



The Empty Tomb

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The “empty tomb” (Matt. 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10) is a reality and the cornerstone of our faith. Without the empty tomb, all preaching would be a waste of time. Paul the apostle emphasizes this in I Corinthians 15. He explains who Christ is, how He died for our sins (I Cor. 15:3), rose [from the grave] on the third day (I Cor. 15:4), was seen [alive] by Peter and the twelve—[that is, the eleven apostles], and also by five hundred believers who saw Him *simultaneously* (I Cor. 15:6). Without confidence in this Biblical account, we as believers have nothing to hold fast to. But “thanks be to God” that scripture and reliable historical sources attest to the fact that Jesus was indeed raised up from the dead [alive].

The site of the “empty tomb” was known among both believers and Jews. It is impossible for our faith to be based upon a fallacy, a faith that caused followers of Christ to span the known world of their time to carry His message. Would such a large number of witnesses do this if Christ were still inside the tomb? It stands to reason that Jesus was known in the city of Jerusalem where this event occurred. Religious leaders and the townspeople knew that He was condemned, placed on a cross, and then buried in a tomb. Many knowledgeable scholars today believe that Mark’s Gospel account may have been written before Matthew’s. He may have had access to some early sources and recorded it before A. D. 37. [John] Mark was probably a [secret] disciple during the time of Christ and this may account for why Paul chose him to accompany him on his first missionary journey (Acts 12:25) Also, many commentators believe that Mark was the [young] man who followed closely behind the palace guards who arrested Jesus in Gethsemane as they made their way to Caiaphas’ palace. They believe the “mystery man” who suddenly appeared in the dark and had his linen coat stripped from him was none other than the evangelist Mark (Mark 14:51-52). This means if Mark’s Gospel account was recorded at such an early date, there was not sufficient time for legend to develop around the “empty tomb” story. Mark records his Gospel account in simple, but direct [literal] words, a very Jewish [literal] style with little detail given, unlike the style of Matthew or Luke. He records that Jesus was raised up from the tomb in “glory and power” (Mark 15:42—16:8) and was seen by the religious priests, religious teachers, Roman guards, and the disciples, along with many others.

It seems odd that Jesus was first seen by women, since nobody believed the testimony of a woman during this period unless two men were present to corroborate her testimony. Because of this bias against women, the disciples had to see the “empty tomb” firsthand before they believed her story. Although Matthew doesn’t mention that Peter and John ran to see the “empty tomb”, Luke 24:12 and John 20:3-10 give us the account. John outran Peter, arriving first

at the tomb. And it appears that Mary Magdalene, after giving the exciting news to Peter and John, returns to the “empty tomb” [*Resource is from “Harbuck’s New Millennia Commentary on Matthew”*].

Many atheists and agnostics have proposed theories as to what really happened concerning the testimony of the women. One skeptic (Kirsopp Lake) in 1907 said: “The women merely went to the wrong tomb—they got lost and the caretaker told them, ‘You have come here looking for Jesus of Nazareth—He’s not here. Then they ran away, terribly frightened.’ [Skeptic resource is from “the Case for Christ”—by Lee Strobel—Copyright © 1998 by Lee Strobel; published by Zondervan Publishing House]. Such a simplistic theory of the “empty tomb” must be rejected as having no substance. This weak argument proves nothing; and is instead both ridiculous and outlandish.

Although few Bibles attempt to harmonize the sequence of events surrounding the resurrection, the following resource taken from my [New Millennia Commentary on Matthew](#) will help: **Matthew 28:8-10 Bible Text: “Sequence of Events Surrounding the Resurrection”**

1.) On the day after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene was the first woman to visit the grave site. When she noticed the boulder had been rolled away, she quickly went to tell Peter and John (John 20:1-2).

2.) The second group of women arrived immediately after Mary Magdalene had left the site. To their amazement, there had been an earthquake (28:2) and they saw an “angel of the Lord” who had rolled the boulder away from the sepulcher’s entrance and was sitting on it (Matt. 8:2). Though they were told to “inform Peter and the other disciples,” they were afraid. So they kept the miracle to themselves and told no one (Mark 16:7-8). (a.) The response of the guards: At the sight of the angel, who probably had a “fiery appearance,” the guards began to shake and tremble uncontrollably with fear recognizing that “God’s Presence” was in their midst (see Mt. 28:3-4); and

3.) The third group of women arrived. These women went inside the tomb after they heard what the angel said. The angel told them to carry the news to the disciples, and they quickly left the site of the “empty tomb” afraid, but also filled with joy, and ran to find and tell the disciples what they had seen (28:8-9; Luke 24:1-8). And as they were on their way, Jesus met them and said: “Shalom—peace be to you—keep on rejoicing!” They were overwhelmed with joy; but at the same time, they were awestruck (fearful). They tried to grab hold of Jesus’ feet as they prostrated themselves on the ground in worship and adoration (28:9). This group eventually reported the resurrection to the disciples, probably with Mary Magdalene being the spokesperson.

Not much has changed in more than 2000 years. Believers continue to await the return of the One who was raised up [alive] from the “empty tomb” while others have grown weary, and turned away as skeptics. But we who believe are reminded of what happened when the disciples were assembled together early in the morning on the second week after the resurrection. Jesus suddenly appeared to them and said to Thomas: “Thomas, come and put your fingers on my hands [and feel My wounds] and put *your hand* in My side.” After this occurrence, Thomas exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” The One raised up from the dead was not a mere man, but the God-Man—the Savior of the world!

Easter day is a day of celebration because “Christ arose!” And He left behind the “empty tomb” as evidence of his resurrection. Thus we must never forget the precious truth chorused by that old hymn of long ago:

*“Up from the grave He arose,
with a mighty triumph o’er His foes;
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
and He lives forever with His saints to reign;
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!”*

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