "the sheaf of the first fruits." The priest was then to take this one sheaf and wave it before the Lord in His house. This was to be done "the day after the sabbath."

Prescribed offerings were also to be presented along with the sheaf.

THE SHEAF OF FIRST FRUITS IN THE BIBLE

God commanded the people to bring a sheaf of the harvest (Leviticus 23:10). Remember, three times a year God commanded the people to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. All three of these festivals are agricultural harvest Festivals. Passover is the barley harvest. Pentecost is the wheat harvest. Both of these Festivals are first fruits harvests before the final harvest that was to come at the end of the year during the Festival of Tabernacles, which is the fruit harvest.

The harvest represents all who would put their faith, trust, and confidence in the Messiah (Matthew 13:39). So, the sheaf is the first of the first fruits. Since a sheaf in the Bible is used to typify a person or persons (Genesis 37:5-11), a sheaf spiritually represents people who accept the Messiah into their hearts. The nation of Israel was familiar with the concept of first fruits or the firstborn. The first fruits were always the choicest, the foremost, the first, the best, the preeminent of all that was to follow. They were holy to the Lord. The concept of first fruits or firstborn is a major theme in the Bible. This can be seen by the following Scriptures:
Exodus 34:26, Leviticus 23:20, Numbers 18:12-15, Deuteronomy 18:1-5, 26:2-4, and Proverbs 3:9.

THE THEME OF THE FESTIVAL OF FIRST FRUITS IS RESURRECTION AND SALVATION

There are several important events that happened on this day in the Bible.

1. Noah's ark rests on Mount Ararat (Genesis 8:4).
2. Israel crosses the Red Sea (Exodus chapter 14).
3. Israel eats the first fruits of the Promised Land (Joshua 5:10-12).

The manna that God gave from Heaven during the days in the wilderness ceased the sixteenth day of Nisan after the people ate of the old corn of the land. The day following was the seventeenth of Nisan, the day when the children of Israel ate the first fruits of the Promised Land.

4. Haman is defeated (Esther 3:1-6).

In the Book of Esther, Haman plotted to kill all the Jews in Persia and Media. Haman had ten sons. By this, we can see tht Haman is a type of the false Messiah (antichrist). A decree was sent out on the thirteenth of Nisan that all the Jews would be killed. Upon hearing this news, Esther proclaims a three-day fast, which would be Nisan 14-16. On the sixteenth of Nisan, Esther risked her life when she came to King Ahasuerus. The king asked her, in effect, "Tell me, what do you want?" Esther replied, "If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet tht I have prepared for him." This was the sixteenth day of Nisan. At the banquet, the king again asked Esther what she wanted, and she asked the king to come to another banquet to be held the next day, the seventeenth of Nisan. On this day, Haman (a type of the false Messiah or antichrist, as well as of satan) is hanged.

And, of course, the most important of all:

5. The resurrection of Jesus (John 12:24, 1 Corinthians 15:16-20).

The Lord Jesus celebrated the Festival of First Fruits by offering Himself as the first fruits to all future generations (Matthew 27:52-53).

JESUS IS THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE BARLEY HARVEST

1. Jesus is the firstborn of Mary (Matthew 1:23-25)

2. Jesus is the first-begotten of God the Father (Hebrews 1:6)

3. Jesus is the firstborn of every creature (Colossians 1:15)

4. Jesus is the first-begotten from the dead (Revelation 1:5)

5. Jesus is the firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29)

6. Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrected ones (1 Corinthians 15:20,23)

7. Jesus is the beginning of the creation of God (Revelation 3:14)

8. Jesus is the preeminent One (Colossians 1:18)

Jesus is indeed the Most Holy One of God and is sanctified by the Father. Jesus is the first, the choicest, the preeminent One. He is both the firstborn of God and the first fruits unto God. Jesus is the sheaf of the first fruits.

FIRST FRUITS IS PROPHETIC OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The Festival of the sheaf of the first fruits is prophetic of the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus prophesied that He would rise three days and nights after He was crucified upon the cross (Matthew 12:40, Luke 24:46). This was foreshadowed to happen in the Old Testament by type and shadow (Genesis 22:1-6, Exodus 3:18, 8:27).

Since Jesus was crucified on the Preparation Day of Passover, the fourteenth of Nisan, and He arose from the grave three days and nights after He was buried, Jesus arose from the grave on the seventeenth of Nisan, the day of the festival of First Fruits.

This day would be the day after the weekly sabbath during the week of Passover (Mark 16:1-6).

In fact, Jesus is called the first fruits of those who rise from the dead.

-But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

--1 Corinthians 15:20-23

THE SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING OF FIRST FRUITS

A sheaf in the Bible is used to typify a person or persons (Genesis 37:5-11). Christ will return to earth (Zechariah 14:4) during His second coming as King over all the earth. He also will bring the sheaves (the believers in Jesus as the Messiah) with Him (Psalm 126, Mark 4:26-29, Jude 14).

The 144,000 Jewish witnesses who witness of Christ during the tribulation are first fruits to God during the tribulation (Revelation 14:1-4).

The following are Scriptures in the Bible concerning first fruits.

1. Israel was God's firstborn (Exodus 4:22). But, the first will be last and the last will be first (Mark 10:31). Therefore, the Gentiles became the first to receive the Messiah (Isaiah 60:1-3, 62:1-3, Acts 15:14-16). At the end of this present age, the Jews as a corporate people will accept Jesus as Messiah as well.
2. The Gospel was preached to the Jew first and then to the non-Jews (Romans 1:16).

3. We are called to seek first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).
4. Jesus was alive the first day of the week (Mark 16:1-6).
5. Jesus was the first to rise from the dead (Acts 26:23).
6. The early believers were a kind of first fruits (James 1:17-18).
7. Those who arose from the dead with Christ during His resurrection became the first fruits of all those who would rise from the dead (Matthew 27:52-53, Ephesians 4:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
8. Jesus first loved us, and He is to be our first love (1 John 4:9, Revelation 2:4).
9. Jesus is the first (Alpha) and the last (Omega) (Revelation 1:8, 17, 22:13, Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, 48:12).

Few people understand that God follows a systematic plan, symbolized by His Holy Days, to save all humanity by offering all people eternal life in His Kingdom.

In this world we are simply at the beginning of the harvest from the Kingdom of God.

(Taken from a web article at <http://endtimepilgrim.org/firstfruits.htm>)

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits... 1 Cor 15.22-23a

Matthew 28:51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;
52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,
53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.
54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

Transcribed from Reminiscences of Andrew A. Bonar
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'The graves were opened; and many bodies of the
saints which slept arose.'

Matt. 27: 50-53

This is a passage about which very little has been written. Commentators seem to pass it by as something very mysterious. But if the Holy Spirit be with us we will find that there is a lesson for us in this part of the Word. 'The rocks rent.' Wherever we read of this taking place we know it is the presence of the Lord. This explains Jonathan's wonderful victory — 'there was trembling . . . and the earth quaked' (1 Sam. 14: 15). At Philippi the earth shook (Acts 16: 26) —the Lord was present.

'The saints which slept arose.' When death is spoken of as sleep, it is generally in reference to God's people. Daniel speaks of those that 'sleep in the dust' (12:2). Then we have it in John 11:11; I Cor. 15: 6,51; Acts 7:60. It is as if the Lord did not wish us to think of death as anything sad or disagreeable. He wants us to think of it as a sleep or rest,—a blessed sleep without even dreams.

Let us learn from this the connection between the graves opening and the Veil rending. The Veil separated between the Holy and Most Holy Places. It was a doorway or gateway representing Christ. 'I am the Door.' And when the Lord put down His hand and rent it from top to bottom, He opened the way for us to go in. He can come out, and we can go in. In this connection we shall see some special meaning in the graves opening. It was the death of Christ that opened them. Your body is redeemed by Christ's death as well as your soul, and it must come out of the grave. 'After His resurrection.' The graves were opened at His death, but the saints did not come out of their graves till Christ's resurrection. It is like when Christ breathed on the disciples and said, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost,' but they did not actually receive the Spirit until Pentecost.

'Many bodies,' —not merely one or two. I think it means a great company. What is the meaning of this? The graves stood open till the third day, and passers-by would be amazed to see the stones rolled away. You begin to see now this was a testimony to Christ in more ways than one. These are all saints, and they are coming out of their graves to honour the Holy One. Perhaps the reason Christ did this was to show a sample of His power. These saints were the first-fruits of the resurrection, and when He went up they would be His body-guard, nearer Him than the angels.

If you ask, why does only Matthew mention this? The answer is, the Holy Ghost gave one part to one and another to another. To Luke He gave the part of the record that showed He was the Saviour of the Gentiles; to Mark, that which showed by little things that He was the Messiah; to John, that which showed His divinity. Matthew shows prophecy fulfilled in Christ. Dan. 12:2 says, 'many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.' Matthew says, 'many of the saints which slept arose.'

Christ did what Daniel says will be done for all the saints. He took some of them and raised them up. In effect He was saying, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.'

These saints were likely those who had lately died, for they 'went into the holy city and appeared to many.' If they had been saints of an older time they would not have been known. Perhaps old Simeon was one of them, and Anna and Zacharias. When Christ appeared after His resurrection He conversed as well as appeared.

These saints appeared and conversed with many. At first they would cause alarm, but that would soon be dissipated. It is not likely they spoke of the other world. Very likely they appeared as witnesses for Christ. From all this let us learn the connection between Christ's resurrection and ours. Christ's love to His own is so great that He will not lose even the dust of His people. He will fashion it all into beauty and comeliness. Where there was weakness He will put power, and where there was corruption He will put incorruption. [End Andrew A. Bonar D.D.]

Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament:

And the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent.

Why was this earthquake a miracle, seeing that earthquakes are ordinary events? First, even the most ordinary of earthquakes would in this case, due to its timing, have been strongly suggestive of the supernatural; but this was far more and utterly different from any ordinary earthquake. The peculiar violence of the quake was sufficient in the vicinity of Calvary to rend the rocks, yet the great buildings of Jerusalem, not more than a mile away, were left undisturbed.

Insinuations of skeptics and even some commentators that no earthquake occurred are dissolved in the plain light of the New Testament words that "the earth did quake" (Matthew 27:52) and that the people who witnessed it "feared exceedingly" (Matthew 27:54). There is a historical occurrence of just this type of earthquake within very recent times, Three-quarters of a mile northeast of the village of Novice, Texas, during the 1950's, a violent earthquake took place in the center of a cornfield at three o'clock in the morning, while the village was asleep.

My brother, David E. Coffman, was living there at the time, and I have seen the devastation wrought by that earthquake in which several hundred thousand tons of rocks, some of them ten feet in thickness, were rent and cast up from the earth in a very grotesque geological disturbance covering many acres in the heart of that field. Seismometry teams from a number of universities and colleges examined it and diagnosed it as an earthquake, having a very high epicenter, with the focus only a couple of hundred feet beneath.

The strange story of that little earthquake received widespread newspaper coverage throughout the United States, especially in scientific journals; and there are many pictures of it, some of which were made by this writer, and which show the corn rows leading directly into it. Now this is related, not that it is thought to add anything to the Holy Scriptures, but because it dramatically refutes the allegations of some that an earthquake at Calvary would invariably and necessarily have wrecked the temple.

As a matter of comparison, none of the houses in Novice was damaged by that violent little earthquake so near to it, although the shock was sufficient to rouse people from their slumbers for many miles in all directions. In the light of this, how unpardonable is the question of Plummer, "We seem to have here a tradition with a legendary element in it." [F14](#)

Any traveler to Golgotha needs only to consult his eyes to see that it happened. Alford took note of this, saying, "To this day, Golgotha is a proof of it, where the rocks were rent on account of Christ." [F15](#)

If this extraordinary earthquake was of the type described above, its miraculous element would consist of its extreme rarity and timing; but there is the strongest evidence that it was far more than that. Again from Nicholson:

"Now we say that this earthquake was not only supernatural, but non-natural as well that is, miraculous. It was supernatural in that it was an interference of God, and non-natural, in that it was not the result of any of the natural causes of earthquakes, or any combination of them." [F16](#)

Note that the earthquake did not disturb the cross, that it discriminated among the graves of Calvary, opening those of the righteous but not the others; and, from these considerations, one would be hard pressed indeed to explain it as an ordinary earthquake, however timed!

The meaning of the earthquake does not lie solely in the opening of the grave but bears an independent testimony of its own. It was Calvary answering to Sinai.

There was a great earthquake at Sinai ([Exodus 19:18](#)) when the Law was given; and that Law, so long associated with sin and death ([Romans 8:2](#)), was being removed and replaced by the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. Appropriately, the earth itself should have borne witness to the event that mercy had triumphed over justice, and grace had superseded law. Also, there was prefigured and symbolized the earth-shaking consequences of Christ's redemptive death and the gospel which would be preached and which was destined to shatter ancient empires and destroy the power of the devil himself ([Hebrews 2:14](#)).

Verse 52

And the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised.

THE OPENING OF THE GRAVES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

The implication that only the graves of the righteous were opened comes from the immediate connection with what followed, the resurrection of the saints. At first it seems those two events occurred simultaneously; but the next verse notes that it was "after his resurrection" that they actually came out of their graves and appeared in the city, thus the mention of the saints in Matt. 27:52 is for the purpose of revealing which graves were opened.

This, of course, is a great miracle of discrimination. Incredulous scholars have sought in vain for evidence of an interpolation here, but none exists. Plummer said, "There is no textual evidence that the passage is an interpolation." [F17](#) Accepting the amazing fact recorded here by Matthew, one naturally turns to a consideration of its meaning:

(1) It means that God knows the location of every grave where his redeemed ones are at rest. Matthew's use of "sleep" for "death" suggests that death is a sleep only for the righteous: Death, like sleep, is only temporary and shall be followed by an awakening. Jesus used the same figure when speaking of the death of Lazarus ([John 11:11](#)).

(2) It means that all the dead shall eventually rise from the tomb; and, although this resurrection was but a few compared to the numberless millions of the dead, it is a pledge of much more wonderful things to come when "all that are in their tombs" shall come forth ([John 5:28](#)).

(3) The resurrection of the "bodies of the saints" indicates a bodily resurrection for all.

The opened graves had to be left open over Passover, since it would have been unlawful for anyone to have filled a grave during that holy week; it would have been unlawful even to touch one. While the graves were exposed for three days and nights, a period was provided during which the identity of the graves as belonging to "the righteous" could have been made and verified. No record is left of the awe and wonder that doubtless accompanied the events connected with so strange and supernatural a phenomenon. [End Coffman]

"The first part of Ezek 37:12-13, "I will open your tombs," probably shaped the third line of the quatrain of Matt 27:51b-52b, "And the tombs were opened." But the Ezek passage continues: "And I will bring you up out of your tombs, and I will lead you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord." Even as elsewhere Matt enhances the scriptural background and flavoring of material taken from Mark, so here scripturally he goes beyond the quatrain by offering in 27:53 the fulfillment of the rest of the Ezek passage: "And having come out from the tombs, . . . they entered into the holy city [of Jerusalem]."

Another biblical passage may have shaped Matt's addition, especially the last clause *"and they were made visible to many,"* i.e., Isa 26:19 (LXX): *"Those in the tombs shall be raised, and those in the land [or on the earth] shall rejoice."* Thus in what he has added to Mark (both the quatrain taken over from popular tradition and his own commentary on it), Matt has developed the theological insight. In apocalyptic language and imagery borrowed from Scripture he teaches that the death of Jesus and his resurrection ("raising") marked the beginning of the last times and of God's judgment... [The Death of the Messiah, Raymond E. Brown, Doubleday: 1994, 2 vols.]

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep [died]. 1 Cor 15.20

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits... 1 Cor 15.22-23a

And Jesus is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. Col 1.18

The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thes 4.16-17

From Victorious Proclamation by R.B. Thieme, Jr.

1 Peter 3:18 -- For Christ also once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

Here is the focal point of history for mankind and the initial stage of the strategic victory of the angelic conflict. Christ, the Seed of the woman, the unique Person of the universe, suffered, or literally, died on the cross, the once for all sacrifice for the sins of the world. The suffering on the cross was as unique as the person who was hanging there! The word for "suffered" is the strongest word for death --- to die by utter separation.

It is a word for Christ's spiritual death on the cross, which is the basis of our salvation. He suffers separation from God the father and God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 27:46), during which time the Father cast all our sins upon him and judge them. ..

No one in all of human history has ever suffered or ever will suffer more intense anguish and the Lord Jesus Christ when he became our substitute and bore our sins --- "the just for the unjust."

In his humanity he was impeccable; in his deity he was absolute righteousness. The meeting of our sins with the God man's righteousness was not only the most excruciating agony ever endured but the supreme example of undeserved suffering. Yet it was the means of our eternal salvation, and it broke the back of Satan as far as the angelic conflict is concerned.

Translated literally, the next phrase of 1 Peter 3:18, "having received death in the sphere of his body," emphasizes the two deaths of Christ on the cross. The spiritual death of Christ occurred when he was judged for our sins; his physical death, when he dismissed his spirit. Without a human body the Savior could die neither spiritually or physically. He must be truly a man to take man's place.

"Quickened [made alive] by the Spirit" refers to his resurrection. Both the Holy Spirit, as the agent of resurrection, and the Father had a part in raising the humanity of Jesus Christ (acts 2:24; Romans 8:11). The ultimate victory in the angelic conflict was predicated on Christ's resurrection, and this decisive victory also made it possible for him to go from abject humiliation to maximum glorification, seated at the right hand of the father (Hebrews 1:3, 4).

... When his earthly mission was completed Christ said, "Father, into thy hands I dismiss my spirit" (Luke 23:46). From this statement, we understand that his human spirit ascended into the presence of the Father in heaven.

His assurance to the dying thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), indicates that his soul descended to paradise where the Old Testament saints resided until Christ's resurrection. His body of course went into the grave (Luke 23:53). After the resurrection, he made a trip to Tartarus --- one of the most unusual trips in all of history --- and in this also he was assisted by the Holy Spirit.

Before we can apprehend the full import of the Lord's unique visit, we need to picture the underworld as it existed prior to the resurrection.

Hades contains three compartments: Paradise (a Persian word meaning "garden of the King" or Abraham's bosom (the Jewish designation, Luke 16:19-22); Torments (Luke 16:23-25); and Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4).

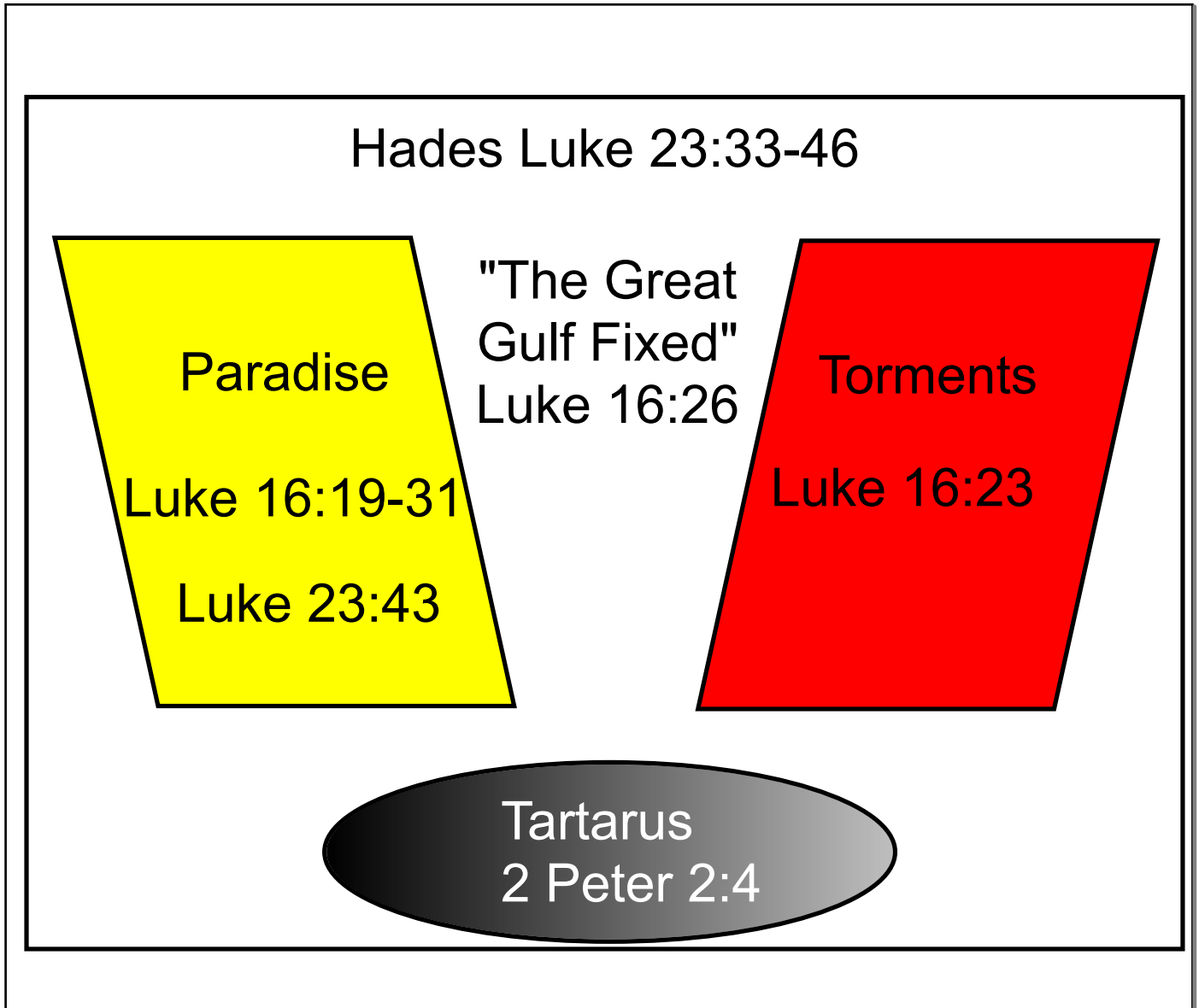
Paradise was the section where the souls of all believers of the Old Testament resided after death. No human being ever went to heaven until Christ entered into the presence of the Father and was accepted as a man.

Much depended on this, because along with the Lord Jesus Christ and his ascension, traveled the souls of all believers who had died up to that time and who were being transferred from paradise to heaven (Ephesians 4:8, nine). If Jesus was accepted in his humanity, it would mean that the Father had accepted his sacrifice for sin, and only under these conditions could believers be admitted into the abode of God. Upon the entrance of Christ in heaven, the father said, "sit thou at my right hand" (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:13). His sacrifice was approved; he had made the way for mankind to enter into the presence of Holy God (Hebrews 8:1; 10:12-20)! Those who dine now go directly into the presence of the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

The second compartment, Torments, is a temporary fire for the souls of unbelievers. Between paradise and torments was "a great gulf fixed" (Luke 16:26) so that none could pass to the other side. Now that Paradise has been emptied, Hades and torments are actually synonymous, but the rendering of both as "Hell" creates confusion because there is yet a final Hell, designated as "Gehenna", or "the lake of fire." The lake of fire will not be occupied, except by the beast and the false prophet, until the second resurrection, when all unbelievers will be raised, judged according to their works, and sent to their final punishment (Revelation 20:11-15).

The third area, Tartarus, as we have already seen, is the residence of the Angels who were involved in the Satanic conspiracy of Genesis, chapter 6. They were the only angels who had not been watching the activities of the son of God on earth and therefore were not aware of the defeat of Satan. They still entertained hopes that their wily leader would emerge victorious in his battle to keep Christ from going to the cross and so free them! But it was not to be, for some time after the three days and three nights in the grave, Jesus Christ was transported to Tartarus in his resurrection body to issue a victorious proclamation to the spirits in prison!

By which [by means of whom, that is, the Holy Spirit] also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which were sometime disobedient (1 Peter 3:19, 20). ..he informed these demons that they had failed in their attempts to destroy true humanity and that God's plan had moved right on through every satanic attack. He had gone to the cross on schedule! Christ on appearance to them in a resurrection body was the visible evidence. The penalty of sin had been paid for mankind, and thus it was possible for Homo sapiens to make a decision for the son of God and to enter into fellowship with God the father, God the son and God the Spirit for all eternity!



Through resurrection, Christ made the victorious proclamation; through resurrection, Christ made it possible for us to be in union with him and thereby to be delivered in the angelic conflict.

Moreover, his resurrection, ascension, session and glorification at the Father's right hand is the means of elevating every believer and the royal family of God to a position of superiority over Angels (Hebrews 1:13, 14).

Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him (1 Peter 3:22)

But we see Jesus [emphasis on his humanity], who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:9).

And deliver them [from Satan's kingdom] who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Hebrews 2:15).

The Resurrection fulfilled the Feast of Firstfruits - the first of the Believers of the preceding centuries being taken along to Heaven with their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be presented to the Father in the Heavenly Temple. Their Hope having now been realized....