

The Empty Tomb

Key Verses: *“As they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee.”*
—Luke 24:5,6

Selected Scripture:
Luke 24:1-12

THE APPEARANCE OF angels to humans is recorded many times in the Bible. (Gen. 22:11-18; Luke 1:11-13; 2:9-11) In today's lesson we find another appearance of angels, this time to the women who had come to anoint the body of Jesus. In Matthew's account of our Key Verse, most Bible translations use the words “Do not be afraid,” a more calming phrase than “fear not,” to describe the angel's response to the frightened women. (Matt. 28:5) Matthew also describes the angelic appearance as being accompanied

by a great earthquake and the rolling back of the stone at the tomb. The Roman guards were so afraid at the sight that “they fell into a dead faint.”—vss. 2-4, *New Living Translation*

The fact that the empty tomb was first found by devoted women is significant as it highlights the fear of the male disciples who had gathered in a locked home. (John 20:19, *NLT*) In ancient times the testimony of a woman counted less than that of a man. If the story had been fabricated, men would have certainly been the ones noted as discovering the empty tomb.

The empty tomb was factual evidence that supports

the apostolic teaching that Jesus had risen from the dead. Opponents could have easily ended the early accounts of these events by simply stating that his body had been found, but God prevented this from happening. A fabricated account was even devised by the Jewish chief priests that the body had been stolen away by his disciples. (Matt. 28:11-15) However, it would be difficult to believe eleven men lacking military training would have been able to overpower Roman guards at the tomb.

The location of the tomb was also an important feature in supporting the claim that Jesus was risen from the dead. Mark 15:43 says, “Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.” Verse 47 adds, “Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.” Joseph was an honorable man, and the women observed exactly where he laid Jesus’ body. There was no deceit nor trickery involved, either by Joseph or by the women. The same women who witnessed Jesus’ placement in the tomb saw it empty on the third day.

About twenty years after the resurrection of Jesus took place, the Apostle Paul wrote about those events. (I Cor. 15:3-8) He reported at least five different post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, including one in which more than “five hundred brethren at once” had seen the Lord and that most of them were still living. Paul himself had seen a glimpse of the glorified Jesus on the road to Damascus at the time of his conversion.—Acts 9:1-6

Legal cases require evidence from reputable and multiple sources. In the case of the empty tomb, both requirements are fulfilled. In our lesson, the evidence all points to the authenticity of the Biblical writings that the tomb was empty because “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”—I Cor. 15:20, *New International Version* ■