

Transcripts of
**EASTER
MESSAGES**

A Lecture Series by R.J. Rushdoony



R.J. RUSHDOONY

(1916–2001)

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony (1916–2001), was a leading theologian, church/state expert, and author of numerous works on the application of Biblical law to society. He started the Chalcedon Foundation in 1965. His Institutes of Biblical Law (1973) began the contemporary theonomy movement which posits the validity of Biblical law as God's standard of obedience for all. He therefore saw God's law as the basis of the modern Christian response to the cultural decline, one he attributed to the church's false view of God's law being opposed to His grace. This broad Christian response he described as "Christian Reconstruction." He is credited with igniting the modern Christian school and homeschooling movements in the mid to late 20th century. He also traveled extensively lecturing and serving as an expert witness in numerous court cases regarding religious liberty. Many ministry and educational efforts that continue today, took their philosophical and Biblical roots from his lectures and books.

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OUR LORD'S EXODUS at JERUSALEM (1988)

R.J. Rushdoony

Let us worship God.

"The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia."

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

Alleluia, let us pray.

All glory be to thee, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. When thy grace, mercy, power, and majesty hast ordained all things unto perfection, has set us aside for thy purpose, and in all our trials and tribulations are at work in that which will perfect us for thine eternal kingdom. Give us joyful hearts in all thy ways, make us strong in thy service. Make us ever mindful that we are the people of the resurrection, and that there is no power greater than thy power. No power that can overthrow thy purpose and thy kingdom. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Our scripture is from Luke 9:28-31, our Lord's exodus at Jerusalem.

"And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."

On this, the day of resurrection, it is appropriate to turn again to these verses in Luke's gospel which were the verses we began our study of Exodus with. We began our study of Exodus with Luke 9:28-31, and we saw at that time that the word translated in verse thirty-one as 'decease' is in the Greek text, "exodon," our word 'exodus.' In the Greek, the root is 'hodos,' or 'way,' and 'ex-' is a preposition, a prefix to 'hodos,' so that very literally the word exodus means 'the way out.' Thus, the exodus of Israel is out of Egypt into the Promised Land. Our Lord's exodus is premised on this earlier 'way out,' in that it signifies a very mighty and total deliverance, the way out, for Christ's new humanity, from a world of sin and death, into a world of life and justice.

According to St. Paul, Jesus Christ is the last Adam, the head of a new humanity, and this new humanity is recreated by him out of the old. We are made anew in His image. We become God's new human race. We are told that God the Son became man, was totally obedient to God's law, paid the penalty of death for which we are all liable, dying in our stead on the cross, and rose again from the dead to become the victorious God-man, king over all creation. His victory on the cross was over the power of sin and death, both of which mark all men born of Adam. The fact of sin is a very important theological and sociological one, but it is very much neglected in modern thought.

The problem now commonly discussed is crime, but sin and crime are two very different things. Crimes are violations of statist law. In some cases, crime and sin can be identical. But their meanings still can be very different. Thus, murder and theft, at present, are crimes because state law prohibits them. As violations of God's law, they are also sins, but they are prosecuted as crimes, and crime commonly includes the failure to meet a variety of statist, bureaucratic regulations which have no relationship to morality in any biblical sense. We will not solve the problem of crime until we deal with the problem of sin.

According to Wilhelm Pauck: "sin is an act or attitude by which the reality of God is denied or violated." This at least points us in the right direction, because sin does deny or violate the reality of God. It assumes that God is not real, and it establishes a man-centered or state-centered moral code and law, and it has no regard for God's law. Today, if a murder is committed, it's not a crime against God or you, if you are the victim. It was, at one time, considered punishable because it was an offense, not only against God's law, but an individual. Now, it's the state that prosecutes in the name of the state as an offense against the state, and it may settle the case without any regard for the victim and the family of the victim, often in contempt of them. Not too long ago, when the case was settled, the family was indignant at the decision and that they were not notified when the case was placed on the calendar for the last hearing, and the judge told them they had nothing to do with it!

Well, such a humanistic perspective leads to tyranny, because it makes man or the state the source of all definition and the determiner of what constitutes good and evil. As against this we are told by I John 3:4-5,:

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he (Jesus Christ) was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin." This means first, that: "...sin is any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God." God defines good and evil, and God determines law, not man, because all the sons of Adam are sinners who seek to determine good and evil for themselves; they are all under sentence of death. Second; John tells us Jesus Christ, the sinless one, paid the death penalty for us and took away our sins so that we are now justified, or made legally innocent before God by Christ's atonement.

This means that the atonement is a radical revolution in history. It means far more than: "Now, you're going to heaven," which you are, if you are Christ's own. It means that there's a radical revolution in history, in time, wrought by eternity, to reverse the whole direction of events. Then, Christ's victory on the cross was not only sin, but also over death by His resurrection. Death entered the world as a consequence of sin. Paul tells us in Romans 5:12: "wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned." God is life, the source of all life, and to depart from Him is to move from life into death. As a result, sin brings in death. Sin is therefore an 'exodus' into death. So, the word 'exodon' in the Greek can mean 'decease' as it is translated in Luke 9:31, and it can also mean 'the way out.' And as it is used in the text here, our Lord is using it in the double sense. He says: "I am going to Jerusalem to be crucified, to die, but to rise again. It will mark both my sin, my death for your sin, but the way out for all those who are my people." Men want a way out.

Recently, in an academic journal, a homosexual wrote on his hope that science would soon provide a vaccine for AIDS. He hoped it would enable men to continue their march into a full liberation from the old world of moral consequences. His idea of an 'exodus' was from morality into a safe amorality, into a freedom for perpetual sinning. As A. Eustace Haydon wrote:

"Man has always been a protestant against death. Even high cultures have refused to recognize its universal rule and have projected the hope of an immortal life free from all future assaults of death."

Well, the subject as Haydon wrote, has been a constant concern of men. He was approaching it as an anthropologist.

James Hastings' classic Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, first published in 1911, gave one hundred and one pages to a survey by a number of scholars just on the subject of death. In a thirty-three page introduction to the subject, one anthropologist, E. Sydney Hartland, began thus:

"The horror of death is universal among mankind. It depends not so much on the pain that often accompanies this dissolution as upon the mystery of it, and the results to the subject and to the survivors, the cessation of the old familiar relations between them, and the decomposition of the body. This horror has given rise to an obstinate disbelief in the necessity of death, and to attempts continually repeated in spite of invariably disastrous experiences of failure to escape death. Even the most natural and inevitable decease is persistently ascribed to causes not beyond human control, and on the other hand, legends of the origin of death are familiar and widespread. The picture thus presented of the desperate refusal of mankind to accept a cardinal condition of existence is one of the most pathetic in the history of the race."

Well, in recent years, the scientific attempts to destroy death have been pronounced, and some people have had their bodies frozen at death to await a hoped for scientific resurrection in the future. Humanistic thinking separates death from sin. It makes it a naturalistic and evolutionary fact, whereas for Scripture, death is abnormal. The Bible is emphatic on this, death is not a normal fact. It is an abnormal aspect of a fallen world order, and even as the natural order has been made unnatural by sin, warped and defective, so too life has been deformed and abbreviated by sin. When sin and death are separated as they are in humanistic thinking, the result is very, very serious, because God makes clear that death is a consequence and the penalty for mankind's sin.

Humanistic thinking cannot then confront the fact of sin as having consequences. It departs from that concept of a moral wrong in the person to an environmental problem that statistics, controls, regulations, and remaking of the environment will eliminate, and death then is simply a scientific problem to be solved in due time.

We have seen the pride reach the point where, ostensibly, mankind will not only conquer death according to one astrophysicist, but will when the sun perishes, create a new sun out of subatomic materials so that man can continue forever.

Death is the consequence of, and the penalty for sin according to the Bible. And in terms of this, the law of God requires immediate death for some sins, as well as death for habitual offenders. And it says that an infection has entered into humanity, which in time will destroy all of us. The penalty of death for sin is set forth both for personal sins and national sins, unless there be repentance and reformation. But, as we have seen, humanism separates sin and death, and therefore, as it looks at Easter, it sees it as a time comparable to spring, of a periodic renewal, a reawakening, a spring festival. It opposes the death penalty itself as a crime. Sin is not the cause of crime, but rather environmental factors are blamed for criminality.

As a result, without Christ's atonement and resurrection, a people have no solution for the problems of sin and death. Humanistic policies end up as subsidies to sin, and death for justice and moral order ensues. As a society ceases to understand and honor the meaning of our Lord's death and resurrection, that society begins an 'exodus' from life into death.

The exodus of modern men and nations in this century has been a grim and ugly march into death. For

us as Christians, however, life is an exodus into a new creation because of Christ's death and resurrection, and as a conclusion to that exodus we are told:

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

All men are on an exodus, but the directions differ. Apart from Jesus Christ, apart from His death and resurrection, the exodus of a fallen humanity is from sin into death. In Christ, the exodus is into justice and life. He is the model for all creation, and we are told that in due time, the kingdoms of this earth shall be made the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and in eternity, the power of sin and death will be totally broken.

In 1901, a Greek scholar, Arthur S Way, rendered Hebrews 2:5-10, in these words, which help, I think, bring out the meaning of the exodus. He translated:

“For it is not to angels that God has subjected the New Humanity of the future, which is the theme of my argument. Witness was borne to this in that prophetic passage, ‘WHAT IS MAN THAT THOU DOST REMEMBER HIM? ‘WHAT IS THE SON OF MAN, THAT THOU DOST STOOP TO HIM? THOU DIDST MAKE HIM BUT LITTLE INFERIOR TO ANGELS, WITH GLORY AND HONOUR DIDST THOU CROWN HIM, AND DIDST APPOINT HIM RULER OVER THE WORKS OF THINE HANDS: ALL THINGS DIDST THOU SET BENEATH HIS FEET.’ —(Ps. 8:4,6). Now the expression, ‘Set all things beneath him’ must mean that God exempted nothing from this destiny of subjection to him (to Jesus). But, as a matter of fact, we do not as yet see all things subjected to man. But we do see the archetype of the New Humanity, Jesus—Him who has been lowered to the level of humanity, and so made a little inferior to angels already, because of His suffering of the death-penalty of our sin, crowned with glory and honour. This has been done, that his tasting of death might, by God's grace to us, prove to have been for the sake of all humanity. For it was an act worthy of God, for whose ends all tilings exist, and by whose power are all upheld, to draw onward to the glory of His presence these myriads, all His sons, and so to make the Captain who leads their march salvation-ward perfect through those very sufferings that He endured for them.

The scriptures tell us all the way through that all life is an ‘exodus.’ Our exodus in Christ is a victorious and a glorious one. Let us pray.

Oh Lord, our God we thank thee that in Jesus Christ, we have been made members of his new humanity. That we have been brought into the great exodus from life to death, from sin to justice and righteousness. How great and marvelous are thy ways, oh Lord, and thy gifts unto us. Make us ever joyful that we have been called to life and victory. Make us ever mindful that this is the day of resurrection, the day commemorating our glorious exodus in Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

ENDNOTES:

1. James Hastings, ed. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. Vol. Volume 4, Confirmation-Drama. 15 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908, 411.

2. Arthur S. Way, D. Lit., trans. The Letters of Paul to Seven Churches and Three Friends with the Letter to the Hebrews. London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1935, 224,225.

OUR LORD'S EXODUS at JERUSALEM (1989)

R.J. Rushdoony

Let us worship God.

"The Lord is risen indeed. Hallelujah!"

"I am He that liveth and was death, sayeth the Lord and behold I am alive forevermore."

Hallelujah!

Let us pray. All glory be to thee, oh God the Father Almighty. Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, oh Holy Spirit, who hast made us thy people, and hast overcome death and sin for our salvation. Make us ever joyful, our Father, in the knowledge that all things are under Christ's feet, and He shall reign forever and ever. Make us ever joyful, our Father, for the calling which is ours, for the certainty of our victory in Christ, and for the blessed assurance that though the heathen rage and take counsel together against the Lord and His anointed, yet they shall be broken, as with a rod or iron. For thy will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. How great and marvelous thou art and we praise thee. In Christ's name, Amen.

Our scripture is from the gospel of Luke 9:28-31. Our subject; Our Lord's Exodus at Jerusalem, Luke 9:28-31.

"And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."

We began our study of Exodus with these verses and we shall examine them further today, because they are essential to Christ's death and resurrection. This Easter is very much like the first Easter, when the powers of the world conspired to destroy Jesus Christ. Death by crucifixion was the most fearful means of death that Rome could devise. They had turned it into a science, to see how they could kill a man with the maximum amount of suffering. Very often, locally, there were refinements added to it. One popular means of increasing the agony, very popular in Judea, was to throw rocks at the man on the cross whom they particularly detested. And before long, after an hour or so, the man's face and body would be hanging with strips of flesh. This was done to our Lord because it was not necessary for the Roman soldiers to break his legs to speed his death at the end, he was already dead.

The world today is joined in the same kind of attempt to destroy Christ. Across the country today, a syndicated article is appearing on the front pages of newspapers by a Los Angeles Times writer, but emanating from Washington, DC, accompanied very commonly by a six inch picture of Martin Luther King, and a statement that: "It is he who resurrected society."

Two year ago at this time, the Salisbury Review in England carried an article about the death wish of modern man, documenting it with what was taking place in Britain. And they referred to the response to AIDS and the refusal to face up to it, to the refusal to face up to what the Soviet Union is, to the refusal to face up to what is happening in education, to the refusal to face up to the implications of the peace movement, and one thing after another, and concluded by saying: "It is obvious, the whole world has a death wish." And of course, they were right. Thus, as the world seeks to destroy Christ, it is in actuality, involved in its own death-wish, and is destroying itself, because to seek to destroy the Lord of Life is to choose death.

Now, in any attempt to understand the Christian life and faith, and the death and resurrection of our Lord, Luke 9:28-31 is a very key text. It is also essentially related to the book of Exodus because the word 'decease.' "Elijah and Moses appeared in glory and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem," translates a word which is 'exodus.' The word in the Greek is 'exodon.' It is to be Christ's accomplishment, his perfection of his calling at Jerusalem. Now, the historical exodus of Israel was from slavery to freedom, from Egypt toward the Promised Land. The historical exodus of Jesus Christ for his new humanity, the new human race he remakes or regenerates is from sin and death into justice, dominion, and everlasting life.

There is a very, very remarkable fact and irony in this incident that Luke describes. There is a transfiguration, a brief one, limited to this mountain experience, but fading thereafter. Christ radiated, for a time, with a light and glory which were not of this world. The transfiguration brought together three key persons; Moses, Elijah, the New Testament uses the Greek form; 'Elias,' and Jesus Christ. Moses gave the law. Elijah enforced it, and Christ came to empower us, to keep it.

Now, by creating a new humanity through his atonement, Jesus Christ created a people who could obey God's law and bring about the reign, the rule of justice. Moses and Elijah talked, we are told, with Jesus. The Greek word refers to a simple talk, or a conversation. The three disciples were witnesses to this remarkable conversation, and the meaning of Christ's exodus was obviously clearly stated to them, and for them. Their failure to comprehend its meaning until much, much later was a moral failure, not a lack of clarity in what they saw and heard on the mountaintop. Schilder called attention some years ago to the remarkable fact that, in this meeting, Jesus, while God the Son, was in His incarnation in a lesser glory than Moses and Elijah. They appeared in glory, in a permanent state, whereas he, whom Scripture calls 'the Lord of Glory,' was able to manifest that glory only in a brief transfiguration at this time.

JC Ryle, a century ago, commented on subject of the conversation between Moses and Elijah, and Jesus: "his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem," and said:

"This expression is remarkable. It means, literally, his 'exodus' or departure. It is used for death by St. Peter speaking of his own death. It is also remarkable, in Acts 3:24, we have a Greek word used for our Lord's coming to take his office of a savior which might be translated literally, 'his entrance.' Both expressions are similarly, singularly applicable to him who came into the world and was made flesh. And after doing the work he came to do, left the world and went to the Father. The beginning of his ministry was an Eishodos, or entrance. His death, an 'exodus,' or departure."

Thus the Bible speaks, to sum up Ryle's statement, of our Lord's coming as an, 'eisodon' His going, as an exodus; 'eísodos' and 'exodus.'

Our Lord had already spoken of his coming death and resurrection to his disciples, and they were stunned and non-comprehending when he spoke of it. Their minds were concentrated on what they

expected Christ to be, they could not accept nor understand his very plain statements of his coming and his atoning death. Now, this revelation and transfiguration was a witness to the unity of God's revelation from the beginning of the Bible to the end. It was a witness to three selected disciples as it is to us, to the church over the centuries, of the meaning of his coming, and of his going.

Moses and Elijah did not come to console nor to strengthen Jesus, nor was it their sole purpose to witness to Peter, John, and James. All that Moses and Elijah had done was essentially and totally tied to the work of Jesus Christ, and the work of our Lord was essentially and totally tied to the work of Moses and Elijah, to the law and the prophets. Christ did not come in fulfillment of Buddhism, or Shintoism, or Hinduism, or Zoroastrianism, or any other religion, but in terms of the Law and the Prophets, in terms of God's covenant. And any attempt to separate the Old and the New Testaments is death to the faith. The Law and the Prophets are meaningless without the atonement, and the atonement is stripped of its meaning when separated from the Law and the Prophets. God's covenant with man is a covenant of grace and law, and we do not understand the Scriptures unless we appreciate that fact. God the Father, the creator of all things, entered into covenant with man, and that was an act of grace, pure and total grace. At the same time, every covenant is a treaty of law. And God, in the covenant with man declares that the way of peace with him is to walk in terms of his law-Word, the way of righteousness, or justice.

Now, in John 14:6, our Lord declares that: "he is the way, the truth, and the life." This points us to another very significant fact which we lose in translation. The word 'way' in Greek in scriptures is 'hodos.' It is a part of the word 'exodus,' which is very literally 'ex-hodos.' An entrance, or entering is 'eisodos.' In Jeremiah 5:4 and elsewhere, we have a reference to the law as the 'way of the Lord,' which in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, reads, 'odón kyriou.' To walk in the way of the Lord means, in the Old Testament, to act according to the will of God revealed in commandments, statutes, and ordinances. This is what I Kings 2:3 and I Kings 8:58 tell us. God's law is called 'the way of the Lord,' for which the prophets have to struggle to see that it is observed. In Psalm 119, again in the Greek version, the Septuagint, the way and the law are repeatedly equated.

Now, the strange fact is that there are some that want us to believe that after the Bible tells us most of the way through that the way of the Lord is the way of the covenant law and grace. Suddenly, with the New Testament, this meaning is dropped, and a different and a lawless meaning comes in. This is an interpretation which goes against all common sense, as well as any intelligent interpretation. We have to conclude that Jesus, in declaring himself to be "the way," means plainly that he is the incarnation of God's grace and justice, he is the way. The law is the expression of his being, as God the Son, and of his obedience as very man of very man. He is the covenant law incarnate, as well as the incarnation of covenant grace. He is God in the flesh.

The presence of Moses and Elijah makes clear that God's covenant is brought to its perfection in Jesus Christ, and both the law and the prophets are validated. At the same time, the covenant grace and mercy are realized in Him and His atoning death. By his resurrection, he overthrows the power of sin and death. His Ex-hodos in Jerusalem, thus means that God's justice as judgment against sin is executed. His resurrection as part of his Ex-hodos means that the powers of sin and death are broken, a new creation begins of which he is the first fruit, and man is free to walk in the way of the Lord. This way of the Lord means the freedom to exercise godly dominion, and by means of God's law to bring about the rule of God's justice. This was the Ex-hodos, the 'decease,' the way which our Lord opened up for us at Jerusalem.

But the world has chosen death. All around us we see, as the authors of the article in the Salisbury Review so ably presented, a massive will to death. A world bent on suicide and blasphemously so. It is a grim fact, but even as our Lord rose from the dead, so today as they seek to bury him on the front

pages of the papers from coast to coast, and to speak of another so-called resurrection, it is Christ who lives, and it is Christ who reigns, and it is Christ who is victorious over sin and death. It is Christ whose justice is at work in the world and is bringing judgment and death upon those who array themselves against him. "The ungodly nations take counsel," Psalm 2 tells us, "and they conspire together against the Lord and His anointed. And they say: "Let us break his bands," his law, his rules asunder, and declare our freedom.' But: "he that sitteth in the circle of the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision." And his word unto them is: "kiss the son!" fall down before him in adoration and in repentance! "Lest ye perish in your way, lest he smite you with a rod of iron." Blessed are all they that trust in him. Thus, on this day of all days, we must rejoice in the fact that we, by the grace of God, are the blessed of God, and blessedness can be translated also as 'happiness,' as joy. Ours is a joy that is not of this world, and a peace that is not of this world. And while the world perishes, we are destined for freedom and dominion. Therefore rejoice! Christ is risen! He has risen indeed! Let us pray.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we give thanks that even as the world tries afresh to crucify and bury the Lord of glory, He is risen, and he reigns, and his judgment is going forth from pole to pole, against all workers of iniquity. But there is no way, truth, or life, no resurrection apart from Jesus Christ, and no justice apart from his Word. Make us strong in Him, and joyful in Him, for he has risen indeed, with life and healing for His people. Our God, we thank thee. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ENDNOTES:

1. J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, St. Luke, Vol. I (London, England: William Hunt, 1858)

Faith and the Resurrection

R.J. Rushdoony

Let us worship God.

“The Lord is risen indeed! Hallelujah!”

“I am He that liveth and was dead, saith the Lord, and behold I am alive evermore.” Hallelujah!

Let us pray. All glory be to Thee, God the Father almighty, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. We praise Thee that in this day, our savior, Jesus Christ, was risen from the dead, resurrected as the first fruits of them that sleep, and that in Him we are partakers of His victory over sin and death. We thank Thee that, by the working of the Holy Spirit in us, we who are Thine are led into all truth as it is in the risen Christ. And so, we bless thee and praise thee, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, for thy great mercy, and so great salvation unto us. How great and marvelous thou art, oh Lord, and we rejoice in thee and in thy ways. In Christ's name, amen.

Our scripture is in Matthew 27:50-54. Matthew 27:50-54; our subject, “Faith and the Resurrection.”

“Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. 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; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. 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.”

This is a startling text, and not much is said about it by some commentators, nor is it often preached about. It is too strange a narrative for some. It does, however, have an interesting confirmation, and WF Albright and CS Mann, both modernists, summarize the confirmation in these words.

“Josephus {Jewish War VI. 299} has an account of an earthquake before the fall of Jerusalem, while a letter of Jerome (120.8) recalls that the now lost Gospel according to the Hebrews speaks of a cleavage in the masonry of the temple porch, which might have left the Most Holy Place open to view. The Talmud (TB, Yoma 39b) has an interesting story concerned with Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, which reports that the doors of the temple opened of their own accord forty years {sic} before the fall of Jerusalem, so portending the end of the temple.”

So we have three confirmations of this earthquake, two from Jewish and one from a Christian source.

For a generation after the crucifixion and resurrection, there were no challenges to the historicity of the events surrounding the crucifixion and the resurrection. Only when all the eyewitnesses were dead did skeptics dare to speak out. Prior to that, there were too many people who could say (remember there were five hundred at one time who saw Him after the resurrection), too many who could say: “I saw Him in the flesh” after His death.

We do not know how many non-canonical documents reporting on the events became lost, but certainly the events were startling. They begin first with the death of Christ on the cross. He, as the sec-

ond person of the Trinity, now in His Incarnation, experienced the death penalty for us all. As the Adam in His Incarnation of a new humanity, He assumed not only our humanity but also our death penalty. He experienced not only death, but an agonizing death as a criminal. Then, second; various supernatural occurrences marked His death. We will return to those shortly. Third; the centurion and those who were with him feared greatly. They saw a supernatural connection between Christ's death and the violent reaction of the ground under their feet. Not only was there an earthquake, but rocks were rent asunder. As RCH Lenski pointed out, there were three supernatural signs and witnesses to the meaning of Christ's death. We've already touched on them, but to go into them a little more fully.

First, the great temple curtain, veiling the Holy of Holies was rent in twain. The Holy of Holies was exposed and profaned. Lenski supposed that the earthquake snapped the great beam at the top and thereby ripped the veil in two as it fell. The destruction of the sanctity of the Holy of Holies at the time of the evening sacrifices meant the end of its holiness, the end of the ministrations of the Jewish High Priest and the end of Israel as God's chosen people. Their sanctuary, their church, had been profaned by an act of God, in effect cast out.

The second sign was the great earthquake and the rending of the rocks. The coincidence of this event with Christ's death is not accidental. The earth, created by God, reacted to the death of its creator, God the Son, "...by whom all things were made and without Him was not anything made that was made." with a great and gigantic shudder of revulsion. Man in Eden chose death, in choosing to be his own god and lawmaker. And now the earthquake witnessed to the horror of man's act from Eden to Calvary. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men..." John tells us. And when men chose sin and death, the world under their feet witnessed to their choice of destruction. God thereby declared that those who hate him choose death and destruction.

The third sign was the opening of the graves by the earthquake. Now the first stage of this is not unusual. At times, earthquakes have broken open graves. In this instance, however, many of the saints of old arose after the resurrection to enter the Holy City and to appear unto many. Since the earthquake occurred too late in the day and the Sabbath began at sundown of the night before no work could be done on the Sabbath to repair the damages to the graves. This had to remain until the first day of the week. On that day, however, these long-dead saints arose out of their graves to enter the city. Their bodies and souls were reunited. Christ's resurrection, as the first-fruits of the victory over death, is thus openly seen as a victory of all over death. Jesus Christ had entered death to destroy death. These saints represented the Church of the Advent, appearing to witness to a death-bound world.

The Sanhedrin had placed a guard on the tomb, a Roman guard, a detail assigned supposedly to prevent any theft of Christ's body, but actually to prevent the Resurrection. The Sanhedrin had more faith in Rome than in God! They believed that because Rome had executed Christ, they might be able to keep Him from rising. It is possible that many in Jerusalem, with the earthquake, and then the resurrection of dead men, believed it to be the end of the world. We are not told to whom they appeared, but it was unto many. They obviously did not appear to the disciples, who found the first reports of the risen Christ hard to believe. Those to whom they appeared did not apparently become believers, even though they had seen the dead saints risen and alive. Our Lord tells us in Luke 16:31:

"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

This is a devastating verse, because our Lord here equates failure to believe in Moses, that is in God's Law, and if they refuse to believe in the prophets, who set forth the application of the Law, then men will not believe one who rises from the dead. Our Lord is obviously referring to Himself. He declares a disbelief in Moses and the Law and the Prophets to be a disbelief in Him. The reference is not to an

acceptance of certain facts, nor to a faith without works, but to a supernatural and a saving faith.

James tells us in James 2:19: "thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well. The devils also believe and tremble." It would be difficult to stress more strongly a rejection of antinomianism. We are told on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah, the Law and the prophets, appeared to talk with our Lord. Very clearly, this same unity of the covenant is seen in the resurrection of the saints. The devils in Hell and in the temple and in the church, know the reality of God's work in Christ, and of the unity of the Law and the prophets with Christ, and yet they will not manifest the saving faith. The essence of their faith is my will be done, my word is my law and I want only an insurance policy from Christ, not a total Lord.

These dead saints, as we have seen, did not appear to the disciples but to others. They witnessed the enemies of Christ. We are told by St. Paul in Romans 1:18-20:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness (or injustice) of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness (or injustice); Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

At times, God in supernatural ways, as in this instance, has witnessed mightily to the ungodly, leaving them without excuse.

The Holy City had been profaned. It had received a witness of staggering dimension, but however terrified at the moment, it refused to see Jesus as the Messiah. Our Lord declared that the judgment to come on Judea would be without equal: "for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world at this time, no, nor ever shall be," according to Matthew 24:21. The fall of Jerusalem in the Jewish-Roman war of 66-70 AD was the greatest disaster in all of history, but it is a curious fact that people have a habit of forgetting disasters very quickly. In a book on plagues, written in the thirties, the scholar writing it marveled that in so few years after the great flu' epidemic of 1918 and thereafter, which wiped out millions upon millions and in two weeks more would have wiped out all humanity if it had continued to accelerate at the same rate, then had forgotten it. And again and again, we see men suppressing the truth. Paul says they hold the truth, or hold back, they suppress the truth in their unrighteousness or injustice. With regard to the fall of Jerusalem, all too many scholars and nonscholars have tried to belittle the extent of the horror, the vengeance of the Romans, and the death of vast numbers by crucifixion, but the facts are incapable. In a vast area, all the trees were cut down to provide enough wood for crosses.

Now at the time of the resurrection, the dead came alive. They were resurrected, but people feared, yet they did not believe. Then, as now, fear is a substitute for faith in too many people. But for us, Christ is risen from the dead. Moses and Elijah are the resurrected saints who came to His transfiguration, and now at the resurrection, others arise to witness for Him. He is risen, and He is the great law-giver, savior and Lord, our prophet, priest and king forever. Men and nations will stand or fall in terms of their relationship to Him.

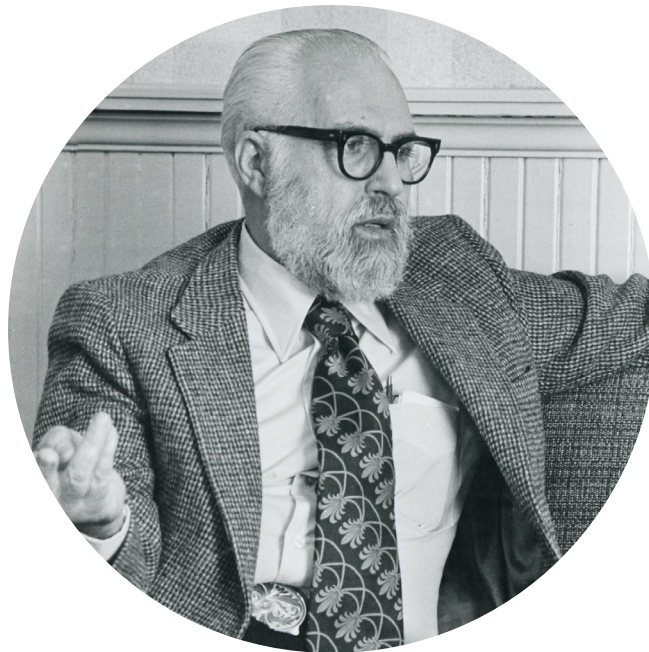
Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, we give thanks unto thee that thou art He who hast redeemed us, saved us from sin and death, so that we are the people of the resurrection, ours is the inheritance of eternal life. Ours is the freedom from sin and death, and with our perfect sanctification in the world to come, will come our perfection in Christ and for His purposes. We praise thee, oh Lord, and we rejoice that thou hast in Jesus Christ, resurrected us also from the power of sin and death. In His name we pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES:

1. The Anchor Bible Matthew. Vol. Volume 26. 140 vols. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1971, 352.

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