

# The Resurrection and Post-Resurrection Narratives

## Chapter 2: The Time of the Resurrection and the Angelic Message

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All the gospel accounts note that our Lord rose from the dead very early in the morning on the first day of the week (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1). The Jews did not have names for the days of the week as we do, so they named days according to their number in relation to the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. Thus, the time indicator could be translated as “at the dawning on the first (day) of the seven (i.e. week),” Mt. 28:1; or literally “day one of the Sabbaths” (Jn. 20:1).

The first day as the day of resurrection was not arbitrary but fulfilled typology and prophecy from the Scriptures. In Genesis 1:1 the first day is the day that God created the world and light. God is telling us that the resurrection of Christ is the light of salvation that pierces through the darkness of a fallen world. The first day points to recreation and redemption. “With the resurrection of Christ a new creation began, and a new light went forth into the darkness.”<sup>1</sup> When Jesus came out of the tomb, a new age of victory over sin, Satan and death began.

Under the Old Covenant, God’s people looked to the seventh day, when Jehovah rested from His creative labor, as their day of rest and worship. But under the New Covenant, our Sabbath is on the first day to honor the Savior’s redemption and recreation of all things. Christ taught His disciples the significance of the first day by always appearing to them on the first day of the week in His post-resurrection appearances (Mt. 28:9; Lk. 24:15-31, 36; Jn. 20:19, 26). The resurrected Savior chose the first day of the week to strengthen the apostle’s faith, instruct them in doctrine, issue commands, engage in fellowship and partake in the breaking of bread. Thus, it is no surprise that the inspired apostles sanctified the first day of the week and called it the Lord’s day (Rev. 1:10). In obedience to our Lord’s example, the early church always met for public worship on the first day of the week (Jn. 20:19-26; Ac. 2:1; 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rev. 1:10).

God has given the New Covenant church the Lord’s day in which to celebrate *the whole work of redemption*. The annual festival observed throughout much of Christendom in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ called Easter is pagan in origin and has no warrant from the Word of God. “The name Easter (Ger. *Ostern*)...is a survival from the old Teutonic mythology. According to Bede (*De. Temp. Rat. c. xv.*) it is derived from *Eostre*, or *Ostara*, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, to whom the month answering to our April, and called *Eostur-monath*, was dedicated.”<sup>2</sup> The Middle Eastern counterpart to Easter would be the fertility goddess Astarte or Istar (pl. Ashtaroth), the female consort to Baal (cf. Judg. 2:13; 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:4; 12:10). The Greek counterpart would be Artemis (e.g., Diana of the Ephesians).

In the Teutonic version of Easter, the “festival was celebrated on the day of the vernal equinox, and traditions associated with the festival survive in the familiar Easter bunny, symbol of the fertile rabbit, and in the equally familiar colored Easter eggs originally painted with gay

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<sup>1</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, [1865], 1980), 2:433.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Macall Fallow, “Easter” in *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (London: The Encyclopedia Britannica, 1910, 1926), 7:828.

hues to represent sunlight of spring. Such festivals, and the myths and legends which explain their origin, abounded in ancient religions.”<sup>3</sup> The rites and rituals of the fertility cults of Canaan and the Greco-Roman world were perverse and obscene. Given the sinful nature of our human hearts and our tendency to incorporate pagan elements into the unadorned worship of Christ, we must heed the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile [lit. vain]” (Jer. 10:2-3).

The church in the days of the inspired apostles heeded Jeremiah’s command and God’s injunction not to add or detract human ideas or traditions to Scripture (Lev. 10:1-2; Num. 15:39-40; Dt. 4:2; 12:32; 1 Ki. 12:32-33; 1 Chr. 15:13-15; Jer. 7:24, 31; 19:5; Mt. 15:3, 9; 28:20; Col. 2:20-23). Therefore, there is no evidence whatsoever that the Easter festival was celebrated by the first generation of New Covenant believers. It also is not found in any of the writings of the apostolic fathers. The use of liturgical calendar and the sanctity of special holy days apart from the Lord’s day was completely absent from the thought and practice of the apostolic church. “The ecclesiastical historian Socrates (*Hist. Eccl.* v. 22) states with perfect truth, that neither the Lord nor his apostles enjoined the keeping of this or any other festival. He says: ‘The apostles had no thought of appointing festival days, but of promoting a life of blamelessness and piety’; and he attributes the observance of Easter by the church to the perpetuation of an old usage, ‘just as many other customs have been established.’”<sup>4</sup> The Reformed churches in Scotland which achieved a greater reformation than their counterparts on the continent abolished Easter and all man-made holy days. The Westminster Assembly Directory for Publick Worship (1645) says, “Festival days, vulgarly called holy-days, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued.”

In the Old Covenant administration, the eighth day or the first day of a new week typified the redeeming re-creative power of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Thus, the male children of believers were to be circumcised on the eighth day (Gen. 17:12) which is the first day of the second week of the newborn’s life. Circumcision was a sign and seal of the new birth or regeneration (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26; Col. 2:11). God is teaching us that union with Christ in His first-day resurrection is the foundation of our regeneration (Eph. 2:5; Rom. 6:4ff.). Those who are united with the Savior in His death and resurrection are made a new creation. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The eighth day was also the day of cleansing from defilement (Lev. 14:10; 15:14, 29). This ritual pointed to the fact that union with Christ in His first-day resurrection breaks the power of sin over believers (Rom. 6:4-5; 1 Jn. 2:29). “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

Under the old administration the eighth day (or first day) was the day of dedication of the firstborn son. Jesus is the firstborn, or firstfruits, of all who believe. “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). Through His sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, the Savior became “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). Thus, all genuine believers are of the “church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” (Heb. 12:23). The dedication of the firstborn son also hearkens back to Passover where the blood of the Passover lamb saved the firstborn of Israel

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<sup>3</sup> *Funk and Wagnall’s New Standard Encyclopedia* (New York: Unicorn, 1950), 2:404, 405.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Macall Fallow, 7:828.

(Ex. 12:21-36). The Mediator's death and resurrection gives us a glorious future of salvation and life.

The fact that Christ was dead in the tomb on the Jewish Sabbath and arose the first day of the week indicates the end of the Old Covenant Sabbath day and the inauguration of a new Sabbath day. This point is proved in two ways. First, in the restatement of the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy 5:15 the numbering connected with this special day is not simply God's rest from creation (Ex. 20:11), but the redemption of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Thus, the Sabbath day is set apart to commemorate the great redemptive act of the Old Testament. Redemption from Egypt was a type of a believer's redemption from sin and spiritual bondage. Since the day of our deliverance from death, slavery to sin and Satan is Sunday, the day of resurrection, this is now the day we are called upon to remember our salvation in a special way.

Second, this is supported by the prophecy of Psalm 118:24: "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." Peter applies Psalm 118:22 (see Ac. 4:8-12) directly to the exaltation of Christ, which began at His resurrection (cf. Mt. 28:18; Rom. 1:4). Psalm 118 identifies the day of Christ's exaltation as a day of rejoicing and gladness. Were the disciples rejoicing on the seventh day (Saturday)? Were they glad and happy on that day? No, absolutely not. They were living in deep sorrow, mingled with fear and doubt. Jesus was dead, still in the tomb. Their cause looked defeated; their leader had been put to death as a common criminal. But on Sunday, the first day of the week, the Savior rose from the dead and their tears turned to joy, their sorrow to gladness, their doubt to hope and their defeat to victory. They were now rejoicing and fulfilling Psalm 118:24. This is the origin of the term "the Lord's day." It is the day on which the Christian church celebrates the victory of the Son of David. "We observe the Lord's day as henceforth our true Sabbath day made and ordained of God, for the perpetual remembrance of the achievements of our Redeemer.... Entering into the midst of the church of God, and beholding the Lord Jesus as all in all in the assemblies of his people, we are bound to overflow with joy. Is it not written, 'then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord'?"<sup>5</sup>

The fact that the resurrection took place early in the morning while the sun was rising or about to rise teaches us that Jesus was "the Bright and Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16); "the Sun of Righteousness" (Mal. 4:2); the "light of men" who "shines in the darkness" (Jn. 1:4, 5); the one who gives light to "those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Ps. 107:10; cf. v. 14). The sun arose over a new day, a new age, a new creation.

The gospels teach that Christ arose on the third day. Jesus and the evangelists express this historical fact in different ways. There are passages which speak of the Savior rising "after three days" (e.g., Mk. 8:31; 9:31). This of course does not mean that our Lord rose after the three days were over for then the resurrection would be on the fourth day. It means that the resurrection would occur after any part of the third day is started. We know that "after three days" means "on the third day" because: a) where Mark will say "after three days" (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:34) the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke will say "the third day [Jesus will] be raised up" (Mt. 16:21; 17:23; Lk. 9:22). "Mark's phrase reflects Jewish usage, whereby 'After three days' would mean 'the day after tomorrow.'"<sup>6</sup> b) Matthew 27 has the chief priests defining "after the third day" as the same as "until the third day." The account reads, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will arise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day" (vs. 63-64).

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<sup>5</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1882] 1983), 5:332.

<sup>6</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 337.

Jesus had prophesied to the Jews saying, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19). This does not necessarily mean three twenty-four hour days for the Jewish term “day” could be used in reference to any part of the day (i.e. part of Friday, the whole day Saturday, part of Sunday equals three days). The vast majority of scholars, commentators and theologians believe that all the gospel accounts teach that our Lord was in the tomb for around thirty-six hours. He was buried late Friday afternoon (around 5:00 pm) and arose around dawn Sunday morning.

Some confusion has arisen regarding the Savior’s statement in Matthew 12:40, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Some writers argue that this verse proves that Christ could not have been crucified on Friday; that Jesus must have spent three full days and nights in the earth.<sup>7</sup> This view suffers from a number of problems. a) It ignores the fact that our Lord was using a Jewish idiom which was not intended to be taken in a literal modern sense. This point is proved by Esther 4:16 where the third day obviously was not an entire day. After Esther proclaims a fast for three days and nights (4:16), the fast came to an end on third day (5:1, 4). The Savior used a colloquial expression which could be used by three parts of a day and two nights.<sup>8</sup> b) If our Lord arose literally after three days and three nights, then He arose on the fourth day which would explicitly contradict many passages of Scripture. The Mediator “rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor.15:3-4; Ac. 10:40; Lk. 9:22; 18:33; 24:46; Mt. 11:21; 17:23; 20:19, etc). c) The inspired authors of the gospels tell us that Jesus was crucified, dead and buried on *Paraskeue* which means the day before the Jewish Sabbath or Friday (Mk. 15:42, 43; Lk. 23:46; Jn. 19:14, 30, 42). In fact, it is the same Greek word used in modern Greek to designate Friday. A day and a night was the Jewish way of indicating one time unit. Therefore, Scripture does not contradict Scripture. Jesus was buried Friday and arose early Sunday morning.

Although the only New Testament allusion to three days in the Old Testament is Christ’s reference to Jonah 1:17, there are hints of a third day redemption in other passages. In Genesis 22:4 we read, “Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place [of sacrifice] afar off.” After three days without water in the wilderness God provides Israel with water that gives life (Ex. 15:22 ff.). In Exodus 19, Jehovah makes His appearance on the third day (vs. 10, 11, 15, 16) to give the covenant nation the law as a guide for personal sanctification and godly dominion (cf. Mt. 28:18-20). Hosea 6:2 reads, “After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.” This prophecy of the national restoration of Israel points to the ultimate spiritual restoration of the true Israel. Given the Old Testament pattern of using three days or the third day in redemptive history and prophecy we can understand Paul’s statement that Jesus “rose again according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:4; cf. Lk. 24:46).

The thirty-six to thirty-eight hours that Jesus spent in the tomb was enough time to demonstrate that our Lord was really dead and yet not too long so that our Lord would not see corruption. The Bible teaches that God would not allow His Son’s body to decay. “Therefore my

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Wayne Carver writes, “The Lord Jesus Christ clearly said in Matthew 12:38-40 that He would spend ‘three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,’ just as Jonah had spent ‘three days and three nights’ in the belly of the great fish. Isn’t it strange, however, that almost universally throughout Christendom we find that the remembrance of Christ’s crucifixion is held on ‘Good Friday’ and that His resurrection is acknowledged as occurring on Sunday morning, at dawn? By no stretch of the imagination or masterful manipulation of Scripture is it possible to stretch the period from Friday evening to Sunday morning into ‘three days and three nights’! Many have attempted to do so and millions of Christians have accepted this viewpoint; but in all honesty, it just can’t be done.” (*Chronology of the Crucifixion Week* [Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, n. d.], 3).

<sup>8</sup> See R. T. France, *Matthew*, 213.

heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Ac. 2:26-7; cf. 13:35; Ps. 16:9-10). God not only restricted the amount of time that Christ spent in the tomb, but also supernaturally preserved the Savior’s body from corruption.

## The Stone Rolled Away

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men (Mt. 28:2-4).

The record of the angel who came and rolled away the stone is only found in Matthew’s gospel. It is important because it tells us how the stone was removed and explains why the Roman guards were not present when the women arrived. God sent the angel to open the tomb not to let Jesus out, but to let the women and the apostles in. The resurrection of Christ had already taken place and had been witnessed only by God. None of the gospel writers describe the resurrection itself. Our Lord arose and passed through the linen wrappings and walls of the tomb silently, without fanfare. The angel came to open an empty tomb and to make some important announcements to Mary and the other women. In this section of Scripture we want to examine three things: (1) the actions of the angel; (2) the description of the angel; and, (3) the response of the Roman guards.

(1) Matthew places an importance on the work of this angel by opening this pericope with the word *lo* which means “look” or “behold.” What we are about to witness is unusual and marvelous. The coming of this angel from heaven to earth results in “a great earthquake.” (Note *gar*, “for”) Supernatural earthquakes would call the Hebrew mind to a number of biblical passages. Earthquakes are associated with God’s special presence during the giving of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 19:18), and Jehovah’s wrath and judgment against sin (Is. 29:6; Rev. 6:12; 8:5 11:13, 19; 16:18). Just a few days before, a great earthquake had opened the saints’ tombs in order to set their resurrected bodies free (Mt. 27:51-53). The earthquake was a signal of Christ’s victory over sin and death as well as a sign of the Mediator’s coming judgment upon His enemies. “The earth shook again at His resurrection, which was not only proof of His divinity, but also of the wrath of God against the Jews and their land which would be destroyed and left destitute. The inhabitants would perish miserably and their religion would be taken from them and be transferred to the Gentiles. It also indicated that all temporal ceremonies were now terminated and that an unchangeable religion had taken their place.”<sup>9</sup>

It is likely that this earthquake occurred as the women were on their way to the tomb. It was probably a localized earthquake, either limited to the burial site or the area of Jerusalem.

The angel then rolled away the stone from the door and sat upon it. The word “rolled away” (*apokulisen*) can mean “rolled off” or “rolled back.” The stone was either rolled away from the door and left in its groove; or, it may have been rolled off the groove so that it turned over on its side. The fact that the angel sat upon it indicates that the rolling away of the stone is an accomplished fact. The stone rolled away certifies the resurrection of the Redeemer. The angel rolls away the great stone in order to call us to faith in the merit of the Savior’s blood and the victory of His resurrection. “[T]hat stone rolled away was as it were, before the eyes of our

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<sup>9</sup> Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 1:627.

faith consecrated that day as a memorial of Christ's eternal victory over the powers of death and hell."<sup>10</sup> The tomb will remain open and unguarded so the resurrection is known to all the disciples. Having completed his first task, the angel now waits patiently for the women to arrive.

(2) The description of the angel indicates that this was a very high ranking angel and not merely one of the angelic hosts. The angel's appearance is so bright and radiant that he is described as being "like lightening" (cf. Dan. 10:6; Mt. 13:43). His clothes are a dazzling white, like fresh snow that sparkles in the sunshine (cf. Dn. 7:19; Mt. 17:2; Ac. 1:10; Rev. 3:4; 4:4). The angel's bright countenance and exceedingly white, dazzling garments indicates both the reflective glory from being in heaven in the presence of God and the angel's holiness as an unfallen being. An angel or angels are often observed at crucial periods in our Lord's life: His birth (Lk. 2:9 ff.); His temptation (Mt. 4:11); after His period of agony at Gethsemane (Lk. 22:43); and, at His glorious resurrection. But, when the Savior was on the cross being forsaken by the Father we find no holy angels attending Him. The opening of the tomb was an event which all the holy angels longed for. It was the time when Christ would emerge victorious and resume the glory he had before the foundation of the world. Very soon Jesus would return to His white, lustrous throne to be adored and worshipped by all the angels.

(3) The appearance of this mighty angel who reflects the majesty of God terrifies the Roman guards. Roman soldiers were noted for their bravery and discipline. They were trained not to flinch in the heat of combat when blood and death was all around them. Yet the appearance of this one angel was enough to paralyze them with fear so that they fainted and fell flat to the ground. These men shook with fear and were frightened into unconsciousness. When they came to, they fled for their lives. These Roman guards retreated before one angel who did not even bother to draw his flaming sword. After they fled, "They were no longer an organized unit, for not 'all' of them but only 'some' came into the city."<sup>11</sup> If one angel could cause such terror, what terror will the ungodly experience on that great day when Jesus will descend with all the hosts of heaven to take vengeance on those who have rejected Christ?

## The Women Discover the Empty Tomb

Early Sunday morning, while it was still dark, a group of Jesus' female followers came to the tomb to anoint the body of Christ. This group included Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and other women (Jn. 20:1; Lk. 24:10). They arrived at dawn as the sun was rising (Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1) and noticed that the stone was rolled away from the tomb (Lk. 24:2; Mk. 16:4; Jn. 20:1). At this point Mary Magdalene ran to get Simon Peter and John (Jn. 20:2) while the other women stayed behind. These women entered the tomb and could not find the body of the Lord (Lk. 24:3). Luke tells us that the women were very perplexed; that is, they had no idea of what to make of the situation before them (Lk. 24:4). We learn from Mark that after the women entered the tomb they saw an angel sitting on the right side dressed in white (16:9). White or shining clothes are a mark of a heavenly visitor in the New Testament (cf. Mt. 28:3; Jn. 20:12; Ac. 1:10; 10:30, etc). "White clothes were, of course, a mark of festivity or of a formal occasion such as a wedding."<sup>12</sup> (To wear white, which is an indication of celebration and victory, in a tomb where someone is supposed to be dead itself points to the resurrection.) The women's

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<sup>10</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Stone Rolled Away" in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1970), 15:184.

<sup>11</sup> William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 989.

<sup>12</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 678.

response to the sight of this angel was amazement, surprise, shock, “alarm” (NJKV). “Mark uses *ekthambeomai* as a particularly strong term for people’s surprise or shock on seeing something remarkable and unexpected...; the verb contains an element of fear.”<sup>13</sup>

Luke’s account notes that at this time the first angel is joined by a second (Lk. 24:4). The first angel which was sitting, stands, joins the second angel and approaches the women (Lk. 24:4). People who (*a priori*) reject the divine inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures see great and insurmountable difficulties in the number, positions and different things said by the angels. Matthew and Mark mention one angel (Mt. 28:3, 5; 16:5), while Luke and John mention two (Jn. 20:12; Lk. 24:4). Some accounts discuss the visitor (Mk. 16:5) or visitors sitting (Jn. 20:12) while Luke has them standing (Lk. 24:4). There are also differences in the messages spoken. Does any of this indicate a real challenge to the doctrine of inspiration? No, not at all! The number of angels is easily explained because either the one angel was soon joined by another or the second angel was ignored to focus on the angel who did the speaking. It is common in the gospel narratives to mention only one person when we know that others were present (e.g., John only mentions Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb [20:1] when Luke says she was with a whole group of women [24:10]). The objection to the different positions of the angels is simply absurd. Angels move quite freely; obviously they changed positions. They were first seated and then they stood and approached the women. The objection to the different things spoken is also ludicrous. The messengers said a number of things and the evangelists recorded different things. “[W]hy should it be regarded as impossible that the messengers spoke more than once?”<sup>14</sup> Once again the best thing to do is to weave all these glorious facts together and study them in order to increase our faith and love of Christ.

Luke says that the sight of the two angels in dazzling apparel caused the women to be frightened. “This fear probably should be understood more in the sense of reverential awe such as we find in Luke 1:12... 1:30, 2:9 rather than in the sense of their experiencing stark terror.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, rather than running away, they demonstrated respect by bowing with their faces to the ground (Lk. 24:5). The Roman soldiers, being pagans, were terrified at the sight of one angel and fainted. The women being believers were frightened, but held their composure.

## The Angelic Message

This section of the synoptic gospels reveals that these angels were sent to earth with a very specific mission. After the one opened the tomb allowing the women to enter, both were to give specific instructions to the women who entered. This announcement is rather amazing, for we have angels from heaven speaking the gospel directly to mortals on earth. If we combine the record of the synoptic gospels, there are six elements to the angelic communication.

First, the women are commanded “Don’t you be afraid” (Mt. 28:5; The statement is emphatic in Greek.); “Do not be alarmed” (Mk. 16:6). The angel starts his message by calming down these surprised, frightened women. Words of reassurance are a common feature of angelic appearances (cf. Dan. 10:12, 19; Mt. 28:5; Lk. 1:13, 30; 2:10; Ac. 27:24, etc). Calvin writes, “[I]t is proper that the majesty of God should strike both terror and fear indiscriminately into the godly as well as the reprobate, that all flesh may be silent before his face. But when the Lord has humbled and subdued his elect, he immediately mitigates their dread, that they may not sink

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 582.

<sup>14</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Luke*, 1053.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Stein, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 604.

under its oppressive influence; and not only so, but by the sweetness of his grace heals the wound which he had inflicted.”<sup>16</sup>

Second, the angel gives the woman a reason why they do not need to fear: “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified” (Mt. 28:5; cf. Mk. 16:6). In essence, the angel tells the women they have no reason to be afraid because he knows that they are loyal followers of Christ who have come to minister to His body. “*I know, says the angel, that it is love to Him, crucified although He has been, that has brought you here.*”<sup>17</sup> Obviously, the angel had been informed ahead of time by God who would be coming to the tomb and why. The angel knew exactly what to say to set these women at ease.

Third, Luke tells us that the angels asked the women a question: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” (24:5). This question may be a gentle rebuke. “It appeared to them an act of folly to look for the Lord of *Life* in the abode of *Death*. They felt that His followers ought to have known that He is risen.”<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, the women are to be commended for seeking Christ. Clearly, their hearts were in the right place. But, because of their failure to pay close attention to what the Savior had said and remember it, they were seeking the Lord in the wrong place. Here was the first word that Jesus is alive.

Fourth, then immediately the angel proclaims the resurrection. “He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him” (Mk. 16:6). This announcement is found in all three synoptic gospels (Mk. 16:6; Mt. 28:6; Lk. 24:6). After comforting the women and stimulating their interest with a question, the angel delivers his main instruction. Jesus is not in this tomb because He has been raised from the dead by God. “The angels bear the same witness to the resurrection of Jesus that is to be found in the early Christian preaching (cf. Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40-42; 13:30-31).”<sup>19</sup> “Your great ground and reason for consolation, seeker, is that you do not seek a dead Christ, and you do not pray to a buried Savior; he is really alive.”<sup>20</sup> The angel’s simple declaration of the fact that the Savior was raised from the dead immediately rules out all alternative and unbelieving explanations of the empty tomb. This is Jehovah’s own explanation delivered by the holy lips of an angel from heaven.

Then to aid these women’s faith and instruct them regarding the true physical-bodily nature of the resurrection, the angel asked the women to closely examine the very spot where Jesus was laid (Mt. 28:6; Mk. 16:6). These were the same women who carefully watched how Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus laid the Redeemer’s body in the tomb (Mk. 15:47; Lk. 23:55). They had seen how the Savior’s body was wrapped. They had observed the exact place where the body was laid. At the angels’ bidding they came close and stared at the burial shroud and other wrappings. They could see that they were lying there in the exact same spot where our Lord’s body was, as if He passed right through the linen shroud. With this sight their hearts must have raced within them. The shelf was empty, the body was gone, the wrappings are still there. Jesus is risen! He is alive! His glorious ministry of salvation and godly rule continues. That these women were genuinely convinced of the reality of the resurrection is proved from their “great joy” (Mt. 28:8) and their obedience to the angel’s command (Lk. 24:9-10).

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<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 3:344.

<sup>17</sup> James Morison, *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, [1884] 1981), 615.

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Nevin, *Popular Commentary on the Gospel according to Luke* (Philadelphia: William Flint, 1968), 680.

<sup>19</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 1190.

<sup>20</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Stone Rolled Away,” 15:191.

These uneducated women understood the resurrection better than all the modernist theologians with their multiple degrees and honors from men who refuse to believe in the real bodily resurrection of Christ. In spite of the empty tomb, the untouched wrappings, the appearance and testimony of angels and the words, “He is not here for He is risen,” they continue in their unbelief and humanistic speculative theories. Because of their unbelieving axioms, they only cling to explanations that are contrary to the explicit and plain teaching of Scripture. As Paul says, “Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:22). They cheat themselves “through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

Fifth, the angel supported his statement about the resurrection of Christ not only by pointing to the undeniable physical evidence, but also the prophetic proof. He reminded them of what the Savior had said. What Matthew briefly alludes to, “as He said” (28:6). Luke gives the fuller account, “Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day arise again’” (24:7). God had told this angel to remind these women about the predictions they had heard directly from the lips of Jesus. The gospels record three separate occasions where our Lord spoke virtually the exact same words to His disciples (see Mt. 16:21; 17:22, 23; 20:17-19; Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 34; Lk. 9:22, 44; 18:31-34). It is often the case that prophecies are not understood when they are spoken but become great aids to faith only after the events have taken place. This is precisely what occurred with these women. For some reason God hid our Lord’s predictions from their remembrance and understanding. But now that these events have occurred, God, through the use of His special messengers, calls these women to remembrance so that they can be witnesses to the resurrection and the faithfulness of the Redeemer’s prophecy. Thus Luke notes, “And they remembered His words” (24:8). We must not forget that the Word of God in the Old Testament and Jesus’ own inspired words serve as a solid testimony of our Lord’s glorious resurrection.

These women who came to lovingly care for Christ’s body are gently, yet directly corrected by these angels. We see here the tender mercies of God in guiding His saints who out of ignorance have wandered astray. These women were now somewhat ashamed of the preparations they had made. Now that God had opened their eyes to the truth they realized how often Jesus had spoken of His suffering, death and resurrection. “Note, a seasonable remembrance of the words of Christ will help us to a right understanding of his providence.”<sup>21</sup> Remembrance of God’s Word brings conviction and conviction in a true child of God leads to biblical action.

Sixth, the announcement of Jesus’ resurrection and the proof set before these women are the basis of an urgent message for the disciples. The angel said, “And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you” (Mt. 28:7). The important message of the resurrection of Christ must be conveyed as soon as possible to the remaining apostles. They must hear the women’s testimony that the Lord’s predictions regarding this marvelous event have indeed come to pass. Mark’s account (16:7) adds that the Lord’s predictions regarding this marvelous event have indeed come to pass. Mark’s account (16:7) adds that they are to remind the apostles of the Savior’s promise that He would meet them in Galilee after the resurrection (see Mk. 14:28; Mt. 26:32). “The commission to deliver the message presupposes that, despite the scattering in Gethsemane, the disciples including Peter [see Mk. 16:7] are still to be found together as a

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:833.

group, however demoralized. The fact that Jesus still has a message for them, and still more that it includes the repeated promise of a post-resurrection meeting, may be expected to overcome their self despair, and they may well remember that the previous prediction of a meeting in Galilee followed directly after Jesus' prediction of their being 'scattered' (14:27)."<sup>22</sup>

There are scholars who have a problem with the angels' instruction because our Lord's first appearance did not occur in Galilee, but in Jerusalem later that same day. This observation is not really a problem for the following reasons. a) The instructions do not say that Jesus would appear first in Galilee, but only that He would be going ahead of the disciples into Galilee. b) A reading of the gospels indicates that the apostles did not believe the testimony of these women (Lk. 24:11) or Mary Magdalene all of whom had seen the risen Savior Himself (Jn. 20:10-11). Thus, the Savior who is loving and merciful to His disbelieving disciples may have deemed it necessary to appear to the apostles that very day to lift up their faith and ensure their obedience to His command. This simply shows that the risen Mediator does what it takes so that His stumbling apostles will believe His promises.

Matthew and Luke's gospel make it clear that the women's faith in the resurrection led to an immediate obedience to the angel's command. "So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word" (Mt. 28:8). "Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest" (Lk. 24:9). Mark's account focuses on the women's emotional state. "So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mk. 16:8). These women were so excited and astonished by what they had seen, their bodies quivered. Their encounter with the supernatural frightened them, but their faith in the resurrection brought them great joy.

When Mark says that the women did not speak to anyone because of their fear, he means that they did not speak to anyone on the way to the disciples. What they saw was so extraordinary and shocking, they believed it would be wise not to speak to any strangers about their experience. Only someone who rejected the divine inspiration of the Scriptures and believed the gospel writers were totally incompetent would think that Matthew and Luke would explicitly contradict Mark's account. Further, Matthew informs us that on the way to speak to the eleven the women met and saw the risen Savior Himself who repeated the command of the angels (Mt. 28:9-10). Are we to believe that these women who fervently loved and worshipped Jesus would ignore His instructions? No, of course not!

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<sup>22</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 681.