

Episode #948 - Matthew 28 Part 1-Earthquake at the Tomb

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord Jesus was laid in the tomb, and wicked humanity had done all it could do, actually putting to death our own Creator. Now, God would act to reverse all that rebellious mankind had done, raising the Lord and getting the victory.

III. Earthquake at the Tomb. Matthew 28:1-8.

A. Matthew 28:1. Matthew seems to be giving a composite here. But the end of the Sabbath, drawing on/dawning into the first of the Sabbaths, came Mary Magdalene. It is as if we are to imagine the sun setting over the tomb, the sun dawning and rising over the tomb, and now the two Marys coming to see the sepulchre.

1. “The first day of the week” is a fanciful translation of the Greek, which reads “one of the Sabbaths.” Yet the Sabbath had ended the evening before, as is stated earlier in the verse. Luke 23:56 assures us the women rested on the Sabbath day according to the commandment. They did not come to the tomb until the Sabbath was over. So what does this mean, “One of the Sabbaths”?
2. We need to understand the feast of firstfruits and the feast of weeks. Leviticus 23:10-11 tells us about the wave sheaf. Then Leviticus 23:15-16 tells us of the counting of weeks. This was from the day after the Sabbath, Sunday, fifty days, counting seven Sabbaths to another Sunday. I believe this is what is meant by “one of the Sabbaths.” This was the first day for counting the seven Sabbaths to Pentecost or the feast of weeks.
3. Today, when agriculture in Israel has little meaning to Jewish culture as a whole, they ALWAYS count firstfruits as happening on the Sunday during the feast of unleavened bread. It seems doubtful to me that it was that way when Israel was actually in the land, for one cannot wave firstfruits until the harvest actually comes in, so it would be dependent on the agriculture. Moreover, the LORD never commanded it to be this way, but that it should be done when the firstfruits come in. Nevertheless, whether it was always this way or not, it was this year. Notice that this means that the Lord died on Passover and rose on Firstfruits, becoming the living fulfillment of both feasts!
4. We spoke of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary back in Matthew 27:56. This other Mary was Mary the mother of James and Joses, not the Lord’s mother or Martha’s sister. This was obviously a very popular name at the time.
5. Take careful note of what this says. It does not say they came to decorate the body with spices, as Mark and Luke say, but only to view the sepulchre. I believe this was a return to the tomb after they already had learned of His resurrection from the angels. Mark 16:1-8 and John 20:1-2 seem to record the first visit of three women while it was still dark, coming early before the other women to decorate the body with spices, and finding the tomb empty. John 20 follows Mary, Mark 16 the other two women. Luke 24:1-10 records a later visit by a large group of women, who know nothing as of yet since the women in Mark 16 kept quiet. After meeting the angel they return and tell His

disciples, who do not believe them. Then the two Marys return together to see the tomb again, at which time this event takes place, after dawn on that important day.

6. "Tomb" is the same word as in Matthew 27:61, 64, 66. They are coming out to view it.
- B. Verse 2. The third of three earthquakes in Matthew, the only gospel to mention earthquakes. First the one during the storm at sea, Matthew 8:24, then at His death, Matthew 27:54, then at His resurrection, Matthew 28:2. (Jesus also prophesies earthquakes in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, but this was not an actual earthquake at the time.) We believe that what the Old Testament calls "the angel of the LORD" was Jesus Christ Himself. This is not He. The Greek reads "angel of-Lord" which is properly "an angel of the Lord." He might have come down from the sky, but of course he came out of the place called "heaven" as well, thus "from heaven." "Came" is approached, Greek *proserchomai*. He rolled back the stone, thus answering the question of the women in Mark 16:3 in a way they never anticipated! Considering how huge this stone was, this was either a very powerful angel, or else he was using the power of God granted to him. "The door" or "the entrance."
- C. Verse 3. "Countenance" means form or external appearance. The word is only here. "Like lightning," in other words, shining that brightly. This was a Divine messenger. "Clothing" refers to his outer garment or cloak. "White" or dazzling as snow. Since they had no chemical bleaches like we do, this kind of whiteness would have seemed especially supernatural to them.
- D. Verse 4. A stronger word than fear, like "terror," is probably in order. These guards were those placed there at the suggestion of the religious leaders. No guards could stand up to God's messenger! "Shook" means to tremble, or to quake as in an earthquake. We would say they fainted dead away. Notice that this incident is only in Matthew, which is also the only gospel that tells about this guard. Yet at the same time, the actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus is not described, nor in any of the four gospels. Since no one was there to see it, it is never recorded. We just read about the aftermath, presenting to us the evidence that it actually happened. Describing the event would not be evidence, since no one saw that. This was not the resurrection. He may have already been gone once the angel came down and did this, passing out of the tomb just as He passed out of the grave clothes

IV. Conclusion: This took place on the feast of firstfruits, so that the Lord died on Passover and rose on Firstfruits, becoming the ultimate fulfillment of both. There were multiple visits of the women to the tomb, a fact that should be obvious from examining all four gospels. These two women came to see again what they had already seen. An earthquake accompanied His resurrection, and a glorious angel came and removed the stone from the door, which made the guards faint dead away. No power of man or even of death could stop the glorious resurrection of our Lord and Savior!