

## **Gospel Glimpses: The Third Day**

*Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead..."*

Throughout the Old Testament, the third day was altogether uneventful. So why does Jesus say that on the third day He was to rise from the dead, according to the Scripture? The answer to this question is not found in a word search for "third day," but rather in Jewish funeral practices.

When Lazarus lay at the doorstep of death, his sisters sent for Jesus, hoping for a miracle. Jesus didn't come immediately. He waited until the Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. According to Jewish funeral practices, the body of the deceased would be laid in a tomb. For three days, the body could be visited and verified for legal purposes. Then the tomb was sealed and no more admittance was permitted. The fourth day was the day in which decay was official; the swollen body would split open and the noxious fumes of death would fill the tomb. As Jesus came to the tomb and commanded the stone be removed, Martha's response is particularly telling, "'Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days' (John 11:39).

Decay is not just an unpleasant smell; it is the destruction of the body as punishment for sin. This theological truth echoes all the way back to the curse pronounced about Adam in the Garden of Eden. The Lord said, "For you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). Adam had used his body for sin; as a result God would allow his body to be destroyed by undergoing decay. Since then, every body that has been used for sin has decayed.

Millennia later, David wrote something very interesting. "For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay" (Psalm 16:10 NASB). In a sense David may have been writing about himself, if he simply thought that God, in this particular moment, was going to save him from being killed.

Ultimately, this passage is not about David. Peter notes that in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, because he argues that the body of David is still in his grave nearly a thousand years after he died (Acts 2:24-31). His body was well decayed.

David's psalm was a prophecy about Jesus. Jesus had not used His body for sin; therefore His body was not to decay and rot in punishment.

On the third day after Jesus was crucified, some women came to His tomb, bringing aromatic spices to prepare His body for the final stage of decay (Luke 24:1-7). They wanted to honor Him by masking the smell. Instead, they found the tomb empty. His body was not going to decay; He was raised on the third day.