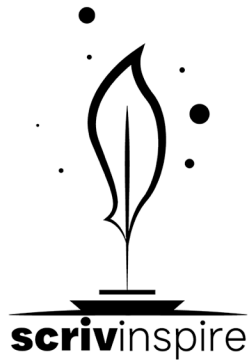


After the Tomb

The Unexpected Encore

Stephen Austin



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Published by ScrivInspire,
an imprint of Scrivenings Press LLC
15 Lucky Lane
Morrilton, Arkansas 72110
<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

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Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-446-8

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-447-5

Editors: Sally Crossley and Linda Fulkerson

Cover by Linda Fulkerson www.bookmarketinggraphics.com

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®
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This book is dedicated to three people in particular, among others, who encouraged me through the process of writing and editing this book:

- My wife Lynette, with whom I began to talk about this book 12 years ago on a night-time walk, and who made valuable suggestions about writing and framing, as well as affirming that this book could be unique and important;
- My sister Marcia, an accomplished biblical scholar who shares my love for and interest in this kind of biblical imagination and wonder, and who spent more than 100 hours editing the manuscript;
- And my mother-in-law Wynetta, who along the way fed me her beef stew as she encouraged me in writing the book, asked about my progress, and read early drafts.

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INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR'S NOTE

As a Christian, Bible professor, and minister, I've studied and taught about the life of Christ for more than forty years. About twelve years ago, while reading the stories of Jesus' appearances after his resurrection, I began to wonder what had happened during those forty days on earth before his ascension. We have biblical stories from perhaps five of those days.

Where did he go? What did he do? Who did he talk to? What topics did he discuss? The Bible has remarkably little to say about these things. And besides lessons on the few stories we do have, I have never heard any sermons or classes, read any books, nor seen any videos about this part of his ministry.

I once read a scholar's explanation of Mark's account of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He said that since no one was with Jesus when he prayed (apart from sleeping disciples), that Mark must have just invented that part of the story.

What an unfortunate conclusion! Rather, I think it is much more likely that Jesus spoke in detail with his disciples about the events of his arrest and trial during the forty days he was with them. If I were

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an apostle, that would have been one of the first questions I asked after his resurrection.

I believe during these forty days, Jesus planted the seeds for many things that happened later, such as the beginning of the church, the gospels, and the apostles' ministries. Acts 1:3 says Jesus spoke with them during this time about the Kingdom of God; all these topics would be part of his Kingdom.

I believe he talked with his mother and family, visited people whom he had healed or helped, and taught and encouraged them regarding their roles in the kingdom.

I believe this was a time of joy and celebration after the suffering and sorrow of his trial and death.

In this book, I've begun with the biblical account, then added my description of what Jesus might have done or said during the forty days. I used "biblical imagination," often basing my ideas on scriptural principles or events shown in other parts of Jesus' ministry. I've included many references to scriptural events and principles that informed my thinking and writing, as well as consulting many other historical and cultural sources.

I don't claim that the events I write about happened—but I think they are possible, even likely.

I pray this book will help its readers ponder deeply the character and ministry of Jesus and how they can follow in his footsteps.

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PREFACE

THE THIRD OMER

When the Israelites traveled from Egypt to Mount Sinai to receive the Law, the Lord began to provide food for them in the desert, which he continued until three days after they reached the Promised Land. The Israelites gathered their *omer* of manna each day to sustain them physically in the desert. God also gave them a second kind of *omer*—a wordplay spelled a little differently in Hebrew but sounding the same. This *omer* was God's Law—his promises, commands, and words—which sustained them spiritually through the desert. Jesus is the first and the second *omer*—the Bread of Life, the Word of God, the Promise of God. Through these things, he can sustain us forever.

The Jews also celebrate a third *omer*—the 50 days between Passover and Pentecost. In Exodus, this was the time when the Israelites waited to receive the laws and promises of God at Mount Sinai. Over the years, it has become a time of waiting for the Messiah, which some Jews think will happen on Pentecost. The year Jesus died, this *omer* began on Resurrection Sunday and ended on Pentecost Sunday with the establishment of the church.

This book tracks what Jesus might have done during the third *omer*, preparing for the full coming of the Spirit and establishment of

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the church. I present 50 vignettes, one for each day of the *omer*, offering a chronological path and itinerary Jesus *might* have taken. I invite you to come on this journey to reflect with me what those days could have been like, learn more about Jesus and Israel, and consider what purposes he has for you and me as we wait for his return.

Stephen Austin

VIGNETTE 1

THE CENTURION BELIEVES



John 19:17-37; Matthew 27:51-55

“It is finished,” Jesus cried, and his head fell forward on his chest. The small group of women near the foot of Jesus’ cross wailed.

The centurion glanced up at the man, then felt the earth begin to shake under his feet. Large rocks in the quarry nearby split open and crashed to the ground.

The two criminals screamed as the tremors rattled their crosses.

The Roman soldiers stationed near the cross grabbed their swords, looking ready to fight or run.

The spectators ran away shrieking, scrambling for safety.

A series of loud cracks erupted from several tombs in the garden near the crosses. Many stones, which had covered the mouths of graves, toppled over. Jagged lines opened along the face of rocks. Through the gloom, the centurion caught a glimpse of movement. Shrouded figures emerged from the tombs and came toward the crosses.

Choking down a scream of terror, the centurion broke and ran,

STEPHEN AUSTIN

his men racing behind him down the path toward the nearby city wall. They charged through the Gennath gate, fled headlong through the streets, and finally reached the gate of the Antonia Fortress, where they leaned against the walls, panting. The centurion gazed toward Golgotha, slowly regaining his wits and calming his racing heart, drew a shuddering breath, and declared, “Surely ... that man was the Son of God!”



REFLECT

1. Why do you think there was such a variety of responses from the people present at the cross that day?
2. If you are a follower of Jesus, what convinced you he was the Son of God? If you are not, what do you think *would* convince you?

LEARN

In order to understand the gospels better, study a good map of Jerusalem during the time of Jesus. (See maps of Jerusalem in Appendix C.)