

## 6.0 The Synoptic Resurrection Narratives

### 6.1 The Resurrection

#### (a) Mark's Account

[Mark 16:1-8](#) [1] When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. [2] And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. [3] They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” [4] When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. [5] As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. [6] But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised, he is not here. Look there is the place they laid him. [7] But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” [8] So they went out and fled from the tomb; for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.

#### [The Shorter Ending of Mark](#)

And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.

#### [The Longer Ending of Mark](#)

[Mark 16:9-20](#) [9] Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. [10] She went and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. [11] But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe

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it. [12] After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. [13] And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. [14] Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. [15] And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. [16] The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. [17] And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; [18] they will pick up snakes, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” [19] So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. [20] And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.

According to Mark some women disciples of Jesus go on Saturday night, at the end of the Sabbath, to purchase spices to anoint the body (Mark 16:1). On Sunday morning their problem about the removal of the stone (Mark 16:3) is already solved as it has been rolled away (Mark 16:4). A young man gives them a message about the resurrection (Mark 16:5-7), which causes the women to flee in fear (Mark 16:8). Mark’s Gospel has a confused ending. Most manuscripts have the Gospel end at Mark 16:8. Some manuscripts have a shorter ending in which the women tell Peter and Jesus commissions his disciples. Other manuscripts offer a longer ending that includes resurrection appearance stories. The original ending (Mark 16:8) forces the reader to examine how the disciples seriously misunderstood Jesus, believing that he was concerned with power, influence and success. It points to the fact that for the early Christians, faith in the resurrection was not easy. Mark’s Account can be divided into two parts: The Empty Tomb (Mark 16:1-8) and the **Anonymous Ending** (Mark 16:9-20).

The account of Mark 16:1-8 is restrained with no attempt to describe the actual resurrection and there is no mention of any appearances of the Risen Christ. The phrase “when the Sabbath was past” (Mark 16:1) suggests some time after 6 PM. The reason for the visit of the two women is to anoint Jesus (Mark 16:1; cf. Mark 14:8). The phrase “very early on the first day of the week” (Mark 16:2) is problematic. According to Jewish chronology that would be Saturday night, but according to Roman chronology it would have

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been 3-6 AM. In Mark 16:5 Mark describes the reaction of the women, uniquely in the New Testament, with the verb *ekthambéomai* (ἐκθαμβέομαι - Greek: *to be alarmed*). The women enter the tomb, look around and report it as empty.<sup>1</sup> The messenger's retort "do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth" (Mark 16:6) emphasizes the continuity between the ministry of Jesus and the new state of affairs. According to Mark 16:7 Jesus is said to have returned to Galilee and the narrative ends on a note of fear (Mark 16:8).

Scholarship is agreed that the text of the *Anonymous Ending to Mark* (vv.9-20) is not original to Mark as the vocabulary is non-Markan and the narrative is a collage of resurrection traditions. Mark 16:9-11 deal with the first of four appearances, which is probably derived from Luke or John. Mark 16:12-13 contain non-Markan vocabulary and recall Luke 24:13-35. Mark 16:14-18 do not constitute a narrative but are a collection of post-resurrection sayings. Some manuscripts contain a *Logion* or saying that has been inserted between Mark 16:14 and Mark 16:15 to soften Mark 16:14 and to excuse the behaviour of the eleven.

### (b) Matthew's Account

**Matthew 28:1-20** [1] Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulchre. [2] And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. [3] His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. [4] And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. [5] But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. [6] He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. [7] Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you." [8] So they

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<sup>1</sup> The "empty tomb" is problematic! The earliest statement of faith in the resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-5) says nothing of the empty tomb. In fact, it seems to have been the appearances of the Risen Christ which first formed the Easter faith. Subsequently, the Gospels seized on the empty tomb motif as the only explanation that could explain the conviction that God raised Jesus. What then does the New Testament affirm about the resurrection? The New Testament confesses that God raised Jesus to life and that the conviction of the early Church that this was so was based on the appearances of the Risen Christ. In short the empty tomb cannot prove or disprove the resurrection. The New Testament faith is a proclamation of *resurrection* and not *resuscitation*. Thus the resurrection is in the realm of metahistory, i.e. beyond empirical verification.

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departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. [9] And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Hail!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. [10] Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” [11] While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. [12] And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sum of money to the soldiers [13] and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ [14] And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” [15] So they took the money and did as they were directed; and this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. [16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Matthew’s resurrection narrative can be divided into two stories: the Empty Tomb (Matt 28:1-15) and the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20). According to Matthew the women go to the tomb “after the Sabbath” (Matt 28:1). It was so late that the Sabbath was over. They are identified as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Matt 28:1). These saw Jesus die (Matt 27:56) and the burial (Matt 27:61). Matthew’s account has no reference to anointing as this had already taken place (Matt 26:12). The reference to an earthquake in Matt 28:2 is an apocalyptic motif. The Markan young man (Mark 16:5) becomes a Matthean angel (Matt 28:2) who explains how the stone has been rolled away. Matt 28:4 mentions the guards who were watching to prevent the theft of the body (Matt 27:62; 28:11-15). A comparison between Mark 16:6 (“He has been raised, he is not here”) and Matt 28:6 (“He is not here; for he has risen, as he said”) suggests that Matthew has expanded the text to link it to the passion predictions (Matt 16:21-23; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). The statement “he has risen” does not follow from the empty tomb; rather it is an explanation *for* the empty tomb. Matt 28:12-15 is a refutation of a rumour, still current in Matthew’s day, that the authorities stole the body. Matthew’s account is a reworking and expansion of Mark’s account. Matt

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28:1-8 tidy up the Markan narrative by introducing the women; these establish an eyewitness link between the death, burial and empty tomb. Mention of anointing is left out as it has already occurred. The Markan mystery of how the stone has been rolled away is explained. Matt 28:9-15 have no counterpart in Mark.

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee...” (Matt 28:16). The group has been depleted by Judas’ suicide (Matt 27:3-10) and there is no reference to restoring the number to twelve (cf. Acts 1:12-26). Matt 28:17 describes their reaction: “when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted.” The note of homage suggests a proper response to the Risen Lord. While some of the Eleven worshipped Jesus, others doubted. It is not clear if they doubted the experience or the appropriateness of worshipping Jesus. The reference to baptism (Matt 28:19) suggests that the language of the Early Church’s experience has been put back on to Jesus’ lips. The Gospel ends with “I am with you always” which forms an *inclusio* with Jesus’ name Immanuel (עִמָּנוּ אֵל).