

who saw them know who they were? Why did God raise them? But the truth is so beautiful because so little is said. Just enough is told in God's record and no more.

### THE RISING OF THE SAINTS

"Rapture" is not a Bible word. Jesus used the Greek word "parousia" to speak of His coming again. All Christians expect the Messiah to come for them. At that time their bodies will be redeemed (Rom 8:19–23). This will happen at the resurrection. Peter said God delays judgment and Jesus delays His coming so that more will be saved (2 Peter 3:15). "He is patient ... not wanting anyone to perish but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Some wrongly teach a two-stage resurrection. That after the Parousia – Christ's Second coming – more people will be saved in a seven-year time of great suffering. If this was true, Peter would have said so. In the second book of Peter, chapter 3, Peter gives us an order of these final events:

- a) Things in the world will get worse (Verse 3).
- b) Christ will come again (Verse 4).
- c) Judgment will come at once (Verse 7).
- d) At that time the world and the things man has built will be burned (Verses 10,12).
- e) The New Jerusalem will appear (Verse 13).
- f) Our Lord's coming again will bring about the eternal state of life forever in Heaven for those who love Jesus Christ.
- g) Those who died without faith in Jesus Christ will be judged.

### THEN HOW SHOULD WE LIVE?

Peter wrote to Christians, "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. ... Since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him (God)" (2 Peter 3:11,14).

We can only have peace with God by receiving Jesus Christ as our Saviour from sin. The Bible says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – " (Acts 16:31).

Jesus said, "This gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14).

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# The Empty Tomb

Written in Easy English

by

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John 20:1-9

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## TO THE READER...

Read your Bible first, then study this book. In this study all Bible verses are from the New International Version of the Bible. Verses from the Bible are shown as (Luke 7:6 = chapter 7 and verse 6).

When verses are taken from other versions they are shown as: KJV – King James Version; NASB – New American Standard Bible; TLB – The Living Bible; TEV – Today's English Version. NLT – New Living Translation.

## THE EMPTY TOMB

The tomb where Jesus was buried belonged to Joseph of Ar-im-a-the'-a. After Jesus was crucified, Joseph asked for Jesus' body and put it in his own new tomb. Then Roman soldiers closed the tomb with a heavy stone. No person could move the stone by himself.

The soldiers sealed the stone 'door' to the tomb with the seal of Pilate the Roman governor. A guard of sixteen Roman soldiers was set to watch the tomb! They were armed and would be punished by death if they failed to guard the tomb.

All this was done because the leaders thought Jesus' disciples might come and take His body away (Matthew 27:62–66).

On the third day, Jewish women who were disciples of Jesus came to the tomb. They would anoint Christ's body with spices and perfumes. As they came close, they asked each other: "Who will roll away the stone for us?"

They saw that someone had rolled the heavy stone away. They looked into the tomb, but Jesus' body was not there.

Suddenly two men appeared dressed in white, shining clothes. They asked the women, "Why are you looking in a tomb for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Don't you remember what He told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that He would rise again the third day" (Luke 24:5–7)?

The women were afraid and hurried back to tell the other disciples. Mary Mag'-da-lene told them, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and I don't know where they have put Him!" (John 20:2).

## PETER AND JOHN RAN TO THE TOMB

The women told how they found the tomb empty, but their words seemed like nonsense. The disciples must find out for themselves!

Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb. John followed right behind him. Soon they were at the tomb. They also saw that the stone had been rolled away. John knew the women could not move the stone! No one man could!

A wonderful change takes place in the seed planted in the earth. First the seed's old body must die. Then a new form (body) rises out of the earth. Although it is of the same kind, it appears to be different. For example, a hard yellow corn seed will come up as a soft green shoot (body). This is because God gives it a body according to its own kind (Gen 1:11).

"Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds and fish have another." In nature, God has given different things different bodies and He can do the same in the resurrection.

"There are also heavenly bodies" – stars, sun, moon – which differ in their brightness. God made them and He can make a resurrection body for a Christian.

**The resurrection:** a) A perishing body raised an ever-living one (1 Cor 15:42–44). b) A body without honour raised in glory" c) A natural (physical) body raised a spiritual body. d) The dust of the earth changed for heaven's glory forever.

## IT IS FINISHED!

When Jesus was crucified many great signs were shown to men. Some were from the heavens, some from the earth, and some from under the earth.

Jesus cried out on the cross, "It is finished." The veil in the Temple that closed off The Holy of Holies – the most sacred place – tore apart and fell at the feet of priests offering the evening sacrifice. The force was from heaven to earth and the message was plain. Man could now come straight to God, because of the sacrifice of Jesus (John 1:29; Heb 9:3,8; 10:19–20).

There was an earthquake. "The earth split and the rocks split" (Matt 27:51). With a great natural force God shook the earth, split the rocks and opened the tombs. Jesus' victory over death and hell shook the heavens and God broke up the earth. The tombs in that neighbourhood split open and the bodies of many holy people were raised to life (Matt 27:52). These bodies received their spirits again and lived on until they died. They went into the holy city (Jerusalem) and appeared to many people. What an amazing miracle!

There was such rejoicing in Heaven that these holy ones leapt out of the cold tombs that held them and joined the celebration. And, "after Jesus' resurrection," they went into the city to witness that their Saviour had risen! They were God's people in life, and God used them even in death.

The earthquake did not open all the tombs on the rocky hillside of Calvary. It opened only graves in which the bodies of saints lay. God makes a vast distinction between them! (Ex 8:23; Dan 12:2).

We are curious to know more. Who were they? Who saw them? Did those

"The first man was of the dust...earthly man." In every way, we are like Adam. "We have borne the likeness of the earthly man" (1 Cor 15:49-50).

"The second man (was) from Heaven...so shall we bear the likeness of the man from Heaven (Christ). Christians are being made like their Saviour now. In the resurrection, their bodies will be very much like His "glorious body" (Phil 3:21). There will be no difference.

"Up from the grave He arose,  
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;  
He arose a victor from the dark domain,  
And He lives forever with His saints to reign:  
He arose! He arose!  
Halleljuah, Christ arose!" – Rev R. Lowry

Paul told the Christians:

- we will not all sleep in death; some will be alive when Jesus comes again
- but we will all be changed, with resurrection bodies fit for life in Heaven
- this will happen "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Thess 4:13-18).
- for the trumpet will sound to herald Christ's coming with His mighty angels
- the dead (bodies) will be raised
- and we will be changed – "mortal to immortal" (1 Cor 15:42-44).

The resurrection of the body will be the final victory over death. The body that was ours, in Adam, will be forever changed and made new.

## DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP

"Then the saying will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting" (1 Cor 15:50-53)?

When Paul thought of this final victory – of death and hell cast into the lake of fire – he could not hold back his shouts of praise (Rev 20:14).

"Thanks be to God!" he exclaimed. "He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:57).

Victory over sin and evil is never won by us. Victory is always given by God. He gives the victory as we live "in Christ."

So Christians have the resurrection life of Christ abiding in them now:

- showing forth His power to make our spirits like His. (2 Cor 3:18).
- giving us victory over the sin and evil around us. (2 Tim 4:18).
- moving through us to draw others to Himself (2 Cor 5:20).

## HOW CAN THIS BE?

Jesus and then Paul used a seed to teach this truth of the resurrection. When you sow a seed, it must first die before it can come to life again (John 12:24; 1 Cor 15:36-38).

Peter did not stop to think about this, he went into the tomb. Then John followed him. They saw the grave clothes lying there in the tomb and the cloth that had been around Jesus' head. These lay in the tomb just as they had been wound around Jesus' body. His changed 'body' had come out of the wrappings without moving them. If someone else had taken His body, the grave clothes would not have been left in place.

John "saw and believed" (John 20:8). He needed no other proof!

## MARY WENT BACK TO THE TOMB

Peter and John went back to the others, but Mary went to the tomb crying (John 20:13).

She turned and saw a man who asked, "Woman...who is it you are looking for?" She thought it was the gardener. Then Jesus spoke her name, "Mary!" cover Mary knew it was her Master. That same voice had freed her from many demons! (Luke 8:2) She answered at once, "Rabboni!" which means 'my Master' or 'my Lord.'

Jesus told her, "Do not hold on to Me, for I have not yet returned to the Father." She would see Him again. She need not hold on to Him now.

Jesus said to Mary, "Go and tell My brothers: 'I am returning to My Father and your Father...'" Mary took this news back to the disciples.

"I have seen the Lord," she told the others (John 20:18).

## HOW CAN WE EXPLAIN THIS MIRACLE?

Tombs are made to hold dead bodies forever, but the disciples found that Jesus' body was not in the tomb. How can we explain this miracle?

First, miracles cannot be explained. They are the work of God. When He was alive, Jesus did miracles to show that He had come from the Father. He did them "that men might believe" in Him.

There are three ways to look at the empty tomb: 1. Jesus' disciples came and took His body out of the tomb. 2. His enemies carried His body away. 3. He rose from the dead on the third day as the Bible says.

When Jesus rose from the tomb, the soldiers fell to the ground. When they gathered themselves up, they went into the city to tell the chief priests and leaders what had happened.

The chief priests made up a story. 'Say this and save your lives,' they told the soldiers. Say, "His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we were asleep." And they gave the soldiers "a large sum of money," to spread this lie (Matt 28:11-15).

Jesus' disciples did not take His body. Fear filled their hearts that first Easter morning and they were huddled together behind locked doors in an

upper room in the city. They had no thought of fighting the Roman guards and breaking the seal on the tomb. And they would have needed an army to do it.

### **HIS ENEMIES TOOK HIS BODY**

Jesus' enemies would not want His body. They were glad to see Him dead. That is why the chief priests and leaders of the Jews had gone to Pilate, the Roman governor, and said, "Sir, we remember that deceiver once said... 'After three days I will rise again.' Give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise His disciples may come and steal the body..."

'And the last lie will be worse than the first,' they added quickly.

Pilate had answered them, "Take the guard," make the tomb as secure as you know how" (Matt 27:62-66).

### **CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD**

On the third day, Jesus Christ rose from the dead as He said He would (Mark 9:31). This truth – the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the tomb – is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. More than one trillion Christians, in every country on earth, have believed that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And that His death on the cross was for them and in their place.

Paul said, if Christ has not be raised from the dead, we could not be forgiven and our faith would be empty and in vain (1 Cor 15:14,17).

Jesus' disciples were willing to die for their faith. They all did except, perhaps, John the Apostle who was exiled to the Isle of Patmos.

In the 2,000 years since then, hundreds of thousands of believers have suffered persecution and thousands have died for their faith. They all believed that Jesus rose from the tomb, and they were willing to give their lives for that truth.

### **IN AN UPPER ROOM**

That same evening (the first day of the week) the disciples were together in an upper room. The doors were locked and they talked with low voices. Suddenly Jesus appeared to them and said, "Peace be with you!"

They thought He was a ghost, but it was Jesus, the same Jesus! He held out His hands and drew aside His cloak and they saw His wounds.

They were full of joy to see the Lord.

"Peace be with you," He said again. 'As the Father sent Me, so I am sending you.' When He said that, He breathed on them all and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22).

Peter told them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children..." (Acts 2:38-39). Then he warned them: "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." They must leave their old way of life and join with other Christians to live godly lives.

It was not long before the leaders noted that Peter and John were ordinary untaught men. The leaders were astonished and took note that Peter and John had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

### **JESUS CHRIST THE FIRSTFRUITS**

Jesus rose as the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20). Out of all those who live by faith, He was the first to rise from the dead. God called Him "the firstfruits" or the first of the harvest. His resurrection was the guarantee that all those who live by faith will rise and join Him in Heaven "at the last day" (2 Tim 4:18).

At the last trumpet, Christ will call to all spirits. Each true Christian will receive a new body. This will happen in "the twinkling of an eye" when Jesus comes again. Their bodies sleep in graves now, but they will be fitted with a resurrection body and recreated into His likeness (1 Thess 4:13-18).

Jesus Christ shed His blood for all men. He is "the resurrection and the life" for all who believe (Acts 16:31). Praise God, we can celebrate our resurrection now, because His resurrection was a guarantee of our own.

The words 'sleep' and 'resurrection' speak only of this human body. Our spirits do not sleep. Jesus told the thief on the cross, "This day you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The criminal's body would be dumped outside the city and burned, but his spirit would live on forever in Heaven.

Paul compared the body we have now with the new one we will receive

- a perishing body will be raised a new body that will never perish
- a body with no honour (even a crippled body) will be "raised in glory"
- the natural (physical) body "raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:42-44).
- the "dust of the earth" will become the glory of Heaven (Matthew 13:43).

### **FROM ADAM TO CHRIST**

"So it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being,' the last Adam a life-giving spirit....The spiritual did not come first, but the natural and after that the spiritual" (1 Cor 15:39, 46).

Again, God declared His order, sowing must come before harvest. God began with Adam, the natural man. Then he moved on to the 'spiritual Adam' which was Jesus Christ. God will never go back to the natural again.

prayed and waited on God. Mary, Jesus' mother was one of the women. They were "all together in one place" and they were of one mind.

These disciples waited and prayed for ten days. They were not in a hurry. On the 50th day after Jesus rose from the dead – on the Pentecost – suddenly, the Holy Spirit came. All in the room heard a sound like a mighty wind and they saw what "seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them" (Acts 2:3).

Men and women together, "were filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). They saw the glow of the Spirit rest on each head, but His filling came to their hearts. His was a gentle flame that brought light and joy to their lives.

The "tongues of fire" soon passed from their sight, but the fullness of the Holy Spirit stayed. He filled them with love for Jesus and for each other.

Now God commands each of us to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18). As we believe and trust Christ, His Spirit fills us. The Presence of Jesus comes to us by His Spirit. All Christ's grace and strength is ours because of Pentecost. Paul wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).

When we are filled with the Spirit, we will overflow with Christ's love. We will be bold for Christ and want to tell others (Acts 4:31).

The disciples who received the Holy Spirit went out speaking "the wonderful works of God!" (Acts 2:11).

At Feast of Weeks, the number of people in the city rose to tens of thousands. People came from every country and packed into every inch of space. All these strangers (non-Jews, or Jews from other lands) heard the apostles praising God. Each man heard in his own language. This was a miracle and it happened only once!

At first these Jews scoffed at this miracle of language. These men have had too much wine, they said (Acts 2:13). Then the Holy Spirit took control of Peter's tongue and he spoke with power. His local Galilean speech would have been hard for the crowd to understand, but the Spirit of God made Peter's words clear and bold.

## PETER SPOKE TO THE CROWD

Peter was a changed man. He told these leaders of Israel: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). His words cut them to the heart and some asked him and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

## THOMAS WAS NOT THERE

Thomas was not there when Jesus came into the room, so the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" This was too much for Thomas.

"Unless I see the nail marks in His hands...and put my hand into His side," he said, "I will not believe it."

A week later Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came to them as before. "Peace be with you!" He said. Then He said to Thomas: "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:26–29).

"My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. He had convincing proof!

Jesus told Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

## THE RISEN CHRIST APPEARED TO MANY

After Jesus rose again from the dead, He showed Himself openly (John 20:14–28). The women were the first to know that Jesus had risen. Some might say, 'The women made a mistake. That they went to the wrong tomb.' But did angels go to the wrong tomb to tell them, "He is risen!"

Christ appeared: a) To Mary. b) To Thomas. c) To His disciples. d) To five hundred. Someone said if the 500 who saw the Risen Christ each had five minutes to tell of it, that would be 50 hours of testimony.

## SAUL SAW THE RISEN CHRIST

Saul, the Pharisee, hated Christians. When he found people who belonged to "the Way" (a name for Christ's followers) he put them in chains and dragged them before the courts. The chief priest gave him this authority.

One day Saul went to Damascus with letters from the chief priests to arrest Christians there. As he neared the city, a blinding light knocked him off his donkey. He lay on the ground and heard a voice ask: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me" (Acts 9:3–4)?

"Who are you, Lord (Yahweh)?" Saul stammered.

As Saul lay there, the voice spoke to him: "I am Jesus, whom you persecute... it is hard for you to kick against the pricks! Now get up and go into the city..." (Acts 9:5–6).

Paul had been going his own way, kicking against God! That day Saul learned that Yahweh and Jesus are One and the same. The mighty God!

Jesus Christ stopped Saul in his mad rush to destroy Christians.

Saul's eyes had been blinded by the light, so his friends took his hand and led him into Damascus (Acts 9:8–12). For three days he did not eat or drink anything. He waited for God to tell him what to do.

### THE PROMISE...

"And afterward, I will pour out My Spirit on all people.... Even on My servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days...And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:28–29, 32).

In the same city there was a disciple named An-a-ni'-as. The Lord spoke to him in a vision: "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul..."

Ananias was afraid. "Lord," he answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem...."

The Lord told him: "Go! This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles..." those people who were not Jews (Acts 9:15).

God would use Saul to speak to three different groups of people: a) To Gentiles. b) To kings. c) To Israel. This tells us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone (Matt 28:18).

Ananias found Saul at the house on Straight Street. "Brother Saul," he said, "the Lord – Jesus who appeared to you on the road...sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). At once, Saul's eyes were opened – "something like scales fell off them." He got up, was baptized and took food.

## **SAUL IN DAMASCUS**

Saul began to preach in the Jews' meeting places called synagogues. He preached in the synagogues because God-fearing Jews and Gentiles went there to worship. They would listen.

He preached that Jesus is the Son of God. People could not understand the change in Saul. "Isn't this the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name?" they asked. God, the Holy Spirit, had changed Saul from a crazy persecutor of Christians to a patient preacher of the gospel. Now he was just as strong for God as he had been for Satan. The Jews in Damascus could not argue against Saul's preaching, so they made a plan to kill him. "Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates..." When the Christians learned of this plan, they took Saul by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall and he escaped.

Saul went back to Jerusalem. He tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him. Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles.

When Saul had no friends, Barnabas encouraged him. Barnabas came from the island of Crete. He was the one who sold his field and gave the money to the poor (Acts 4:36).

The news spread quickly: "Saul of Tarsus is here. He is speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus." No one could believe it. Jews from Greece asked Saul about his faith. They also tried to kill him, so the brothers took Saul down to Cae-sa-re'-a and sent him home to Tarsus (Acts 9:28–30).

## **CHRIST'S LAST WORDS TO HIS DISCIPLES**

Before He was crucified, Jesus led His disciples out of the city to the Mount of

Olives. As they sat on the hillside they asked Him, "Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6).

Israel was ruled by a Roman military government. The Jews and the disciples hoped Jesus would free them from Rome and restore their nation.

Jesus answered: "It is not for you to know the times, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses..." (Acts 1:8).

He turned their eyes away from earthly possessions to a spiritual kingdom. For forty days after He rose from the tomb, He had talked with them about God's Kingdom. They were part of God's Kingdom and they would preach that Kingdom to the whole world, beginning "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

This handful of disciples would need more than their natural ability to preach the gospel of God's Kingdom "in all the world." They would need the power and boldness of God's Holy Spirit living within them.

## **JESUS WAS TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN**

After Jesus said these things, He was taken up to Heaven before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from view (Acts 1:9).

The disciples were surprised. They never expected this to happen. They stood there with their mouths open, looking straight up at the bright cloud that had received their Master.

"Suddenly, two men dressed in white stood beside them" (Acts 1:10). "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into Heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into Heaven."

Jesus cared enough to send two angels to tell His disciples, and the world, that He would come again. He would come "in the same way" as they had seen Him go into Heaven (Mark 14:62). This is Christ's promise to all believers. If we love Jesus, we will surely see Him when He comes again in His glory! (1 Thes 4:13–18).

Luke is the only evangelist who tells of Jesus' ascension to Heaven. But it was believed by all. Mary clung to her risen Lord and Peter said He was "exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:31). It was a fact of history.

## **THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT**

Jesus had commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised...in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5).

The disciples obeyed their Lord and stayed in Jerusalem. Men and women