

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – Matthew

SB_MT27C_Jesus' Burial
SB_MT28_Jesus' Resurrection

Jesus is Buried in Joseph's Tomb (27:57-61)

Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Jesus. Arimathea was approximately 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It is interesting to note each of the Synoptic Gospel writer's accounts of this man.

- Matthew 27:57 – “a rich man”
- Mark 15:43 – “a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God”
- Luke 23:50 – “a good and just man”

These descriptions of Joseph of Arimathea should dispel any notions that Jesus taught that a rich man could not enter the kingdom (see Matt 19:23-24). Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin council who, according to Luke 23:5 “had not consented to their decision and deed.” Therefore, he was one of the many disciples of Jesus who had accepted Jesus' claim that He was the Messiah of Israel and that as the Messiah and Son of God, the kingdom of God/heaven was at hand (see Matt 10:5-7).¹ For Joseph to have asked Pilate for the body of Jesus placed Joseph in opposition to the Sanhedrin and identified him as a follower of Jesus.

Once again, we see fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in connection with Jesus' death. Isaiah 53:9 states that “they made His grave with the wicked [the two robbers], but with the rich [Joseph of Arimathea] at His death.”

The two Marys mentioned in verse 61 were also mentioned in verse 56 as having observed Jesus' crucifixion from afar. Mary Magdalene is named after the town from which she came. Magdala is on the northwest shore of Galilee and one of the largest lakeside towns.

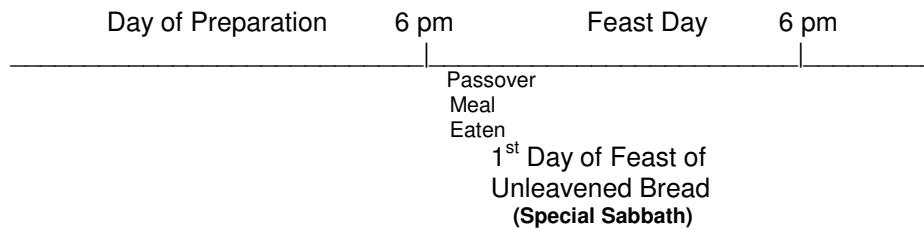
The first three Gospels give little evidence of Mary's character. Only Luke comments that ‘seven demons had gone out’ of her, but there is no evidence that Jesus had exorcized her and she was probably an epileptic, for epilepsy was commonly attributed to possession by evil spirits. This reference in Luke's Gospel immediately follows the story of a sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus during a meal at the house of Simon the Pharisee. The tradition of the Church has from early times identified Mary of Magdala with the woman living an immoral life in the city. Rightly or wrongly, Mary has become for all Christians the type of passionate penitent.² [See Luke 7:44-50 for the situation to which Brownrigg refers.]

Pilate's Guard for the Tomb (27:62-66)

¹ Of course, Jesus' and His disciple's teaching that the kingdom of God/heaven was at hand did not mean that if Israel had accepted Jesus as her Messiah/Savior that there would have been no Cross. As we have previously discussed, it was quite to the contrary. The Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah's sufferings (e.g. Psa 22; Isa 52-53) would still have been fulfilled. Rome would have most certainly crucified as a criminal any Jew who claimed to be Israel's king, especially had that person been accepted by Israel en masse.

² Ronald Brownrigg, *Who's Who in the New Testament* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 299.

The “next day, which followed the Day of Preparation” was the special Sabbath during Passover week. As we have previously studied, I believe that it is very likely that “the next day” referred to here is the special Sabbath (per Lev 23:5-7 and Ex 12:15-16) that during Passover Week was known as the “Feast Day” or the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.³ The first and last days of this Feast were considered special Sabbaths. Just to recap –



This means that the day of crucifixion was on the “Day of Preparation” (27:62) and could have been on Thursday or even Wednesday of Passover Week.⁴ This still allows for Jesus to have been taken off of the cross prior to the Sabbath as described in such passages as John 19:31.

The Sadducees and the Pharisees described the Lord Jesus as a deceiver when, in reality, they were the deceivers and hypocrites (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 26:4). It is a fact of the Angelic Conflict that Satan will inspire his own to charge those who oppose his agenda with reversing the truth. Jeremiah described the religious leaders of Israel this way in Jeremiah 6:14 – “And they have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ but there is no peace.” The religious leaders of Jeremiah’s day had reversed the truth so as to deceive the inhabitants of Jerusalem prior to the Babylonian siege contrary to the warnings of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 6:1. Such deception and distortion of the truth was still practiced by religious leaders during Jesus’ day and it is no different today.

The religious leaders of Israel distorted Jesus’ words even though they understood exactly what He meant. In Matthew 26:60-61, they encouraged two false witnesses to testify against Jesus with a distorted interpretation of what Jesus had said. The false witnesses testified that Jesus had spoke of the temple when Jesus had stated that He would rise in three days (John 2:19-21). Obviously, the religious leaders knew exactly what Jesus meant since they asked Pilate to place a guard against the tomb (Matt 27:63-64). What a contrast to Jesus’ disciples who seemed to draw no comfort from Christ’s predictions that He would rise (12:40; 16:21; 17:9, 22-23; 20:17-19; 26:32).

The guard to which Pilate referred is a Latin word and as such refers to the Romans and not the Jewish temple guard. They could have used their own temple guard without asking Pilate’s permission. All of these religious leaders efforts to prevent a forced fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy through some deceitful action of His disciples only served to establish the validity of the resurrection. Every precaution was taken to prevent the fulfillment of the sign of Jonah (Matt 12:39).

He Is Risen (28:1-8)

³ See the lesson notes entitled “SB_MT26A_Intro_Passover Week” for more information on this topic.

⁴ We examined this issue in a previous Easter special entitled “The Day of Christ’s Crucifixion” as a lesson in the series entitled “Christ – His Person and Work.”

This Sabbath is the regular, weekly Sabbath that falls on Saturday. So, the two Marys who came to the tomb would be the first to witness the vacant tomb in evidence of His resurrection. As we noted in the last lesson, women weren't subject to crucifixion; however, the disciples as men could have been crucified like their leader.

For three days after the burial, the Jews had the custom of visiting the sepulcher to see if the soul – which, by popular tradition hovered about the sepulcher – had returned to the body. But the apostles wisely avoided visiting the tomb of Jesus and uselessly exposing themselves to the suspicion and fury of the determined and triumphant rulers of the Jews, who would be glad to do to them what they had done to Jesus.⁵

Another earthquake occurred and an angel moved the stone so that everyone could see inside the tomb and know that Jesus was not there. When the account of this morning's events as presented in all the Gospel writers' narratives is examined, we see that there were other women who visited the tomb that morning. The sequence of events perhaps occurred as follows:

- The earthquake and the opening of the tomb by an angel
- The resurrection and the descent of the angel
- A group of women (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10) including the two Marys (Matt 28:1) make their way to the tomb prior to the sunrise (John 20:1). They came to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:3) and were pondering how to roll away the stone (Mark 16:3)
- Mary Magdalene arrived first and immediately ran to tell Peter and John (Jn 20:1)
- At least a part of the group of women arrive as the sun began to rise (Mark 16:2)
- An angel appeared to them and gave them a message to relay to the disciples (Matt 28:5; Mark 16:5ff).
- Some of the group of women arrive a little later and see "two young men" dressed in white at the tomb, and receive words of comfort and instruction (Lk 24:4)
- Next, Peter and John arrive with John in the lead (John 20:3-10)
- Mary Magdalene arrives again to see two angels (John 20:11-13)
- The other women had returned to bear the message to the other apostles (Luke 24:10)
- Jesus revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:14-18; Mk 16:9)
- Later, Jesus appeared to the rest of the women who were returning to the tomb (Matt 28:9)
- Also later, Jesus appeared to Peter (Lk 24:34; 1 Co 15:5) and to Cleopas and the other disciple on the road to Emmaus (Matt 28:12-13; Lu 24:13-35)
- Even later that evening, Jesus appeared to the eleven and others in the room with barred doors (Mk 16:14; Lk 24:36ff; Jn 20:19ff)

Galilee was the appointed location for Jesus' reunion with His disciples (see 26:32) and was the setting for the Great Commission (28:18-20). Most likely, Jesus chose to minister to His disciples in Galilee for at least a couple of reasons. First, all of them were from Galilee and second, He wanted a place where they could be free of the opposition while He instructed them.

The Soldiers Are Bribed (28:11-15)

The religious leaders bribed the soldiers of the guard; however, the excuse that the soldiers were provided would not hold up under close scrutiny. First, no Roman soldier would admit to sleeping while on duty since this was an offense punishable by death (see Acts 12:19; 16:27-28; 27:42). Second, if they had been asleep, how did they know who stole the body. Finally, Jesus Himself appeared to many people after His resurrection therefore providing even

⁵ J.W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1946), 611 in J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 495.

more witnesses to His resurrection. Some other points in support of the authenticity of the resurrection account include:

- Jesus' tomb was shut with the Roman seal; to break the seal brought serious penalty (death), yet that penalty was entirely ignored.
- A two-ton stone slab was removed from the entrance to the tomb while under direct vigil by the highly disciplined Roman military guard.
- Both Jews and Romans admitted that the tomb was empty.
- Rather than execute the Roman guard for failing their task, they were ordered to lie concerning what really happened. The bribery is evidence that they knew the truth.
- The wrappings of cloth were apparently in tact, but without the corpse.
- Later Jesus appeared to numerous witnesses, at one time more than 500. (Psychologists insist that hallucination is a phenomenon that occurs only individually; it is virtually impossible for two persons to see the same hallucination, much less at the same time).
- Given the Jewish disconsideration (or rejection) of women as trustworthy witnesses, it makes no sense that the disciples would have conjured a story in which two women are the first witnesses to the resurrection.
- After their having fled and hidden during the crucifixion, to suggest the disciples stole the body makes no sense. It makes even less sense to say that, having allegedly stolen the body, they were then disposed to suffer and die for their feigned belief that Jesus had risen from the grave.
- No evidence whatsoever was ever offered to refute the Christian claim of Christ's resurrection in the first decades and centuries of the early church. The Church was built on the fact of the resurrection.
- Given the implausibility of other arguments which do not explain all the data, the most likely conclusion is that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead.

The Great Commission (28:16-20)

When the eleven disciples went away into Galilee they were probably accompanied by many more people. This may be the appearance to more than five hundred people mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor 15:6. The "some" who doubted (28:17) most likely came from among the 500 and not the eleven disciples who were apostles to Israel (Matt 10:1-4). The reason I believe this is most likely the case is that the eleven were confirmed believers in the resurrected Christ by this time (see John 20:19-28). Also, as we have previously noted, Matthew has a style of writing that is sometimes very abbreviated with regard to details not pertinent to His main purpose.

In verse 18, Jesus makes an interesting statement. He says that all authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth. This authority was delegated authority from the Father. Jesus was most likely recalling the prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14 that was Messianic in character. Of course, Jesus' exercise of this authority over the earth in a Messianic manner was contingent upon Israel's repentance and acceptance of Him as the resurrected Son of God and Messiah (see Acts 3:19). Of course, we know that the required acceptance en masse never occurred; therefore, the establishment of the kingdom and Jesus' exercise of the authority granted to Him to the fullest extent never occurred.

As recorded by Matthew, Jesus' command seems to imply that the disciples were to immediately (even prior to Pentecost) begin making disciples and baptizing them. However, when the parallel accounts are examined, we can see that Jesus expected the disciples to tarry for a period. In Luke 24:49, Jesus commands His disciples to "tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." We have examined this issue to some degree in the Special set of lessons in this series that we've just concluded. Therefore, I will not reiterate that which we've previously covered. The bottom line – I believe that the "Great Commission" in these verses was given to the disciples in anticipation of the extension of the offer of the kingdom through His disciples after Jesus' resurrection. This is the subject of the early chapters of the book of Acts. Therefore, if I am correct, the "Great Commission" is not directed to the Church (as in the body of Christ and Church Age), but is directed to Jews and Gentiles of the transition period

of opportunity prior to the beginning of the Church Age. This is a technical point and doesn't diminish our responsibility as Church Age believers to evangelize the world and be witnesses.

This concludes our overview of the book of Matthew. What a truly awesome study it has been!