



RIVER VALLEY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

The Story of the New Testament - Easter

The following “story” is taken from the book, *The Untold Story of the New Testament* by Frank Viola. Notes and additional commentary are added and arranged by Thomas Hale. Also emphases by Hale.

Spring A.D. 30

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:3-6 NIV).

It is four days before Passover. every Israelite family has secured **a spotless lamb**. The lambs are set aside for four days of preparation. On this same day, Jesus the Christ Messiah enters the city of Jerusalem.

Friday, April 7th, 30

From noon to 3:00 PM, the cries of the spotless lambs fill Jerusalem as they are slaughtered for the Passover feast. At the same time, Jesus Christ, the real Lamb of God, is crucified.

NOTE: John says that Jesus was crucified on “the day of Preparation” (John 19:31), that is, the Friday before the Sabbath of Passover week (Mark 15:42). At the third hour (9:00 AM), Israel's high priest tied the **Passover lamb** to the altar for sacrifice. **At that exact moment, outside the city walls of Jerusalem, Jesus, the Lamb of God, was nailed to the cross.** For six hours, both the Passover lamb and Jesus, the Lamb of God, awaited death. Finally, at the ninth hour (3:00 PM), the high priest ascended the altar in the temple and sacrificed the Passover lamb. **At that exact moment from the Cross, Christ's words thundered out over the city of Jerusalem, "It is finished!" (Christianity.com)**

As Jesus breathes his last breath, an earthquake hits the land, and the **curtain veil which encloses the Most Holy Place in the temple is rent in two from top to bottom**. This signifies that the way to fellowship with the Father has now been opened for all men to experience. Through his death, Jesus solves the entire problem of man's fall and satan's rebellion. Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin and a disciple of Jesus, places Christ's body in a new and unused tomb.

***NOTE:** The curtain referred to was the one that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the temple. It was torn from the top to the bottom. Mark must have regarded this as a supernatural act, though he does not assign theological significance to it (see Heb 9:1–14; 10:19–22). Since only the priests were permitted entrance into the Holy Place, this event probably became part of the tradition through the report of priests who were subsequently converted to Christianity (cf. Ac 6:7). Perhaps the experience of witnessing the tearing of the curtain in the temple prepared their hearts for receiving Jesus Christ as their Savior. Expositor's Bible Commentary. 1994.*

Sunday, April 9th, 30

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain (NKJV, John 12:24).

The Feasts of the Sheaf of Firstfruits has arrived. An Israelite walks into a field and locates the first sheaf of barley that has sprung up. The blade demonstrates that there will be a coming harvest. The Israelite pulls the sprig out of the ground and hands it to a priest. The priest waves the barley sheaf in the temple before Jehovah. **At the same moment, the Lord Jesus Christ comes out of the tomb as the firstfruits of all who will rise from the dead!**

***NOTE:** In the New Testament, the firstfruits offering is mentioned seven times, always symbolically. Paul calls Epaenetus and the household of Stephanas “the firstfruits of Achaia” (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:15). His meaning is that, just as the firstfruits offering was the first portion of a larger harvest, these individuals were the first of many converts in that region. James calls believers “a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:18). Just like the sheaf of grain was set apart for the Lord, so are believers set apart for God's glory.*

Jesus was put into the earth as a corn of wheat, suffering death alone. But on this morning, He has resurrected as a new grain which has sprouted with many others to follow after His resurrection. Jesus meets with the Twelve and breathes the Holy Spirit into them. Jesus Christ now indwells the

Twelve just as His Father indwelt Him. Christ stays on the earth for forty days, during which time He intermittently appears to the Twelve. He also appears to five hundred of His followers. When he appears, He speaks to them about the Kingdom of God.

May 19th, 30

After the forty days are complete, Jesus meets with the Twelve on the Mount of Olives. He sends them out to preach the gospel and found the Church, but they are commanded to wait in Jerusalem until their sending is activated. They are told to wait for the promise of the Spirit.

Jesus Christ disappears in a cloud and ascends into the heavens, where He takes His seat at the right hand of His Father. Jesus Christ enters His present-day ministry of High Priest for His people. As the twelve strained their eyes to see Him vanish, two white-robed men stand before them and assure them that Jesus will return in the same way that He ascended. The Twelve walk a Sabbath day journey, 3/4 of a mile from the Mount of Olives to the city of Jerusalem. They are accompanied by one hundred and eight other disciples, followers of Jesus. Jesus Christ is now the crucified, risen, ascended, enthroned Lord of Glory. His work on Calvary has paved the way for His Church, the community that will express His nature to be built on the earth.

***NOTE:** According to one of the early church fathers, Augustine of Hippo, the Feast of Ascension originated with the Apostles. It may be one of the oldest feasts practiced by the Church, possibly going as far back as AD 68. There is no written evidence, however, of the church honoring Ascension Day until Augustine's time in the fourth century. Churches around the world have observed Ascension Day Feasts for centuries, including ceremonies and traditions, including processions, prayer vigils, and Catholic masses.*

The Church is Born

2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (NKJV, 1 John 1:2–3).

9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the

heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, (NKJV, Ephesians 3:9-11).

11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory (NKJV, Ephesians 1:11-12).

This is the story of the Church, the *ekklesia*, as the community that **God has had in view since the dateless past**, a community that will express His divine nature in the earth. The Church is made up of the hidden ones who were chosen and hid in the Son before time began. When the Church is born, the hidden ones will begin to be manifested. **God's eternal purpose of expanding the divine fellowship that exists within the Godhead finds its fulfillment in and through the Church.**

Sunday, May 29th, 30

It is the Day of Pentecost. Hebrew-speaking Jews, Greek-speaking Jews, and proselytes, gentiles by birth who converted to Judaism from all across the Roman Empire, have swelled the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the feast among the nations. Approximately one hundred and twenty Jewish disciples of Jesus hold a prayer meeting in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem where they all have been living. The house probably belongs to Mary, John Mark's mother.

It is 9:00 AM. A priest has prepared **two loaves of leavened bread**. He pours oil on them and slips them into an oven to be baked together. At the same moment, the Holy Spirit descends into the upper room where the one hundred and twenty are staying. The Spirit enters the room with the noise of a rushing mighty windstorm. The Spirit fills the one hundred and twenty with His presence and power. Tongues of fire appear on their heads, and they speak in languages that they have never learned. As a result, those visiting Jerusalem from around the Roman Empire hear God being magnified in their own language and dialect.

Jesus Christ is being expressed in Jerusalem. Spiritually speaking, **one of the loaves has been baked**. Ten years will pass, and the Lord will baptize gentiles into this same body, and the **two oil-covered loaves that were slipped into an oven on the day of Pentecost will find their fulfillment**. The Jew and the gentile will be baptized into one body comprising a new race and new spiritual community.

NOTE: *Leviticus 23:15-22* gives the original instructions for the celebration of Pentecost. As part of the public priestly sacrifices made for this feast, *Leviticus 23:17* specifically says that two loaves of leavened bread were to be waved before the Lord. This was highly unusual. Generally, Israel could not offer any kind of leaven or yeast with a blood offering (*Exodus 23:18, 34:25*).

God encoded a hidden message into the ceremony for the feast of Pentecost. It was as if God said, “One day to come, on Pentecost, that which was thought to be unclean and unacceptable will be brought before Me, and I will honor that.” For centuries before the Pentecost described in *Acts 2:1*, Israel saw the leavened loaves waved before God in the ceremony commanded for this feast. Maybe they wondered what it meant. **But we know; as the great English preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “Were there not two loaves? Not only shall Israel be saved, but the multitude of the Gentiles shall be turned unto the Lord Jesus Christ.”** (David Guzik)

Significantly, the day of Pentecost has been invested with the **commemoration of the giving of the Law**. According to Jewish tradition, the law was supernaturally uttered from Sinai in the seventy languages of the nations of the world. The Jerusalem church is born with the Spirit’s coming. Jesus Christ the Head, baptizes one hundred and twenty Jews into His body. The first church is born on the earth. There is now a community of people who contain God's life and are expressing God's nature.

The noise from the upper room provokes a crowd of Jews to see what has happened. The Jews are bewildered to hear many of their own dialects from the various nations being spoken by one hundred and twenty Jerusalem residents. Some question what this strange phenomenon means. Others accuse the one hundred and twenty of being drunk. Peter, surrounded by the eleven apostles, stands in the midst of a crowded Jerusalem. He preaches Jesus Christ to a Jewish audience and exhorts them to repent and be baptized in the Name of Jesus. Three thousand Jews respond and are added to the newly formed church. **The fellowship of the Trinitarian community has now broadened from 12 to 120 to 3000.**

The first instinct of these new Christians is to meet and to meet constantly. The Galilean experience of informal gatherings with Christ as center is now brought to Jerusalem by the Twelve, and it is being reproduced among three thousand people. Those in the church devote themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the Lord's Supper, prayer, and fellowship. The Twelve are performing signs and wonders in the city. The Church is in awe as it beholds God's power made visible!

HAPPY EASTER!