

The Third Day Phenomenon
(Part 1)
Read Genesis 22:1-14

Abraham repressed turbulent emotions beneath hasty movements of preparation. Only miscalculated activities revealed inner unrest: he had arranged donkeys, servants, and son in caravan style even before gathering the provisions necessary for a three day journey. Sticks finally roped and hitched to one of the donkeys, the knot of men traversed northward toward a mountainous range known as Moriah. Abraham was not averse to following Yahweh's directives; he had abandoned homeland, family, and household deities to fuse a relationship with Him. He merely wished to fathom how a boy was to live, when Yahweh wanted him dead.

It was early enough to have a mist sheltering the craggy slopes. The men had awakened during the night to arrive by dawn of the third day—the day that Abraham had cleared up in his mind what appeared to be irresolvable. His enlightenment had taken place as he had peered up at the mount; the thwack of comprehension had nearly stunned him. “Remain here,” he said, consigning the task of caring for the animals to the servants, “The lad and I will go over there, we will worship and then we will return to you.” With the last five words—we will return to you--Abraham conveyed his new-found awareness and his resolve to believe God's commitment to bring innumerable seed through Isaac, even though he must sacrifice him. Abraham understood what Yahweh must do to keep this pledge: raise his only begotten son, whom he loved, from the dead.

Abraham's moment of faith on the third day of his trek to Mount Moriah, is recorded in Hebrews 11:17, which states, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and [Abraham] who had received the promises (of seed through Isaac) was offering up his only begotten son.... He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead....” The author of Hebrews recognized Abraham's initial perplexity: Yahweh had promised seed through Isaac, Isaac as yet had no seed, and Yahweh had demanded Isaac's life. There was only one inevitable solution--a resurrection. Additionally, Abraham had acted upon his faith in a resurrection “on the third day” (Genesis 22:4), which brings us to the “third day phenomenon.”

My brother Jim was introduced to this phenomenon when he was preparing a sermon for Easter. His text was from 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures....” Searching for a prophecy of the Messiah raised on the third day proved to be ineffectual. When typing in the words “third day” and “three days” on his computer Bible program however, numerous passages popped up. “What's going on?” he asked me when he had phoned.

“I call it the third day phenomenon, Jim,” I said. “On the third day, something spectacular often occurs in the Old Testament, which gives credence to Paul's claim that the Scriptures foreshadow a third day resurrection.

“Keep going, I'm still not sure I understand what you mean,” said Jim.

“In the Old Testament,” I said, “there are narratives in which the climax happens on the third day. These third day occurrences prepare the reader for the resurrection.”

I could hear Jim's intake of breath, so I let him speak. "You mean like in the story of Jonah, when he's in the belly of a great fish and on the third day he's spit out."

"Yes, Jim, and Jesus uses that story to illustrate His coming death and resurrection in Matthew 12:40 saying, 'for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'"

"Are there more stories like that in the Old Testament?" Jim was excited.

"The Old Testament is replete with them, Jim. For example, Queen Esther fasts and, on the third day, she enters the king's court to request salvation for her people. The story of King David's census is another narrative in which Israelites are delivered on the third day.

"But, my favorite illustration of the third day phenomenon is when Abraham takes his beloved son to Mount Moriah—the same mount that would one day be called Jerusalem, where animals would be sacrificed and where Jesus would be crucified. On the third day Abraham arrives, recognizes what God must do to keep His promise, and willingly takes knife in hand to sacrifice a son he is confident will rise from the dead."

"Gotta go," Jim said, anticipating the prospect of discovering his own examples of the third day phenomenon.