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The Empty Tomb

Luke 24:9-12 and John 20:2-10

About 6:30 am on Sunday the seventeenth of Nisan

The empty tomb DIG: What were the women feeling on their way to the tomb? What problems do they expect to find? How do you think they felt when they left the tomb? Why do you think the women met the angels before the apostles? How did the talmidim respond to the report of the women? How did Peter and John respond to Mary Magdalene's report? Who challenged the report that the tomb was empty?

REFLECT: How does Mary's story teach us that we are the messengers to others that the gospel of Jesus Christ - the good news that Yeshua has defeated the Enemy without and the enemy within - is one in which we follow a living Savior?

At that time the resurrection fell on **the festival of Firstfruits** (see the commentary on **Leviticus**, **to see link click [Ea](#) - Resheet**). On this day a delegation was sent out from Jerusalem in order to harvest a specially marked area of a barley field with Temple sickles. One sheaf from the standing harvest was brought to the priest. The lone sheaf was called "the sheaf of the first fruits." The priest was then to take this one sheaf and wave it before **ADONAI** in the Temple. Later, these **firstfruits** of the barley harvest were threshed and winnowed. Then the collected grain was milled. The flour was then made into an unleavened meal offering and presented to **ADONAI** on the bronze altar as a burnt offering (see my commentary on **Exodus [Fe](#) - The Burnt Offering**) and a grain offering (see my commentary on **Exodus [Ff](#) - The Grain Offering**). Nowhere in Isra'el could barley be harvested before this had taken place.

According to the Torah the offering of **firstfruits** should occur **the day after the Sabbath (Leviticus 23:15)**. As Roger Liebi asserts in his classic book *The Messiah in the Temple*, an argument over the interpretation of this statement was ignited between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees held that this feast should always take place on the first Sunday that fell in the week of Pesach. On the other hand, the Pharisees believed that the term **Sabbath in Leviticus 23:15** had a special meaning, in other words, they believed it was "a special feast day." By this they meant that the fifteenth of Nisan was intended by this

expression in **Leviticus 23:15** to be the day on which the Passover lamb was eaten. Therefore, according to the Pharisaic view, the principle of **the festival of Reshit Katzir** should *always* be celebrated on **the sixteenth of Nisan**.

The situation in the year of **Messiah's** crucifixion, however, was very special. That year when the sun went down to start **the sixteenth of Nisan** - the Sabbath began. According to the Pharisaic interpretation, **the firstfruits** of barley should have been harvested that evening. But how could it be possible to harvest, to thresh, to winnow, to collect, to mill and to bake on the Sabbath? They had a problem.

So that year **the fifteenth** and **sixteenth of Nisan** together made up a double Sabbath; accordingly, in the year of the crucifixion, **the firstfruits** of the barley harvest could only be brought to the Temple on **the seventeenth of Nisan**, the day of **the Lord's** resurrection! How is this a type of **Christ**?

In predicting **His** death, **Yeshua** says that putting grain in the ground is an image of dying: **Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds (Yochanan 12:24)**. This is symbolic of plants shooting up after the dying seed produces a great crop. Therefore, the Temple feast of the resurrection fell on the very day of **Messiah's** resurrection. This conclusion fully agrees with the fact that Rabbi Sha'ul repeatedly mentions this in his classic chapter on the resurrection: **But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through one man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through one man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all we be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when He comes, those who belong to Him (First Corinthians 15:20-23)**.¹⁶⁵⁶

Evidently once **Mary Magdalene** saw **the tomb** was empty, **she** did not wait for **the other women** to arrive, but ran back, taking another route, to alert **Peter** and **John**. As Scottish pastor A. Moody Stuart (1809-1898), wrote, "**She** was privileged to follow **Jesus** to Jerusalem, to look on **His** cross, to watch at **His tomb**, to be the first witness of **His** resurrection, and even to be sent by **Him** as the messenger of **His** word, **an apostle to the apostles** themselves." **When [she] came back from the tomb, Miryam from Magdala told John and Peter that Jesus had risen from the dead. When Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women arrived, they reported the message of the angels that the resurrection has occurred to all the other apostles (Luke 24:9-10). They said: They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put Him (John 20:2)!**

The vacated **tomb** never resists honest investigation. Believer's don't have to check their brains at the door to follow **Yeshua. Christ** demands faith, but not blind faith. "Come and see," **the angels** invite. Shall we? Take a look at the empty **tomb**. (I visited the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, October 2023. To see a video of **Yeshua's** tomb click [here](#). The first thing you will see is a small room for the preparation of the body to be wrapped in spices. **Yeshua's** body would have been placed in the recessed area on the left hand side of the tomb). Do you know the opponents of **Messiah** never challenged its vacancy? No Pharisee or Roman soldier ever led a contingent back to the burial site and declared, "**The angels** were wrong. The body *is* here. It was all a rumor." They would have if they could have. Within a few weeks disciples occupied every street corner in Jerusalem announcing the risen **Messiah**. What quicker way for the enemies of **the Prophet of Nazareth** to shut them up than to produce a cold and lifeless body. Display the cadaver and messianic Judaism would be stillborn. But they had no cadaver to display.¹⁶⁵⁷

It is hard to imagine the extreme mood swing that **Mary Magdalene** and **the other women** experienced. They expected to see **the tomb** just as Joseph left it. So it was a terrific shock to see the heavy stone slab removed - lifted out of the groove and lying flat on the ground - and **Jesus'** body missing. Immediately **they** assumed foul play.

It was an awkward assignment, to say the least, for **the woman** who courageously stayed through the entire ordeal to address the **men** who succumbed to **their** fears and retreated into hiding. **But** when **they** reached **the men**, all of **the apostles but Peter and John did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense (Luke 24:11)**. The statements from **the other women** went against the culture's view of **them**. **Yeshua** clearly expected **the men** whom followed **Him** to see the situation from **His** perspective and to value **the women** as **He** did. **The women** weren't second-class **talmidim**, but crucial to **Jesus'** ministry. **He** didn't give them small jobs. **He** gave **Miriam** two of the most significant - as the first witness to **His** resurrection and as **an apostle to the apostles**.¹⁶⁵⁸

However, when **Peter and John** received the report of **the empty tomb** from **Mary Magdalene**, **they got up and started running to investigate (John 20:3)**. The grey light of early spring had broken the heavy curtain of mist. Red and golden sunlight lay on the edge of the horizon. The garden was still, and the morning air stirred the trees that the dark night had seemed to keep watch over the dead. Then, with hearts pounding and out of breath, **they** arrived at **the tomb**.

The Greek language has no less than six verbs translated **to see**, but they have different

nuances and specific uses. In **John 20:5-8**, **Yochanan** uses three different forms - *blepo* in **verse 5**, *theoreo* in **verse 6**, and *eidon* in **verse 8** - to describe the different kind of "seeing" experienced by **Peter** and **himself**.



Upon hearing **Mary's** report **both** took off **running**, but **John**, being the younger man, **outran Peter and reached the tomb first**. **Bending over** and peering in, **he** observed without understanding (*blepo*) **Yochanan** clearly **saw** that there was no body although **the strips of linen were lying there by themselves**. That means that **Jesus** was resurrected right through **the strips of linen** used to wrap **His** body. Therefore, there was no need to unwrap **Yeshua** as there was in the case of Lazarus (**John 11:44**). The point is that **the strips of linen** were wrapped around the body of **our Lord**, but after **His** resurrection **they** were still **lying by themselves** as if **they** were still around **His** body. But the body was no longer there. **But John did not go in** at first. Initially, **he went away confused, wondering to himself what had happened** (Luke 24:12; John 20:4-5).

Then Simon Peter came along behind him moments later and **went straight into the tomb** to investigate (*theoreo*) the curious condition of **the burial clothes**. **He also saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head**. **The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen**. The fact that **the strips of linen cloth** were undisturbed and that **the cloth that had been wrapped around Messiah's head** were neatly folded up by **them** was evidence that the body had not been stolen. Thieves **either** would have left **the burial clothes** in disarray **in the tomb**, or, more likely, have carried the body off wrapped, leaving no **cloths** behind. The condition of **the cloths** further indicates that there was no undue haste associated with the resurrection. Had there been, **the cloths** would not have been laid aside so neatly. **Finally, John, who reached the tomb first, also went inside**. **He saw . . . and left the tomb** perceiving with understanding (*eidon*) and believed (**Yochanan 20:6-8**).¹⁶⁵⁹

Then **John** explains the reason for **their** slowness to comprehend the *full* meaning of what **they** saw (**John 2:22**). **They still did not understand** the necessity **from Scripture** that

Jesus had to rise from the dead (John 20:9). They were still struggling with the Jewish concept of two **Messiah's** (see [Mv - The Jewish Concept of Two Messiah's](#)). In the days and weeks to come, before **Yeshua** ascended back to **the Father**, **they** would come to the *full* meaning of what **they** had seen because **Christ Himself** would, like the two on the road to Emmaus (see [Mh - On the Road to Emmaus](#)), would explain everything to **them**.

These two **men** had not grasped the fact of the resurrection even though **Jesus** had repeatedly declared it. Even the news brought by **Miryam from Magdala** did not persuade **them**. It was not until **they** saw for **themselves the empty tomb** that **they** believed that **Messiah** had actually been raised from **the dead**. **Then John and Simon Peter went back to where they were staying**, firmly convinced of the fact of **the Lord's** bodily resurrection for the dead (**John 20:10**).¹⁶⁶⁰