

‘HE WAS RAISED ON THE THIRD DAY
ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES’
(1 CORINTHIANS 15:4)

A TYPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION BASED ON THE CULTIC
CALENDAR IN LEVITICUS 23

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Summary

According to one of the earliest creedal statements in the NT, which Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 15:4, the Messiah ‘was raised on the third day according to the scriptures’. Scholarly analysis has centred on determining which scriptures are in view, rarely differentiating between the creed’s perspective and Paul’s. One can only speculate about the former, but with regard to the latter there are contextual clues in 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul sought to draw attention to the typological significance of the sheaf of firstfruits which, according to the Leviticus 23:10-11, was to be waved before the Lord on the day after the Sabbath after Passover, the very day that Jesus rose from the dead.

1. Introduction

Paul’s reference in 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5 to an early Christian creedal statement¹—or, less likely (since Paul uses the quasi-technical

¹ So the great majority of scholars. Cf. e.g. John Kloppenborg, ‘An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula in 1 Cor. 15:3b-5 in Light of Some Recent Literature’, *CBQ* 40 (1978) 351-67; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Tradition and Redaction in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7’, *CBQ* 43 (1981) 582-89; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 718-19; Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1997) 255-58; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SacPag7; Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999) 529-32; Anthony C.

vocabulary of ‘receiving’ and ‘passing on’ a tradition), to a creed he himself composed out of traditional formulae²—has generated intense discussion due both to its intrinsic importance for understanding the development of New Testament Christology and to the exegetical challenges it contains.³ Among the latter is the creed’s statement that the Messiah ‘was raised on the third day according to the scriptures’ (ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς) in 1 Corinthians 15:4, to which we direct our attention in what follows.

2. The *Status Quaestionis*

Scholarly discussion of this statement has focused on two questions: First, what is the antecedent of the prepositional phrase ‘according to the scriptures’? Second, what scriptures is the creed referring to? It is probably not too much to say that the first of these questions would hardly have been posed were it not for the difficulty inherent in an-

Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 1186-97; Christian Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (ThHK 7; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000) 355-61; Rainer Riesner, ‘Vom Messias Jesus zum christlichen Bekenntnis: Jüdische Voraussetzungen und judenchristliche Überlieferungen’, *Theologische Beiträge* 32 (2001) 373-92, esp. 379-80; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (1Kor 15,1-16,24) (EKK VII/4; Düsseldorf: Benzinger/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2001) 18-25; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (HTA; Wuppertal: Brockhaus/Giessen: Brunnen, 2006) 875-77; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 32; New Haven: Yale, 2008) 541-43; Dieter Zeller, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (KEK 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010) 462; James Ware, ‘The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15.3-5’, *NTS* 60 (2014) 475.

² So Ulrich Wilckens, ‘Der Ursprung der Überlieferung der Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen: Zur traditionsgeschichtlichen Analyse von 1. Kor 15,1-11’, in *Zur neutestamentlichen Überlieferung von der Auferstehung Jesu*, ed. Paul E. Hoffmann (WdF 522; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988) 139-93, esp. 174-75 [originally published in *Dogma und Denkstrukturen*, Edmund Schlink Festschrift, eds. Wilfried Joest and Wolfhart Pannenberg (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963) 56-95]; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 745-46.

³ Questions regarding the creed’s origin, whether in the Jerusalem church (so Hays, *First Corinthians*, 255; Schnabel, *Korinther*, 877; Wolff, *Korinther*, 359-60; Riesner, ‘Messias’, 379-80) or Hellenistic Jewish Christianity (so Hans Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (KEK 5; 2nd edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981) 307; Schrage, *Korinther*, 23; Zeller, *Korinther*, 462) and whether it was originally composed in Aramaic or Greek, need not detain us here. It must, in any case, be dated very early (terminus a quo is the mid-30’s of the First Century CE.; terminus ad quem is the early 40’s), and on balance an origin among the Hellenistic Jews in the Jerusalem church seems most likely.

swering the second. In other words, it would not likely have occurred to anyone to question the traditional reading, which takes ‘according to the scriptures’ to modify ‘he was raised on the third day’, if it were clear which OT texts the creed has in view. In any case, this reading is to be preferred to a newer one that takes ‘according to the scriptures’ to modify only ‘he was raised’.⁴ The latter is syntactically possible, but it disrupts what seems to be an intentional parallelism in the creedal formula; the clear antecedent of the same phrase in 1 Corinthians 15:3b is the entire clause that precedes it.⁵ Unless there is a compelling contextual argument for not doing so, it seems that 1 Corinthians 15:4b should be read in the same manner. The newer interpretation also ignores the fact that the resurrection accounts recorded in the canonical Gospels do not employ the phrase ‘on the third day’ in their description of the events of Easter, especially the discovery of the empty tomb or the appearances of risen Christ.⁶ Those accounts, in other words, were not the source for the tradition.⁷ Rather, it seems likely that independent reflection on those events confirmed the earliest church’s conviction that, despite chronological and calendrical uncertainties,⁸ the day on which the Messiah Jesus rose was, in fact, ‘the third day’, and that this took place ‘according to the scriptures’.⁹

⁴ Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, ‘A Suggestion Concerning the Meaning of 1 Cor. xv. 4b’, *JTS* 8 (1957) 118-23. Metzger is followed by C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968) 340; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 256; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 548-49; and Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 748.

⁵ On which cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu* (Göttingen, ⁴1967) 96-97; Karl Lehmann, *Auferweckt am dritten Tag nach der Schrift: Frühste Christologie, Bekenntnisbildung und Schriftauslegung im Lichte von 1. Kor 15,3-5* (2nd edn; Freiburg in Breisgau: Herder, 1969) 51-52; Franz Mussner, ‘Zur stilistischen und semantischen Struktur der Formel von 1 Kor 15,3-5’, in *Die Kirche des Anfangs*, eds. Rudolf Schnackenburg et. al. (Heinz Schürmann Festschrift; Erfurter Theologische Studien 38; Leipzig: St. Benno, 1997) 405-415, esp. 405-406; Lidija Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to Scripture: The Role of Israel’s Scripture in the Early Christian Interpretations of Jesus’ Resurrection* (Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies 12; London: Bloomsbury, 2012) 123-24.

⁶ Cf. Novakovic, *Raised*, 123.

⁷ Novakovic, *Raised*, 121-22.

⁸ These include the apparent discrepancy between John and the synoptic Gospels regarding the day of the crucifixion and the fact that according to Matthew, Jesus said that he would spend ‘three days and three nights’ in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40), which does not easily harmonize with the Synoptic chronology.

⁹ This does not warrant the inference that the creed as a whole or this detail in particular is based on theological reflection rather than historical remembrance (contra Schrage, *Korinther*, 40). Apart from the false dichotomy that this reasoning entails, there is little reason to doubt that the discovery of the empty tomb and the first

What scriptures, then, is the creed referring to? Some commentators argue that the formula is only a general reference to the OT.¹⁰ Wolfgang Schrage, for instance, is convinced that the creed reflects ‘the earliest stage of alluding to the Old Testament...during which arguments were formulated without reference to individual texts of scriptures’.¹¹ It is doubtful, however, in light of C.H. Dodd’s seminal work establishing the crucial role that particular OT texts played in the formation of the Christian kerygma, that there ever was such a stage in the early Christian community.¹² The creed itself, of course, gives no indication of the texts its author or authors have in mind, but it hardly follows that there were none at all. There are, in fact, a number of OT passages that mention a time period of ‘three days’ or ‘the third day’ (cf. Gen. 22:4; 42:18; Exod. 19:11, 16; Josh. 3:2; Hos. 6:2; Jon. 1:17), and many scholars speculate that these are in view.¹³ Two are particularly attractive candidates: 1) Hos. 6:2 not only employs resurrection language (albeit metaphorically), but also makes *verbatim* use of the phrase ‘on the third day’ (LXX: ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ). For this reason many scholars think it is the creed’s primary or even exclusive referent.¹⁴ The fact that ‘rabbinic writings routinely interpret Hosea 6:2 as a prophecy of the resurrection of the dead’¹⁵ would seem to corroborate the legitimacy of this interpretation. 2) Jon. 1:17 is referred to by Jesus when he predicts his own resurrection according to Matt. 12:40, so if the author or authors of the creed were familiar with this logion, it may well have played a central role in the credal formulation.¹⁶

appearances of the risen Lord (however one interprets these phenomena) took place on the ‘first day of the week’ following the crucifixion (cf. esp. Schnabel, *Korinther*, 883-84; Wolff, *Korinther*, 367). It is the conviction that Easter Sunday was in fact ‘the third day’ that seemed to require further reflection. In any case, its precise calendrical significance was clearly not the main concern of the Evangelists.

¹⁰ Cf. Schrage, *Korinther*, 25; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 726-27.

¹¹ Schrage, *Korinther*, 25 (my translation).

¹² Cf. C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1953).

¹³ Cf. Lehmann, *Auferweckt*, 122; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 548; Wolff, *Korinther*, 368.

¹⁴ Cf. Harvey K. McArthur, ‘On the Third Day’, *NTS* 18 (1971) 81-86; Conzelmann, *Korinther*, 311; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 531; Schnabel, *Korinther*, 884; Zeller, *Korinther*, 466; Novakovic, *Raised*, 126-33.

¹⁵ Novakovic, *Raised*, 128.

¹⁶ Two recent proposals should perhaps also be mentioned. Martin Pickup, ‘“On the Third Day”: The Time Frame of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection’, *JETS* 56 (2013) 511-

Ultimately, of course, there is no way of knowing what specific OT texts the creed's author or authors had in mind. Since the statement is embedded in Paul's argument, we simply have no contextual clues—at least with regard to the creed's original context—to work with. Fortunately, this is of no great importance for our investigation, which is not concerned with recovering the creed's original referents. We are only interested in the more limited question of how Paul might have construed the credal phrase 'according to the scriptures' with reference to the resurrection of the Messiah on the third day. Even this, of course, is no small exegetical task, but it holds greater possibilities of arriving at a verifiable answer, since we have the apostle's lengthy discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 to provide us with context.

It is worth noting at this juncture that, though Paul is keenly interested in convincing his audience that Christ rose bodily from the dead on the basis of eyewitness testimony, he does not try to establish that the resurrection occurred 'on the third day' independently of the credal formulation. He is very familiar with the tradition, of course,¹⁷ but he himself cannot witness directly to its veracity, since his own encounter with the risen Lord took place many months later. There is, to be sure, no reason to doubt that he accepted the testimony of Peter and as many of the Twelve whom he personally knew,¹⁸ but neither Paul nor the creed specifically affirm what Luke clearly implies: that

42, surmises that, given the early Jewish understanding that corpses begin to decay after three days, Ps 16:10 and its promise that 'you will not allow your Holy One to undergo decay' is in view. The fact that Psalm 16 does not mention the third day militates against this proposal. Similarly Nicholas P. Lunn, "'Raised on the Third Day According to the Scriptures": Resurrection Typology in the Genesis Creation Narrative', *JETS* 57 (2014) 523-35, argues that the emergence of land from the waters on the third day of creation may have served as a typological antecedent for the 'on the third day' formula. This is possible, but there is no evidence that it actually played a role in the formulation of the creed.

¹⁷ It is possible that Paul was familiar with Jesus' three-fold prediction of his resurrection, which would occur, according to Matthew and Luke, 'on the third day' (Luke 18:33 reiterates the credal formula τῆ ἡμέρᾳ τῆ τρίτῃ exactly; Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19, and Luke 9:22 all have the very similar τῆ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ). Mark, however, has 'after three days' (μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας) in all three predictions (cf. Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34). Assuming Markan priority, it must therefore be considered likely that the credal formula influenced Matthew's and Luke's wording. If that is the case, then they cannot be considered early attestation of the 'on the third day' formula.

¹⁸ The resurrection appearances to the 500 as well as James and the other apostles (1 Cor. 15:6-7) did not take place on Easter Sunday, and thus they cannot serve as corroboratory evidence that Jesus rose on the third day.

Jesus *appeared* to Cephas and the Twelve ‘on the third day’ (cf. Luke 24:33-49). Both are more concerned with the witness of Scripture than empirical proof.

3. A New Proposal

It seems likely, then, that Paul would have been interested in aligning the creedal proposition that the Messiah rose on the third day with particular texts or OT traditions and, further, that 1 Corinthians 15 might contain clues as to which these might have been. Unfortunately, none of the OT texts that scholars have surmised to stand behind the creedal formula plays any role in this chapter or, for that matter, anywhere else in Paul’s letters. As we noted above, the creed itself probably has particular texts, especially Hosea 6:2, in view, and Paul may well have known that, but, if so, he does not let us in on that secret.

On the other hand, Paul’s penchant for typological readings of the OT is quite apparent, not least in 1 Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-11). This raises the question as to whether we can discern the outline of a scriptural typology in 1 Corinthians 15 that would explain Paul’s confidence in the ‘on the third day’ formula. I think we can. Specifically, I want to propose that Paul was convinced of the veracity of the statement ‘he rose on the third day according to the scriptures’ on the basis of a typological understanding of the cultic calendar in Leviticus 23; more specifically, that he viewed the wave offering of the sheaf of firstfruits (Lev. 23:10-11) as a type of the resurrection of Christ ‘on the third day’.

This presumes, of course, that Paul’s Christology was shaped in no small part by his ongoing reflection on the significance of the cultic calendar. We know that it plays an important role, both structurally and theologically, in the Gospel of John.¹⁹ But what about Paul? There is some anecdotal evidence that Paul adhered to Jewish convention by relying on the cultic calendar to provide a general framework for the division of the year and, in particular, that the three great feasts—Passover, Weeks, and Booths—continued to play an important role in

¹⁹ Cf. Dorit Felsch, *Die Feste im Johannesevangelium: Jüdische Tradition und christologische Deutung* (WUNT 2.308; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

his structuration of time.²⁰ Luke portrays Paul as a good Diaspora Jew who arranges his travel in such a way that, if possible, he can be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). Paul himself expresses his desire in 1 Corinthians to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8). This statement has led many scholars to the conclusion that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in the spring of the year around the time of Passover,²¹ which may help to explain why we find him meditating intently on the Christological significance of that feast in 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8. In any case, he develops a complex ethical argument in that passage based on a typological understanding of the close link between Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the cultic calendar.²² This makes it plausible, if not likely, that Paul reflected on the typological significance of other feasts, along with their attendant rituals, as well. For instance, a strong case can be made for viewing Paul's identification of Christ as the 'place of atonement' (ἱλαστήριον) in Romans 3:25, especially in conjunction with the mention of blood, as an allusion to the ritual associated with the Day of Atonement.²³

4. The Cultic Calendar of Leviticus 23

The starting point for any discussion of the major feasts in early Judaism is the cultic calendar of Leviticus 23.²⁴ This text would have been very familiar to a First Century Pharisee such as Saul of Tarsus, steeped as he must have been in the calendrical controversies that raged among the various parties in early Judaism. Leviticus 23 is structured as a series of five 'divine speeches', each of which is clearly

²⁰ Cf. Jin K. Hwang, 'Jewish Pilgrim Festivals and Calendar in Paul's Ministry with the Gentile Churches' *TynBul* 64 (2014) 89-107.

²¹ Cf. Udo Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (4th edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002) 75.

²² Though these feasts seem to have originated independently of each other (cf. Baruch Bokser, 'Unleavened Bread and Passover, Feasts of', *ABD* 6:756), they were closely associated at least by the time of the composition of Deut. 16:1-7. Cf. J. Gordon McConville, 'Deuteronomy's Unification of Passover and Massô: A Response to Bernhard M. Levinson', *JBL* 119 (2000) 47-58. In the post-exilic period the features of one can be ascribed to the other with no apparent sense of impropriety. Cf. Ezek. 45:21, where Passover is described as a feast lasting seven days.

²³ Cf. Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 232-36.

²⁴ The redaction history of the so-called 'Holiness Code' (Lev. 17-25; on which cf. Henry T.C. Sun, 'Holiness Code', *ABD* 3:254-57) need not detain us here, since it is not germane to Paul's view of this text.

demarcated by the introductory formula ‘and Yahweh spoke to Moses saying...’ (cf. Lev. 23:1, 9, 23, 26, 33).²⁵ These correspond to five sets of instructions concerning 1) the Sabbath, Passover, and Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:1-8), 2) the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:9-22), 3) the solemn day of rest (Lev. 23:23-25), 4) the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32), and 5) the Feast of Booths (Lev. 23:33-43), respectively. This salient literary structure has important hermeneutical ramifications. As Wilfried Warning notes,

the recognition of the structural significance of the formulaic introductory addresses with which each DS [= divine speech] begins may be path-breaking in deciphering the overall structural outline of Leviticus. Though there are many conceptual units which are larger than a single DS (e.g., the cultic calendar in Lev. 23 has been cast in *five* distinct DS), the delimitation which is based solely on terminological evidence [i.e., formulaic introductions] may prove to be more solid than making conceptual considerations the point of departure.²⁶

Surprisingly, many commentators ignore the integrity of the divine speeches when they outline this chapter, opting instead to divide Leviticus 23 according to the descriptions of the feasts as they became normative in later Jewish practice.²⁷ This has affected the interpretation of the passage in a number of ways. The most important for our purposes is that it engenders an artificial separation of the so-called ‘Feast of Firstfruits’ (Lev. 23:9-14) from the ‘Feast of Weeks’ (Lev. 23:15-22), despite the fact that they are grouped together in one divine speech (Lev. 23:9-22). A quick glance at the major English Bibles substantiates the near ubiquity of this approach; they divide the text between verses 14 and 15 and give these passages separate headings, generally those noted above. This, however, goes against the intention of the unified divine speech, as a brief summary of its contents reveals.

In Leviticus 23:9 the divine speech formula is followed by a description of the ritual procedure for offering the first of two communal ‘wave offerings’: the ‘sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest’ (Lev. 23:10). Given its proximity to Passover (see below), the harvest

²⁵ Casper J. Labuschagne, ‘The Pattern of the Divine Speech Formulas in the Pentateuch’, *VT* 32 (1982) 268.

²⁶ Wilfried Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (Biblical Interpretation Series 35; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998) 38-39 (emphasis original).

²⁷ Cf. e.g. Martin Noth, *Das dritte Buch Mose: Leviticus* (ATD 6; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1964) 163-76; Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT 3; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 300-307; Baruch Levine, *Leviticus* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 153-63.

in view here can only be that of barley.²⁸ Various instructions concerning the ritual and its attendant offerings follow (Lev. 23:11-14). Importantly, no new section begins with Leviticus 23:15; rather, the procedure for reckoning the proper day for the next wave offering is delineated. This second wave offering is to be presented to the Lord fifty days after the sheaf of firstfruits (Lev. 23:15-16) and consists of two loaves of baked bread that are referred to as ‘the bread of the firstlings’ (Lev. 23:17). This time the wheat harvest is in view. There follows, analogous to the Halacha for the sheaf of firstfruits, a detailed description of the necessary ritual and a description of attendant offerings (Lev. 23:18-22). A new divine speech is introduced in the following verse.

It seems wise, then, to heed the structural indicators in the text and read Leviticus 23:9-22 as a cohesive unit. If we do so, we become aware of the important connection—one that is all too easily overlooked—between the offering of the sheaf of firstfruits and the Feast of Weeks: Although the offering of the sheaf takes place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it is actually associated not with that feast, but with the later one. The significance of this is that

[t]he term “Weeks,” while used as a title for the special festival day on which the first fruits of the wheat harvest were presented to the Lord, actually has reference to the entire period of the grain harvest, beginning with the first cuttings of barley and ending with the completion of the wheat harvest, about seven weeks in all.²⁹

Supporting evidence for this contention is not hard to find: Jeremiah 5:24 states that God guards ‘the weeks of the times of harvest’; that is, the weeks between Passover and the day of Pentecost.³⁰ Numbers 28:26 speaks of the ‘day of firstfruits...in your Feast of Weeks’. Tobit describes Pentecost as ‘the holy seven weeks (Tob. 2:1). Philo calls the day of the offering of the firstfruits sheaf a ‘preliminary or ‘anticipatory’ festival of another greater feast, namely Pentecost (*Spec. Leg.* II 176). The same sentiment is found in the common Rabbinic designation of Pentecost as the ‘the closing feast (*asartha*) of Passover’

²⁸ Cf. the Gezer Calendar; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 490.

²⁹ J.C. Rylaarsdam, ‘Weeks, Feast of’, *IDB* 4:827-28 (emphasis mine). Cf. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1961) 491, 494.

³⁰ Cf. J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 248-49.

(Hebrew: **עֲצֵרַת שֶׁל פֶּסַח**).³¹ The use of this term is attested by Josephus, who mentions in passing that the Jews called Pentecost by that name (Greek: ἁγάροθα; *A.J.* 3:252).

These references combine to show that the Feast of Weeks was viewed as a ritual dedication of the grain harvest with the waving of the sheaf of firstfruits marking its beginning and the waving of the bread of the firstlings fifty days later marking its end. The sheaf of firstfruits, which was taken from the very first barley harvested each year and with which the grain harvest began, symbolically represents the entire harvest, and by waving it before the Lord, the priest is acknowledging on behalf of the people that the entire harvest is God's gift. Perhaps for this reason, this one offering, alone among the vegetable offerings, has a consecratory function; it is 'for your acceptance'—so literally the Hebrew (**לְרִצְנֹכֶם**)—before God.

According to Leviticus 23:11b the barley sheaf was to be waved 'on the day after the Sabbath' (**מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת**). The phrase is repeated in Leviticus 23:15. Though this temporal reference seems, at first glance, to be quite precise, its calendrical referent is actually ambiguous in context, and it therefore generated intense discussion during the Second Temple period. The difficulty lies in the fact that, although the term **שַׁבָּת** (= 'Sabbath') generally refers to the seventh day of the week, it can also denote certain cultic holidays, including the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:31; 23:32), the solemn day of rest (Lev. 23:24), and the first and last days of the Feast of Booths (Lev. 23:39). It later came to be used for Passover, as well. For our purposes the crucial question is whether the referent of **שַׁבָּת** in Leviticus 23:15-16 is the Passover, which is mentioned along with the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the divine speech immediately prior to ours (Lev. 23:1-8), or the weekly Sabbath.

If **שַׁבָּת** refers to Passover itself, then the text should be taken to mean that the sheaf was to be waved on the following day, regardless of what day of the week that happened to be.³² This was the position of the majority of Jews in the first century. It finds support in the

³¹ Cf. e.g. *m. Hag.* 2.4; *Tos. Arak.* 1.11; *Mid. Cant.* 7.2.2. On this use of term, cf. Ernst Kutsch, 'Die Wurzel **עצר** im Hebraischen', *VT* 4 (1952) 57-69.

³² Passover begins on the evening of 14 Nisan, the first full moon after the new moon following the spring equinox. This meant that the day of the week could, and did, vary, though in practice triennial calendrical adjustments prevented its marching inexorably through the week. Cf. Jan van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden: Brill, 1961) 3-10.

Targumim³³ as well as in Philo (*Spec. Leg. II* 162) and Josephus (*A.J.* 3:250-252). It constitutes the Pharisaic tradition,³⁴ which became normative for post-biblical Judaism.³⁵ The LXX translates the phrase in question in Leviticus 23:11 with τῆ ἐπαύριον τῆς πρώτης (= ‘on the first subsequent day’), which in context most naturally refers to the day after the first day of the feast. Joshua 5:11 may also support this reading, for it recounts that the Israelites ate ‘unleavened bread and roasted grain’, which Leviticus 23:14 proscribes until after the offering of the barley sheaf, on the day after Passover.³⁶

Despite this impressive array of early Jewish witnesses, it is, for several reasons, actually more likely that שבת in Leviticus 23:11, 15 refers to the weekly Sabbath. First, Passover is never referred to in the Hebrew Old Testament as a שבת; this convention developed later. In fact, it is even questionable whether שבת, standing alone, ever refers to a day other than the weekly Sabbath.³⁷ Second, what seemed to be clear evidence that the LXX understood the term שבת in Leviticus 23:11 to refer to Passover points in a different direction when we examine Leviticus 23:15, for there the LXX renders the same phrase ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπαύριον τῶν σαββάτων (= ‘from the day after the Sabbath’). ‘Sabbath’ in the LXX refers either to the first day of the Jewish week, the Sabbath year (cf. Lev. 25:2-6; 26:34-35), or, in the form of the quasi-technical term σάββατα σαββάτων, to the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16:31; 23:32), but not to other cultic holidays.³⁸ This is likely the reason that several LXX manuscripts diverge from the majority reading of Leviticus 23:11, adding exegetically, τῶν σαββάτων (29, 68’, 83, 319; Ethiopian versions also reflect this reading) or τοῦ σαββάτου (85’, 321’, 344) to τῆ ἐπαύριον τῆς πρώτης, which disambiguates the term in

³³ Targum Onqelos is slightly ambiguous.

³⁴ Cf. Goudoever, *Calendars*, 19.

³⁵ According to Levine, *Leviticus*, 51, n. 4. Cf. e.g. *b. Menah.* 65b-66a; *Mekilta* Exod. 12:15.

³⁶ It should be noted, however, that the operative phrase ‘on the day after Passover’ is missing from the LXX, a fact which diminishes the force of what might otherwise be weighty biblical evidence for this position.

³⁷ Jacob Milgrom, ‘The Firstfruits Festivals of Grain and the Composition of Leviticus 23:9-21’, in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, eds. Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler, and Jeffrey H. Tigay (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997) 81, n. 1, argues that only the cognate שבתון, either alone or in conjunction with שבת, can denote a day other than the weekly sabbath. He notes that there is no unequivocal instance in which שבת alone refers to a day other than the weekly sabbath.

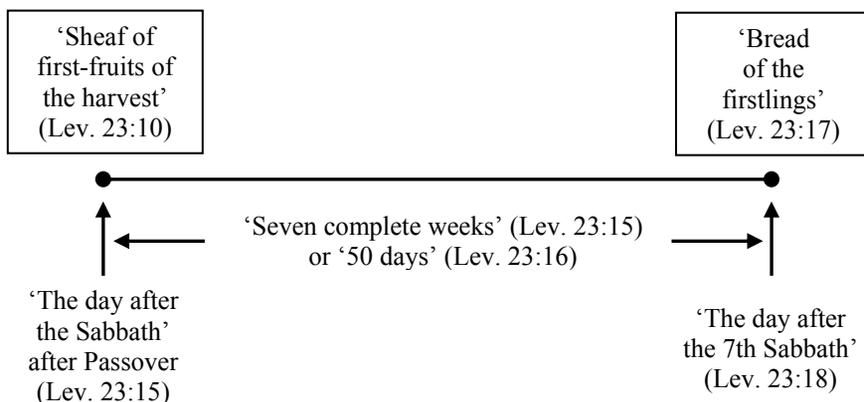
³⁸ Cf. BAGD, σάββατον, 739.

favour of the weekly Sabbath. Origen has a marginal note reading τῆ μετὰ τὸ σάββατον ('after the Sabbath') at Leviticus 23:11 and another one at 23:15 reading ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης τοῦ σαββάτου (= 'after the first of the week'). This reading is also preserved by the Samaritan Pentateuch.

These arguments are, of course, the result of critical lexical and textual research that would not have been familiar to Jews in the Second Temple. They suffered no such disadvantage when it came to counting, however, and at least one Jewish sect—the Sadducees, especially the priestly sect of the Boethusians, against whom much later Rabbinic polemic was directed (cf. e.g. *m. Menah.* 10:3)—was convinced on the basis of the instructions in the cultic calendar that **ממחרת השבת** denoted the day after the Sabbath after Passover.³⁹ This is, in fact, the only reckoning that coheres with the data: Leviticus 23:15 prescribes the counting of 'seven complete weeks' (**שבע שבטות תמימת**) from the waving of the sheaf to the waving of the loaves, and Leviticus 23:16 demands that the fiftieth day fall on 'the day after the seventh Sabbath' (**ממחרת השבת השביעת**). The Sabbath mentioned in the latter verse is clearly a weekly Sabbath, and in order for the counting formula to work the first day must also be the day after the Sabbath. In other words, if the offering of the sheaf of firstfruits is to be separated by a full 49 days, no more and no less, from the waving of the loaves on the day of Pentecost, as demanded by the parameters of the cultic calendar in Leviticus 23, it must take place on the first Sunday after Passover. This may be graphically represented as follows:

³⁹ The Qumran sect and the author of the book of Jubilees also understood **שבת** to refer to the weekly Sabbath, but they maintained that the Sabbath following the end of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread was in view. For a discussion of this and other minority positions, cf. Goudoever, *Calendars*, 17-29, and Lutz Doering, *Sabbat: Sabbathalacha und -praxis im antiken Judentum und Urchristentum* (TSAJ 78; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1999) 518-22.

The Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:9-13)



It is worth noting in passing that, given the significance of the number 7 and multiples thereof, especially 49, in biblical texts, it would not have been viewed as insignificant that a full complement of 7 weeks separated the two wave offerings that symbolically represented the beginning and end of the grain harvest, respectively.⁴⁰ In other words, the time between the offerings would have been thought to be vested with symbolic significance.⁴¹

5. 'Christ, the sheaf of firstfruits with respect to the resurrection' (1 Cor. 15:20)

Debates over matters of Halacha, including calendrical controversies, were the daily bread of the Rabbis in Jerusalem under whom Paul studied. Thus, when he affirms that Christ 'rose on the third day according to the scriptures' he almost certainly knew that the day on which, according to earliest Christian tradition, Jesus rose from the dead—the day after the Sabbath following Passover—was the day on which, according to the position of the Sadducees, the sheaf of firstfruits was to be waved in the temple. This does not correspond, as

⁴⁰ Cf. Joel White, *Die Erstlingsgabe im Neuen Testament* (TANZ 45, Tübingen: Francke, 2007) 61-62.

⁴¹ In later Judaism, this is reflected in the fact that the time between Firstfruits and Weeks was considered a period of apprehension and waiting in which festivities were frowned upon. Cf. Milgrom, 'Firstfruits', 85.

we noted above, to the actual ritual practice in the first century,⁴² but it seems likely that Paul would have been strongly drawn to a reading of Leviticus 23:9-22 that, apart from its intrinsic superiority (see above), is pregnant with Christological possibilities.⁴³

One important point bearing on our discussion has recently been put forward by Sir Colin Humphreys. In his thorough study of the calendrical discrepancies between the Synoptic and Johannine accounts of the crucifixion, he notes that, if one assumes a) that Jesus was crucified either in 30 C.E. or in 33 C.E. and b) that the Johannine chronology is correct, then the problem concerning the date of the firstfruits offering disappears altogether. This is due to the fact that, in those two years, Passover fell on the Sabbath by John's reckoning, and therefore the day after Passover would have been the day after the Sabbath.⁴⁴ Thus, the day on which the sheaf of barley was waved, with the full support of both the Sadducees and the Pharisees, was in actual fact the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. It goes beyond the scope of this article to examine whether the two necessary conditions noted by Humphreys actually hold, but it is worth noting that in both cases they represent what are probably majority opinions in New Testament scholarship.

All this suggests the intriguing possibility that when Paul recited 'he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures' in the creed he quotes in 1 Corinthians 15:4, the day which he knew to be 'the first day of the week' of the resurrection accounts, he was aware that this was the very day on which Leviticus 23:11, 15-16 prescribed that the sheaf

⁴² Josephus notes that even though the high priesthood was firmly in the hands of the Sadducees, they tended to defer in matters of Halacha to the much more influential Pharisees (cf. *Ant.* XVIII.17).

⁴³ C.K. Barrett, 'The Significance of the Adam-Christ Typology for the Resurrection of the Dead', in *Jesus and the Word and Other Essays* (PTMS 41, Allison Park, USA: Pickwick, 1995) 167, considers this possibility but ultimately rejects it on the grounds that Paul, a former Pharisee, would not have adopted a Sadducean interpretation. However, even if we grant that Saul, the Pharisee, shared his party's position with regard to the proper day for the waving of the sheaf of firstfruits (which seems likely, but cannot be said with certainty), this does not imply that Paul, the Christ follower, continued to do so. The apostle was clearly capable of rejecting Pharisaic convictions that involved much weightier matters; e.g. the significance and role of the Torah in God's plan. It hardly seems likely that he would have backed away from any particular reading, especially one with such promising typological potential, out of loyalty to the Pharisees.

⁴⁴ Cf. Colin J. Humphreys, *The Mystery of the Last Supper: Reconstructing the Final Days of Jesus* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011) 66-68.

of firstfruits be offered and may well have been the day on which it was actually offered. Of course, the cultic calendar does not make reference to ‘the third day’, and it is unlikely that author or authors of the creed intended an allusion to this text. Only someone familiar with the calendrical controversy between Pharisees and Sadducees regarding the proper day for the offering of the sheaf of firstfruits would have noted the ‘coincidence’; in other words, someone like Paul. Crucially, however, someone like Paul could hardly have failed to notice it!

What makes this inference not simply plausible, but, to my mind, probable, is the fact that Paul alludes to the sheaf of firstfruits in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23. I came to this conclusion after thoroughly examining that text in my dissertation,⁴⁵ but I have not published those results in English, so I’ll briefly review them here. I am, of course, not the first person to consider the possibility that Paul has the sheaf of firstfruits in mind here,⁴⁶ or even to note the calendrical coincidence between the waving of the sheaf of firstfruits and the resurrection of Jesus.⁴⁷ As far as I know, however, no one before me attempted to relate the reference to Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

Though it has not always been stated plainly, it seems clear that Paul is trying to establish two propositions in this passage: 1) There is a necessary causal link between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of those who are in Christ (1 Cor. 15:20-22), and 2) there is also a necessary temporal disjunction between the resurrection of Christ and those who are in Christ (1 Cor. 15:23-24). He is, in other words, eager both to maintain the unity of the resurrection (in line with Jewish expectations) and to explain its temporal discontinuity (in contrast to Jewish expectations). Intriguingly, the way in which Paul seeks to substantiate these points is, in both cases, by noting that Christ is the “firstfruits” (Greek: ἀπαρχή; 1 Cor 15:20, 23). One searches in vain for any other logical or scriptural mooring for his argument. Apparently, Paul’s reflections on this offering led him to the conclusion that it offered a typology well suited to his argument. This

⁴⁵ White, *Erstlingsgabe*, 109-163.

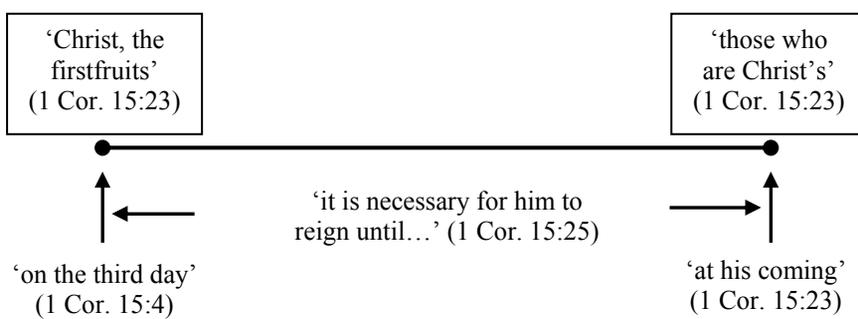
⁴⁶ Cf. e.g. A.T. Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911) 352; Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; London: Tyndale Press, 1958) 21; W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 106, 250.

⁴⁷ Cf. C.E. Hill, ‘Paul’s Understanding of Christ’s Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28’, *NovT* 30 (1988): 297-320, esp. 303, n. 12; Humphreys, *Mystery*, 68-71.

is probably what Johannes Weiss had in mind when he stated that ‘there is an entire thesis behind this short word’.⁴⁸ We can state the thesis as follows: The sheaf of firstfruits stands in the same relationship to the subsequent harvest as the resurrection of Christ stands to the future resurrection of believers.

When we compare the graphic representation of the Feast of Weeks (see p. 115 above) with Paul’s concept of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, we see that they have the very same structure:

The Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-28)



The correspondences are striking. The waving of the sheaf of firstfruits on the day after the Sabbath after Passover is connected to the waving of the bread of the firstlings in that together they represent the beginning and the end of the grain harvest, and the former consecrates the latter. In the same way the resurrection of Christ on the third day is the beginning of the resurrection that will be completed at the parousia. Likewise, it both initiates and consecrates the rest, insuring that the full resurrection ‘harvest’ will take place after a divinely ordained interim, which the NT refers to as the ‘last days’ and invests with *heilsgeschichtliche* significance. These many similarities would seem to be more than coincidental. More likely, they are the result of Paul’s meditation on the early church’s kerygma and his subsequent construction of a cultic calendrical typology strikingly similar in form to the relationship he draws out between Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.

⁴⁸ J. Weiß, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK SB; 2nd edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910) 35 (my translation).

One caveat is in order at this point. Scholars often seek to refute arguments like the one I have presented here by pointing out that Paul's audience would not have been in a position to pick up on such a complex OT allusion. I find this unconvincing for a number of reasons. First of all, it is a commonplace of literary criticism that the implied reader and the real reader of a text are seldom identical. In other words, authors say many things that their readers do not understand. Second, Christopher Stanley offers a better model for assessing reader competencies in Paul's audience than the typical binary 'either they get it or they don't' approach to this question. He differentiates between minimal, competent, and informed audiences, the last of which would have been able to pick up complex allusions.⁴⁹ Third, I have contended elsewhere that in the present case there is evidence that Paul expounded on this firstfruits typology during his extended time in Corinth.⁵⁰

6. Conclusion

Though the author or authors of the creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 probably had other texts in mind when they affirmed that 'he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures', it seems likely that when Paul reflected on the formula, he came to the conclusion that the resurrection of Christ on the Sunday after Passover was typologically prefigured by the cultic calendar in Leviticus 23. For on that very day, according to the Levitical calendar, a sheaf of firstfruits was to be waved before the Lord that served to symbolically commence and consecrate the entire harvest. In the same way, Paul views the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of the eschatological resurrection which consecrates those who are found in him, so that their resurrection necessarily follows on his.

⁴⁹ Cf. Christopher Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004) 62-71. For a full-scale attempt at applying Stanley's methodology to what I take to be another complex allusion to the OT in 1 Corinthians, cf. Joel White, 'Identifying Allusions to the Old Testament in New Testament Texts: Methodological Considerations and a Test-Case (1 Cor. 6:1-8)' in *The Crucified Apostle: Essays on Paul and Peter in Honor of Scott J. Hafemann*, eds. Paul House and Todd Wilson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

⁵⁰ Cf. Joel White, 'Christ's Resurrection is the Spirit's Firstfruits (Romans 8:23)', in *Resurrection from the Dead: Biblical Traditions in Dialogue*, eds. Geert van Oyen and Tom Shephard (BETL 249; Leuven: Peeters, 2012) 289-303, esp. 298-99.