

EXPLANATION OF 43RD BIBLEBOOK

JOHN 20 (A.D. 70-95)

INTRODUCTION

John chapter 20 to 21 deals with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and his appearances to Mary Magdalene and the other disciples. In John 20:30-31 the writer describes the purpose of his Gospel.

Although at first sight it seems that the recorded testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John contain contradictions, these alleged contradictions can be satisfactorily explained so that no unsolved contradiction remains. When we read all four Gospels together, there is *no contradiction with regard to any event that took place*. All four evangelists have heard the testimonies of the women and of the disciples of Jesus several times and finally each recorded in his Gospel what he regarded as important.

OUTLINE

- (I) 20:1-2. The women witness the resurrection.
 - a. The resurrection on a Sunday
 - b. The women that came to the tomb
 - c. The time the women came to the tomb
 - d. The stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb
 - e. The angels at the tomb
 - f. Mary Magdalene reported the empty tomb to Peter and John
- (II) 20:3-10. Peter and John at the tomb (Luke 24:12).
 - a. The resurrection of Jesus caused Peter and John to believe
 - b. The resurrection of Jesus involved the human nature of Jesus Christ
- (III) 20:11-18. The 1st appearance to Mary Magdalene.
 - a. Mary Magdalene saw two angels (20:11-12).
 - b. Mary Magdalene also did not expect the resurrection (20:13).
 - c. Mary Magdalene recognised the resurrected Jesus Christ (20:14-16).
 - d. Mary Magdalene cannot continue to relate to Jesus as before (20:17a).
 - e. Mary Magdalene became the first witness of the resurrection and the ascension (20:17b).
 - f. The relationship between Jesus Christ and his disciples was going to change (20:17b).
 - g. Mary Magdalene reported the resurrection to the disciples (20:18).
- (IV) The 2nd appearance to the other women (Matthew 28:9-10).
- (V) The guards bribed to spread a false rumour among the Jews (Matthew 28:11-15).
 - a. The lies of the Jewish religious leaders in order to explain the empty tomb.
 - b. Why the false report of the guards was never believed.
- (VI) The 3rd appearance to Peter (Luke 24:33-35; 1 Corinthians 15:5).
- (VII) The 4th appearance to two disciples (Luke 24:13-32; Mark 16:12-13).
- (VIII) 20:19-23. The 5th appearance to the disciples without Thomas (Luke 24:36-48).
 - a. Jesus appears to his disciples on the Sunday he was resurrected (20:19a).
 - b. The disciples met behind locked doors (20:19b).
 - c. Jesus appeared to his disciples with his resurrected body (20:19b-20).
 - d. Jesus gave the great commission to his disciples (20:21).
 - e. Jesus gave authority to his disciples (20:22-23).
- (IX) 20:24-29. The 6th appearance to the disciples with Thomas.
 - a. Unbelief (20:24-25).
 - b. Belief by seeing the resurrected Jesus (20:26-28).
 - c. Belief by hearing the Word of God (20:29).
- (X) 20:30-31. The epilogue.
 - a. The signs in the Gospel of John.
 - b. The significance of the signs in the Gospel of John.
 - c. The purpose of the Gospel of John.

EXPLANATION

(I) 20:1-2. The women witness the resurrection.

20:1. Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came (vipn) to the tomb, early, while it was (vppa) still dark, and saw (vipa) the stone lifted up and removed¹ (vprp) away from (the entrance of) the tomb.

a. The resurrection on a Sunday.

Several times Jesus had foretold that he would be resurrected from the dead *on the third day*². Jesus was crucified on Friday 15th Nisan (the day of Preparation for the Sabbath)(19:14)³. Jesus was resurrected from the dead on Sunday 17th Nisan (the first day of the week). These events were the fulfilment of the prophecy in Psalm 16:10, “You will not abandon me to the grave nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”

These historical events were the greatest in all history of mankind and so the Christian Community (the Church) celebrated the first day of the week as commemorating these great events.

¹ G: airó

² Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19 “on the 3rd day” not after 3 days” (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34)

³ Matthew 27:62

Since the creation God's people celebrated the seventh day of the week as a Sabbath, that is, as the day commemorating the completion of God's work of creating the universe and the earth⁴. On the Sabbath one did not work, but rested⁵. One did not go to war, but came together for a holy gathering⁶. But since the first coming of Jesus God's people celebrated the first day of the week as the day commemorating the completion of God's work of recreation/salvation of his people. One not only rested and gathered together on the first day of the week⁷, but also actively worked to save lives⁸.

b. The women that came to the tomb.

The women that had travelled with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem were present at his burial. They went home to prepare spices and aroma's for the body of Jesus⁹. They had probably arranged to meet one another at the tomb early on Sunday morning in order to anoint the body of Jesus¹⁰.

Indeed, if we read each Gospel by itself, it seems as if there are contradictions between the accounts of the Gospels. For example, John speaks of one woman, Matthew of two, Mark of three and Luke of more than three women at the tomb. Luke clearly indicates that there were *more than three women in the group of women who went to the tomb*¹¹. Matthew and Mark abbreviate. For example, Matthew only mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. The apostle John probably assumes that his readers are acquainted with the other three Gospels. Therefore he confines his story to Mary Magdalene.

But this does not mean that John states that she was the only person present at that time at the tomb. In verse 2, Mary Magdalene herself says to the apostle Peter, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him!" Mary Magdalene does not say, "I don't know" (singular), but "We don't know" (plural). She herself therefore clearly implies that other women had been with her at the tomb, exactly as the other Gospels record!

c. The time the women came to the tomb.

The women probably lived temporarily at different places in Jerusalem, maybe with family. On Sunday morning they left their homes at different times: John says that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb "while it was still dark" (20:1). Matthew and Luke say that the women went to the tomb "at dawn"¹² and Mark says, "just after sunrise"¹³. Coming from different places in Jerusalem, they started to go to the tomb at different times early in the morning. It is possible that Mary Magdalene was the first to arrive at the tomb (20:1) and also the first to leave and run ahead to tell Peter and John (20:2).

d. The stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb.

Matthew says that Joseph of Arimathea had rolled¹⁴ a big stone (down in its groove) in front of the entrance to the tomb. He had cut the stone out of the rock¹⁵. Mark says that the stone was "very large"¹⁶. The women asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away"¹⁷ so that they could enter the tomb and anoint the body of Jesus¹⁸. Matthew relates that there suddenly was a violent earthquake, that an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, 'rolled away'¹⁹ the stone and sat on it. The Roman guards were so afraid of the angel that they shook and became like dead men²⁰. It is possible that Matthew heard this from the women or the guards themselves.

Mark says that when the women looked up they saw that the very large stone had been 'rolled away' (and would stay in this rolled away state)²¹. John says that Mary Magdalene saw that the stone had been "lifted up and removed away" from the tomb (and would stay in this removed away state)²² (20:1). Thus, the angel had not pushed the very large stone upwards in its groove, but had actually lifted (picked up) the very large stone out of its groove and placed it away from the tomb. The stone was lying flat on the ground and the angel sat on it! The stone would never again have to be rolled back in its groove in order to seal the tomb of Jesus!

⁴ Genesis 2:1-3

⁵ Exodus 23:12

⁶ Leviticus 23:3

⁷ Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10

⁸ Mark 2:27-28; 3:4

⁹ Luke 23:55-56

¹⁰ Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1

¹¹ Luke 24:10

¹² Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1

¹³ Mark 16:2

¹⁴ G: 'proskulió', roll towards

¹⁵ Matthew 27:60

¹⁶ Mark 16:4

¹⁷ G: 'apokulió', roll away, and not 'anakulió', roll upwards within its groove

¹⁸ Mark 16:3-4

¹⁹ G: 'apokulió'

²⁰ Matthew 28:2-4

²¹ G: 'apokulió', perfect tense. Mark 16:4

²² G: airó, perfect tense

The tomb was not opened to let Jesus *out* of the tomb, but to let the women *into* the tomb! Jesus had already been resurrected earlier that Sunday morning, while the stone had still closed the entrance! God wanted the women and the disciples to see that the tomb was empty and that the body of Jesus Christ was no longer in the tomb. Death had already been conquered!

e. The angels at the tomb.

Matthew says that one angel was sitting on the large stone and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ... He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him”²³. Mark mentions that the women entered the tomb and saw one angel dressed in a white robe and sitting on the right side²⁴. Luke mentions that the women saw two angels in clothes that gleamed like lightning and who said to them, “Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again’ ”²⁵. John says that Mary Magdalene later saw two angels seated in the tomb where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” And she said, “They have taken my Lord away and I don’t know where they have put him” (20:1-13).

Therefore it is clear that there was more than just one angel at the tomb, that the angels were at more than one place at the tomb and that they had said different things to the women. The angels probably moved around and said different things at different times to the women.

f. Mary Magdalene reported the empty tomb to Peter and John.

20:2. So she ran (vipa) and came (vipn) to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus constantly loved²⁶ (viaa) and she said (vipa) to him, “They have taken (lifted up and removed) (viaa) the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know (by intuition)²⁷ (vira) where they have laid (put)(viaa) him.”

While the other women were still speaking to the angels, Mary Magdalene ran to Peter and John to tell them the shocking news: the body of Jesus was missing and could have been stolen. She said that she and the other women (“we”) did not know where they (the assumed thieves) had laid his body (20:2).

Then the other women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered²⁸.

(II) 20:3-10. Peter and John at the tomb (Luke 24:12).

20:3. Then Peter came out (viaa) and also the other disciple (John), and they were coming (viin) to the tomb.

20:4. And the two were running (viia) together. But the other disciple was beginning to run ahead (viaa), faster than Peter, and came (viaa) first at the tomb.

20:5. And as he stooped (vpaa), he noticed (vipa) the linen bandages lying (there)(vppn); however²⁹, he did not go in (viaa).

20:6. Then Simon Peter also came (vipn), following (vppa) him, and he went (viaa) into the tomb and stared at (vipa) the linen bandages (while thinking about the meaning of what he saw) lying there (vppn)

20:7. and the burial head-cloth, which had been (viia) around his head, not lying (vppn) with the other bandages, but separately folded up (wrapped up)³⁰ (vprp) in one place.

20:8. So the first disciple, who had arrived (vpaa) first at the tomb, also went in (viaa). He saw (viaa) and believed (viaa).

20:9. for they had not yet³¹ effectively grasped (know by reflection)³² (vila) the Scripture that he must rise (vnaa) from the dead.

20:10. Then the disciples went away (viaa) again to their own (homes).

a. The resurrection of Jesus caused Peter and John to believe.

While the other women were still on their way to report the empty tomb to the other disciples, Peter and John went to the tomb. The soldiers had already departed from the tomb in order to report the missing body to the Jewish authorities³³.

First Peter and John walked and then they ran. John was first at the tomb, bent forward to look into the tomb and saw the linen bandages lying in the hollow part, where the body had lain. But he did not enter the tomb. When Peter arrived, he went into the tomb. He not only ‘saw, but ‘stared’ at the linen bandages lying there *while thinking about the meaning*

²³ Matthew 28:5-7

²⁴ Mark 16:5-6

²⁵ Luke 24:4-8

²⁶ G: phileó

²⁷ G: oida

²⁸ Mark 16:8

²⁹ G: mentoi

³⁰ cf. Luke 23:53)(G: entulissó

³¹ G: oudepó

³² G: oida

³³ Matthew 28:11-15

of what he saw (observed, perceived)³⁴. What he saw caused him to believe once for all that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead! Then John also entered the tomb.

They had gone into the tomb and saw the strips of linen lying there without the body and also the burial head-cloth was folded by itself and separate from the linen bandages. It is not impossible that the strips of linen bandages still formed an empty cocoon as if the body of Jesus had been raised right through the strips of linen! However, the text only says that the bandages were lying there without the body of Jesus Christ. It does not say in which form the bandages were lying there.

Important was the fact that there was no dead body lying there, but only the linen strips that had been wound and bound around the body! Therefore the alleged Jewish enemies could not have stolen his body in order to show it to people as a proof that Jesus had not risen from the dead! Also the disciples could not have removed the body as an alleged proof that Jesus had been risen from the dead, because in both cases the linen bandages would *not* have still been lying there! The disciples had not expected that Jesus would be raised from the dead. And they certainly would not have risked their lives to remove the body of Jesus from a heavily guarded tomb! It was the sudden realisation of the fact that the body of Jesus had been resurrected from the dead that caused Peter and John to believe in Jesus Christ! Jesus was indeed resurrected from the dead and alive!

Therefore the Bible and especially the prophecies in the Old Testament about the Messiah began to take on new meaning for Peter and John. John 20:9 says that “previously they had not understood the Scripture”. Although they had read the Old Testament many times, they did not understand passages such as Psalm 16 and Isaiah 53. Psalm 16:10 says, “You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” And Isaiah 53:11 says, “After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life.” But now Peter and John suddenly realised that these passages in the Old Testament prophesied the resurrection of Jesus Christ! They realised that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a part of God’s eternal plan and therefore a divine ‘must’ – it had to happen³⁵.

In the New Testament Jesus Christ himself had predicted several times that he would be crucified and *on the third day* be resurrected from the dead³⁶! After Pentecost this conviction was even more clear and strong (Acts 2:23-24; 3:15,26; 4:10-11; 5:30-32; 10:39-40; 13:28-31). Later Peter proclaimed that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead released God’s mercy to give believers new birth into a living hope³⁷. And John proclaimed that since the death and resurrection of Jesus, Jesus Christ reigned together with God the Father on his heavenly throne³⁸.

Peter and John left the tomb before Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb again.

b. The resurrection of Jesus involved the human nature of Jesus Christ.

The human nature of Christ. The Gospels describe that Jesus in his resurrected body could not be hindered by strips of linen bound around him many times, or even by a closed rock tomb. Jesus passed through closed gates and doors. And he appeared and disappeared at will. This does not mean that the human nature of Jesus Christ was now in possession of the qualities of the divine nature and that his human nature had become omnipresent. *Jesus has two natures*: a divine nature and a human nature. His two natures are never confused or blended in his state of humiliation on earth or in his state of exaltation in heaven, so that one nature partakes of the qualities of the other nature. His two natures always remain distinct, unconfused and unchangeable, but at the same time indivisible and inseparable! This is how the ancient Christian Church has always confessed the two natures of Jesus Christ.

The Creed of Athanasius (A.D. 293-373). “The Lord Jesus Christ is both God and human equally. He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and he is human from the essence of his mother, born in time, completely God, completely human, with a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity.

Although he is God and human, yet Christ is not two, but one. He is one, however, not by his divinity being turned into flesh, but by God taking humanity to himself. He is one, certainly not by blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person. For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human.”

The resurrected body of Jesus. Furthermore, it was not *the human spirit* of Jesus that had arisen from the grave (as liberals teach), but it was *the human body* of Jesus that was resurrected! The body of Jesus was not *a phantom* (as the followers of Docetism teach), but a real body! Jesus proved that he had a real body by urging his disciples to touch him³⁹ and by eating food in their presence⁴⁰. The resurrected body of Jesus was not *a completely different body*, but it was *his own lowly body* that had been completely transformed⁴¹.

³⁴ G: theóreo

³⁵ Luke 24:25-26,44

³⁶ Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34

³⁷ 1 Peter 1:3

³⁸ Revelation 5:5-6,13

³⁹ Luke 24:39; 1 John 1:1

⁴⁰ Luke 24:40-43

⁴¹ Philippians 3:21

The apostle Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44,53-54 that the resurrected body of Christ and that of Christians in the future is *imperishable* (incorruptible), that is, it will never grow old, sick or weak and it will never again die. It is *glorious*, that is, it shares in the divine characteristics like love, holiness, righteousness, power and wisdom of God. It is *immortal*, that is, it exists forever in a perfect life, in everlasting blessedness and in the presence of God! Finally it is *spiritual*, that is, it is renewed and governed by the Holy Spirit.

We believers are looking forward to the resurrection of our present bodies! Then our lowly (weak, decaying and mortal) bodies will also be transformed and become like the glorious resurrected body of Jesus Christ!

(III) 20:11-18. The 1st appearance to Mary Magdalene.

20:11. But Mary (Magdalene) was standing (vila) outside the tomb weeping (vppa). Then as she was weeping (viia), she stooped (viaa) (to look) into the tomb

20:12. and she observed (vipa) two angels in white garments sitting (vppn), one at the head and one at the feet, where⁴² the body of Jesus had been lying (viin).

20:13. And they said (vipa) to her, “Woman, why are you weeping (vipa)?” And she said (vipa) to them, “They have removed (picked up and carried away)⁴³ (viaa) my Lord and I do not know (by reflection)⁴⁴ (vira) where they have put (viaa) him.”

20:14. On saying (vpaa) these things, she turned around (viap) and observed⁴⁵ Jesus standing (there) (vpaa), and she did not know (by reflection)⁴⁶ (vila) that it was (vipa) Jesus.

20:15. Jesus said (vipa) to her, “Woman, why are you weeping (vipa)? Who are you looking for (vipa)? Thinking (vppa) that he was (vipa) the gardener⁴⁷, she said (vipa) to him, “Sir, if you have carried (viaa) him away, tell me (vmaa) where you have put (viaa) him and I will remove⁴⁸ (vifa) him.”

20:16. Jesus said (vipa) to her, “Miriam” (Hebrew for ‘Mary’). She turned around (vpap) and said (vipa) to him in Hebrew, “Rabboni” (which means ‘Teacher’).

20:17. Jesus said (vipa) to her, “Do not keep clinging to⁴⁹ (vmpm) me, because I have not yet⁵⁰ ascended (vira) to the Father. Go (vmpn) to my brothers and tell (vmaa) them, “I am (at the point of) ascending (vipa) to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.”

20:18. Miriam Magdalene went (vipn) and announced (vppa) to the disciples, “I have effectively seen (vira) the Lord” and he said (viaa) these things to her.

a. Mary Magdalene saw two angels (20:11-12).

Mary Magdalene was much slower than Peter and John and only arrived at the tomb when they had already left the tomb again.

She stood outside the tomb and wept without stopping. Weeping she bent over to look into the tomb. She saw two angels sitting, one where the head and one where the feet of Jesus had been lying. The angels probably looked like young men⁵¹. Their bright white clothes symbolised their holiness and the triumph of the light of life over the darkness of death and the triumph of the grace of God over human sin⁵². We do not know why the angels appeared to the women, but not to the disciples Peter and John. The Bible says that angels are very interested in the suffering of Christ and in his glory thereafter⁵³.

b. Mary Magdalene also did not expect the resurrection (20:13).

The words of the angels to Mary Magdalene, “Why are you weeping?” intended the same as their words to the other women, namely, that the event they were witnessing was not intended to cause sorrow, but instead great joy⁵⁴! Mary thought that someone had removed the body of Jesus to another place. She wanted to know where his body was, because she had come to anoint his body with spices. The angels did not ask her, “What do you seek?”, but “Who do you seek?” Her answer shows that she had come to seek the dead body of Jesus, not the resurrected and living Lord Jesus Christ! *She was seeking ‘something’, not ‘Someone’!* Like the disciples, also Mary Magdalene did not expect the resurrection from the dead.

⁴² G: hopou

⁴³ G: airó

⁴⁴ G: oida

⁴⁵ G: theóreo

⁴⁶ G: oida

⁴⁷ G: kúpouros

⁴⁸ G: airó

⁴⁹ G: haptomai

⁵⁰ G: oupó

⁵¹ cf. Mark 16:5

⁵² cf. James 2:13

⁵³ 1 Peter 1:10-12

⁵⁴ cf. Matthew 28:5-6; Luke 24:5-8

c. Mary Magdalene recognised the resurrected Jesus Christ (20:14-16).

When she turned around, she saw a man standing there and she thought that he was the gardener who might have removed the body. She did not recognise Jesus! There may be several reasons why Mary Magdalene did not recognise Jesus. She did not expect to see Jesus alive. Jesus could have appeared to her in another form⁵⁵. And she expected a gardener in the garden. She asked him where he had laid Jesus so that she could anoint his dead body. She again turned her face to the tomb, but when he mentioned her name, “Miriam”, she recognised his voice and replied, “My Teacher!” This Aramaic title is only given to very famous rabbi’s like Gamaliel and was also used as a reference to God⁵⁶.

d. Mary Magdalene cannot continue to relate to Jesus as before (20:17a).

Before the death of Jesus, Mary Magdalene had experienced for a long time the daily visible association of Jesus with his disciples and the sweet fellowship with him. She now assumed that this former mode of fellowship was going to be resumed. So she clung to his feet as an expression of worship, just as the other women did a little later⁵⁷. Jesus did not object to her touching him, because he later invited Thomas to touch him (20:27).

But Jesus said to her that she must not and cannot continually hold on to him (cling to him) as if to prevent him from ever leaving again. Jesus made it clear that the period of his day-to-day visible association with his disciples was over. He would appear, now to this one, then to that one. That is why he said to her that she must not think that by holding him back she could always keep him with her. He was about to ascend to his Father in heaven. Then the former day-to-day relationship between Jesus and his followers on earth would not be continued in the same way. Instead of relating to Jesus in his physical body in one place on earth, they would relate to him through the Holy Spirit in every place on earth⁵⁸! Through the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus) believers would be able to have uninterrupted fellowship with Jesus (14:16-18; 16:13-15)! This fellowship would be far richer and more blessed, because it would be the fellowship of the glorious risen Lord in heaven with his Church on earth!

e. Mary Magdalene became the first witness of the resurrection and the ascension (20:17b).

In John 20:17b, Jesus himself said to Mary Magdalene, “Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’.” Mary Magdalene had to tell the disciples, not only about his resurrection from the dead, but also about his imminent ascension into heaven and therefore his new relationship to them! Mary Magdalene was the first witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the first to announce his ascension.

f. The relationship between Jesus Christ and his disciples was going to change (20:17b).

On the one hand, Jesus emphasised *the distinction* between himself and his disciples. When Jesus said, “My Father and their Father” and “My God and their God” he clearly distinguished these two relationships: Jesus is the Son of God *in his essence and divine nature* (1:1,18; 10:30-33), while believers are only God’s sons and daughters *by adoption* (1:12-13)⁵⁹. The followers of Jesus have been chosen and predestined from eternity to be God’s ‘sons and daughters’⁶⁰. They are adopted in history in time⁶¹ and share in the same future inheritance as Jesus Christ⁶².

On the other hand John emphasised *the sameness* of the relationship. Jesus had first called his disciples ‘servants’ (13:13-19), then ‘friends’ (15:13-15), but now with the new name ‘brothers’⁶³. This means that the relationship between the disciples and Jesus would be a fellowship in the Spirit⁶⁴, that the disciples would belong to the same family⁶⁵ and that they would inherit the same eternal inheritance⁶⁶. In a spiritual sense, God is the Father of only those people who have received God the Son by a living faith (8:41-44). But Jesus emphasises that believers will have the same personal and trustful relationship with God the Father as Jesus himself has. They are brothers and sisters of each other and the unique characteristic between them is love. In a spiritual sense, the God who is the Father of Jesus is also the God who is the Father of the disciples! It is to this God and Father that Jesus is ascending.

g. Mary Magdalene reported the resurrection to the disciples (20:18).

Mark reports that after his resurrection, Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had earlier driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping that Jesus was

⁵⁵ cf. Mark 9:2-3; 16:12

⁵⁶ cf. Acts 5:34; 22:3

⁵⁷ Matthew 28:9

⁵⁸ cf. Romans 8:9-10; 2 Corinthians 3:16-18; John 16:28,19,13-15

⁵⁹ Ephesians 1:4-5

⁶⁰ Ephesians 1:4-5

⁶¹ Galatians 4:1-7

⁶² Romans 8:17

⁶³ cf. Psalm 22:22; Hebrews 2:11-12

⁶⁴ Romans 8:9,10,14

⁶⁵ Romans 8:29

⁶⁶ Romans 8:17

alive and that she had seen him⁶⁷. She said, “I have seen the Lord!” (and what I have seen remains constantly before my eyes) (perfect tense) (20:18)⁶⁸. But the disciples did not believe her!

⁶⁷ Mark 16:9-11

⁶⁸ 1 John 1:1

(IV) The 2nd appearance to the other women (Matthew 28:8-10).

The women reported the resurrection of Jesus. While Mary Magdalene was on her way to tell the apostles that she had seen the resurrected Jesus, Jesus met the other frightened and fleeing women⁶⁹, who were on their way to tell his disciples about the empty tomb. Jesus greeted them. And just like Mary Magdalene did, they too were filled with joy and clasped his feet and worshipped him (20:17)⁷⁰. Then Jesus repeated and confirmed what the angels had said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me”⁷¹. Thus, women were the first to witness the resurrection of Jesus!

The disciples besides Peter and John responded with scepticism. While John related how Peter and John had immediately run to the tomb to investigate the report of Mary Magdalene, Luke summarised his account of the appearances by saying that the women reported these things to the apostles (who were probably living at different places in Jerusalem), but that they (the apostles) did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense⁷².

Jesus would go ahead of his disciples to Galilee. In Matthew 28:7, the angel said to the women that they should go quickly and tell his disciples, “He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.” And in Matthew 28:16-20 we read how Jesus indeed appeared to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Although the angel said that Jesus was going ahead of his disciples into Galilee, we know that the first appearances of Jesus to his disciples were not in Galilee, but were all in Jerusalem and its vicinity. This is not a contradiction, because Jesus did later meet his disciples in Galilee and there is no evidence that Jesus did not reach Galilee before his disciples. Jesus simply *did much more* than he had revealed to them through his angel! He met them in Jerusalem *and* in Galilee!

(V) The guards bribed to spread a false rumour among the Jews (Matthew 28:11-15).

a. The lies of the Jewish religious leaders in order to explain the empty tomb.

While these women were on their way to report to the disciples that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them (A.D. 30), some of the guards went to Jerusalem to report to the chief priests what had happened. The religious leaders of the Jews therefore knew from their report that an angel of the Lord had rolled the large stone away from the tomb and that there was no body in the tomb – it was empty.

The chief priests and elders (the Sanhedrin) held a hasty gathered meeting and decided *to bribe the guards with a large sum of money to spread a false rumour among the people*. The soldiers had to say to people that during the night, while they (the guards) were sleeping, the disciples of Jesus came and stole the body of Jesus! If this report reaches the ears of the prefect, Pontius Pilate, the Jewish Sanhedrin would satisfy him (probably with another large bribe) and keep the guards out of trouble. The soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. This false story has been widely circulated among the Jews even to the day Matthew wrote his Gospel (about A.D. 61).

b. Why the false report of the guards was never believed.

This false story was very unlikely for the following reasons:

- First. The disciples of Jesus did not expect that Jesus would be resurrected from the dead and therefore made no preparations at all.
- Second. The disciples would not risk their lives to steal the body of Jesus out of -a heavily guarded tomb that was closed by a very large stone and sealed with the governor’s seal.
- Third. It is unthinkable that every one of the detachment of Roman soldiers would dare to sleep when they had been given the command to guard the tomb! They would be very heavily punished.
- Fourth. Four strong men were usually needed to roll the large stone away from the entrance to the tomb, because the large round stone had to be rolled upwards in its groove, making it extremely difficult to open the tomb. The soldiers would not have missed such an action.
- Fifth. Thousands of Jews never believed this false report for the following reasons:
 - It was a known fact that the Jewish religious leaders had bribed the soldiers with a very large sum of money!
 - The Jewish and Roman authorities have never been able to show the dead body of Jesus to anyone as a proof that Jesus had not been resurrected!
 - The resurrected Lord Jesus Christ appeared to many believers: women, men and at one time to more than five hundred brothers at the same time! Many of these eye-witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus were still alive when Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians (A.D. 55)⁷³.
 - Thousands and thousands of Jews besides uncountable Gentiles believed in the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ⁷⁴.

⁶⁹ Mark 16:8

⁷⁰ Matthew 28:9

⁷¹ Matthew 28:7,10

⁷² Matthew 28:8; Luke 24:9-11

⁷³ 1 Corinthians 15:6

⁷⁴ Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 21:20

**(VI) The 3rd appearance
to Peter (Luke 24:33-35; 1 Corinthians 15:5).**

After the resurrected Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other women, he appeared to Peter on that same Sunday.

**(VII) The 4th appearance
to two disciples (Luke 24:13-35; Mark 16:12-13).**

Late in the afternoon on the Sunday Jesus was resurrected⁷⁵, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ appeared to two followers of Jesus⁷⁶, who were probably not part of the eleven disciples of Jesus. They were on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were talking to one another about these events: the crucifixion and the empty tomb⁷⁷. Jesus joined them and talked with them, but they did not recognise him, probably for the same reasons Mary Magdalene did not immediately recognise him (20:15). Jesus explained to them what was written about him in the Old Testament⁷⁸. Only when Jesus opened their eyes, did they recognise him. But Jesus disappeared from their sight⁷⁹. These two disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem and reported that the resurrected Jesus had appeared to them⁸⁰.

**(VIII) 20:19-23 The 5th appearance
to the disciples without Thomas (Luke 24:36-48).**

20:19. Now when it was (vppa) evening on that day, the first of the week⁸¹, and out of fear for the Jews the doors (the place) were locked (vprp) where the disciples were (viia), Jesus came (viaa) and stood (viaa) in their midst and said (vipa) to them, "Peace (be) with you!

20:20. and on saying (vpaa) this he showed (his) hands and side to them. The disciples therefore rejoiced (viao) at seeing (vpaa) the Lord.

a. Jesus appears to his disciples on the Sunday he was resurrected (20:19a).

John emphasises the fact that the first time Jesus appeared to his disciples (without Thomas) as a group was the same day he was resurrected. He says "On the evening of that first day of the week"!

The New Testament clearly teaches the significance and importance of the first day of the week (the Sunday). Jesus was resurrected on a Sunday (20:1)⁸². The resurrected Jesus appeared to the first people on that very same Sunday (20:19,26). He poured out the Holy Spirit on a Sunday⁸³. The first congregation was founded on that Sunday. Christians gathered together to break bread (to celebrate the Lord's Supper) on a Sunday⁸⁴. Christians set aside their gifts for the work in God's Kingdom on a Sunday⁸⁵. Jesus gave his first revelation in the book of Revelation to John on a Sunday⁸⁶.

In the light of Luke 24:29,33,36 Jesus appeared to his disciples later in the evening of that day, which according to Jewish calculation was no longer the first day of the week, but the second day of the week. But John wrote his Gospel to non-Jews who mainly lived in Asia Minor (Turkey) between A.D. 70 and 97. At that time Jerusalem and the Jewish temple had already been destroyed by the Romans (A.D. 70). John calculated the days according to the Roman way from midnight to midnight, as most people do today (cf. 1:39; 4:6,52; 19:14). Thus, according to John, Jesus appeared to his disciples without Thomas on the Sunday he was resurrected.

b. The disciples met behind locked doors (20:19b).

The disciples were still a scared group of people. They especially feared the Jewish religious leaders (the Sanhedrin) (cf. 7:13; 9:22; 14:27; 19:38). So they met behind locked doors. The Jewish religious leaders had condemned Jesus to death and had organised his execution. The disciples of Jesus would be the next group they would like to destroy⁸⁷. We do not know the place where the disciples gathered. It could have been the house of the mother of John Mark⁸⁸. The reason they gathered was the testimonies of Mary Madalene, of the other women, of Peter and of Cleopas and his companion on their way to Emmaus. They had all seen Jesus and had spoken with him on that first day of the week!

c. Jesus appeared to his disciples with his resurrected body (20:19b-20).

⁷⁵ Luke 24:29

⁷⁶ Luke 24:18,33

⁷⁷ Luke 24:22-24

⁷⁸ Luke 24:26-27

⁷⁹ Luke 24:31-32

⁸⁰ Luke 24:33-35

⁸¹ G: sabbaton

⁸² Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1

⁸³ Leviticus 23:16

⁸⁴ Acts 20:7

⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 16:2

⁸⁶ Revelation 1:10

⁸⁷ cf. Acts 4:1-21; 5:17-42; 6:9,12-14; 7:54-60; 8:1-3

⁸⁸ Acts 12:12

The two natures of Jesus Christ. The disciples of Jesus were glad to see Jesus. He had not entered the meeting place before the disciples and he also had not entered together with Cleopas and the other disciple (the argument of liberals). His human nature had also not partaken of the characteristics of his divine nature (the God-Man) so that he now had become omni-present (the argument of some who oppose liberals).

At the fourth ecumenical council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) both the doctrine of Eutychus and of Nestorius were rejected. Eutychus taught that Jesus Christ had only one nature after his incarnation. And Nestorius taught that the two natures of Jesus Christ were so separate from one another that the unity of his Person threatened to disappear. Christians believe that after the birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he existed with two natures in one Person. He is God and he is Man in one Person. He is God who had also taken the human nature in such a way that his divine nature and his human nature remain unmixed and unchanged, undivided and inseparable from one another.

When the disciples were together behind locked doors, Jesus came and stood in their midst. If his human nature had been omnipresent, there would have been no need to come to his disciples in a specific place. Jesus still possessed one human body. He was not a ghost, phantom or appearance in a vision. At his resurrection Jesus had not only passed through the linen bandages that had been wound and bound around his body, but also through the closed rock tomb. And now at his appearance he had passed through the locked door. His resurrected body was no longer subject to the laws of the three dimensional creation. The Bible teaches that the resurrected body of Jesus and that of Christians in the future have different characteristics than the present weak and mortal bodies of Christians today⁸⁹.

Jesus proved that he had a genuine human nature. The disciples were startled and frightened, thinking that they were seeing a ghost⁹⁰. Then Jesus showed them his hands and his side. The marks of the nails and the spear were still in his hands and in his side. The Person standing in their midst was really Jesus and no-one else. Only Jesus had these marks!

Jesus was not a ghost or an appearance of a spirit⁹¹. He did not have an imaginary body as Docetism taught. He had a real body of flesh and bones that you could see and touch⁹². Luke relates that he asked the disciples whether they had something to eat and that he had eaten a piece of broiled fish in their presence⁹³. This also proves that Jesus has a real body.

Jesus was not only 'the human spirit of Christ'⁹⁴ that had risen from the grave (as liberals teach). He really had a body⁹⁵. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from death was a real resurrection of his physical body! This event guarantees that also the mortal physical bodies of believers will really be resurrected at the second coming of Jesus Christ (5:28-29)⁹⁶!

d. Jesus gave the great commission to his disciples (20:21).

The great commission in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16:14-18). Mark 16:9-20 was not an original part of the Gospel of Mark, because the oldest and most reliable manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark in the Greek, Latin and Syriac languages do not have this section. Therefore the contents of Mark 16:9-20 do not belong to the original Gospel. Mark did not intend to end his Gospel with 16:8. It ends abruptly, but no one knows why.

Mark 16:9-20 is a summary of the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection during the forty days before his ascension. It is a summary from the Gospel of Marc, the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. This summary was probably added in the second century A.D. after the Canon of the New Testament had been closed. The dates off these Scriptures are: Marc 1:1 to 16:8 (A.D. 44-46), Acts (A.D. 61), Luke (A.D. 60-61) and Matthew (A.D. 63-66).

- Mark 16:9-11 is a summary of John 20:11-18 – his appearance to Mary Magdalene. Although Mary Magdalene is mentioned in Mark 15:47 she is introduced in Mark 16:9 as if she had not been mentioned at all!
- Mark 16:12-13 is a summary of Luke 24:13-35 – his appearance to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus.
- Mark 16:14-18 is a summary of Luke 24:36-48 – his appearance to ten (disciples, apostles) in the evening of the Sunday he was resurrected, when Thomas was not with them. The group of ten disciples was nevertheless called 'the Eleven' in Mark 16:14 following Luke 24:33 (cf. Matthew 28:16). The Gospel of John even speaks of them as 'the Twelve' in John 20:24.
- Marc 16:19-20 is a summary of Acts 1:9-11 – his ascension and his continued work through the apostles.

Mark 16:9-20 is only binding for the faith and practice of Christians to the extent in which its content is supported by the Bible in general. Because the picking up of poisonous snakes and the drinking of deadly poison (16:18ab) are not

⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; Philippians 3:21

⁹⁰ Luke 24:36-38

⁹¹ Luke 24:37

⁹² Luke 24:39-40

⁹³ Luke 24:41-43

⁹⁴ cf. Luke 23:46

⁹⁵ Philippians 3:21

⁹⁶ Acts 24:15; 1 Corinthians 15:12-57

supported by any other passage in the Bible, they should not be considered as ‘Scripture’⁹⁷, but rather as apocryphal material. It is of doubtful authenticity and invented by someone to resemble the words and works of Scripture.

The other signs, mentioned in Mark 16:17-20, are especially the signs of the authority given to the Eleven apostles⁹⁸.

The great commission in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 24:44-48). Jesus granted peace. Jesus not only gave them a greeting of peace, but gave them that peace (cf. 14:27; 16:33). Initially the disciples were troubled and had doubts in their minds⁹⁹. But after he had showed them his hands and his side they rejoiced (20:20), because they recognised in Jesus their resurrected and glorified Lord (cf. 20:18).

Jesus explained the Old Testament. He repeated the words he had spoken before¹⁰⁰, namely, that everything that the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms had written about him *must* go into fulfilment¹⁰¹. Before his death and resurrection the disciples had not understood what Jesus had meant¹⁰², but now after his resurrection Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures¹⁰³! The prophets in the Old Testament had clearly prophesied and it is written in the Scriptures that the Messiah (Christ) would suffer¹⁰⁴ and rise from the dead¹⁰⁵. Jesus himself had prophesied several times that he would be crucified and resurrected on the third day¹⁰⁶!

Repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3; Acts 1:8). The disciples of Jesus are to be witnesses of these things (Luke 24:48; cf. John 15:26-27).

People can only understand the Bible when they are born again. Jesus had taught that people who are not born again (born from above) by the Holy Spirit, *can never see or understand the Kingdom of God* (3:3). And the apostle Paul taught that people who read the Bible without being born again *cannot understand the Bible*. Their minds remain dull and a veil covers their hearts. The veil over their spiritual eyes is only taken away when they turn in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ¹⁰⁷!

The great commission in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 28:18-10). “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” Already the Old Testament in Daniel 7:13-14 prophesies the authority of Jesus Christ “*In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*” Before his death and resurrection, Jesus did not exercise his unlimited sovereign power, because he had deliberately and willingly ‘emptied himself’ (that is, he renounced his being equal to God)¹⁰⁸. But after his death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement in heaven, he *began to exercise his unlimited authority* in heaven and on earth! He performed miracles through his apostles and made them bold and courageous to proclaim the gospel everywhere. Through the proclamation of the gospel by Christians, he ‘robs’ an uncountable number of people from the dominion of Satan and brings them into his own Kingdom¹⁰⁹. No-one and nothing can or will stop him until all knees bend before him and all tongues confess that he truly is the Lord¹¹⁰. Jesus received this unlimited authority as a reward for his completed work of salvation¹¹¹. From his first coming onwards, Jesus has overcome the world and the world remains in the state of being overcome¹¹². In the vision of John, Jesus Christ wears the victory wreath and rode out as conqueror bent on conquering¹¹³. The apostles and those that follow them must demand that everyone in every sphere of life acknowledge that Jesus Christ is “King of kings and Lord of lords”¹¹⁴.

The great authority of Jesus makes the great commission possible! The disciples must make disciples of all nations, baptise them and teach them to obey everything Jesus had commanded. A ‘disciple’ is a mature, functioning and persevering believer in Jesus Christ’.

⁹⁷ 2 Timothy 3:16

⁹⁸ Matthew 10:1,8; Luke 10:18-20; John 14:12; 2 Corinthians 12:12; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:9-10

⁹⁹ Luke 24:38

¹⁰⁰ Luke 18:31-33

¹⁰¹ Luke 24:44

¹⁰² Luke 18:34

¹⁰³ Luke 24:45

¹⁰⁴ Isaiah 53:5

¹⁰⁵ Psalm 16:10

¹⁰⁶ Mark 8: 31; 9:31; 10:32-34)(Luke 24:4

¹⁰⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:14-17

¹⁰⁸ Philippians 2:6-8

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 12:29-30; Luke 10:17-19; John 12:31-32; Colossians 1:13; Revelation 12:10-12; Revelation 20:3

¹¹⁰ Philippians 2:9-11; cf. Isaiah 45:23

¹¹¹ Ephesians 1:19-23; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 5:5

¹¹² Greek: νενικηκα (perfect tense). John 16:33

¹¹³ Revelation 6:2

¹¹⁴ Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:16

The great commission in the Gospel of John (John 20:21).

20:21. Then he (Jesus) said (viaa) to them again, “Peace to you! Just as the Father has effectively sent (commissioned) (vira) me, so I am sending (vipa) you”

Once again Jesus blessed them with his peace. In the light of their initial fear and doubts they needed his peace, that is, his restoration and wholeness and his joy and trust.

The word ‘send’ means to send as an apostle. Jesus had already mentioned the great commission in his high priestly prayer for his disciples (the eleven apostles) (cf. 17:18). At that time he spoke to his heavenly Father.

Now he spoke directly to his disciples. In the first place Jesus gave the great commission to his eleven disciples¹¹⁵. They became the apostles of Jesus Christ.

The apostles of Jesus Christ had been with Jesus Christ from the beginning. They had been personally chosen, called, equipped and sent out by Jesus Christ¹¹⁶. They had witnessed his life, death and resurrection¹¹⁷. They were appointed to be his official witnesses to the three kinds of people groups: the Jews (of the former southern kingdom of Judah), the Samaritans (of the former northern kingdom of Israel) who were half-Jews and to the Gentiles who were non-Jews¹¹⁸. They had to go into the entire world and preach the good news to all the creation¹¹⁹. They had to go and make people in all the people groups in the world disciples of Jesus Christ by especially their personal unity to Jesus Christ and their obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ¹²⁰. It is upon them Jesus Christ built his Church¹²¹. It is to them that he gave the keys or authority to include or exclude people from the kingdom of God¹²². But the apostles of Jesus Christ have no successors, because no one would qualify¹²³.

Note that there were also others present when Jesus gave the great commission¹²⁴. Once the Christian Church had been established by the apostles of Jesus Christ, the great commission belongs to the Christian Church as a whole. Now all local congregations with their elders and members work together in this task! Disciples make new disciples and congregations establish new congregations. Thus in the second place Jesus Christ gave the great commission to all Christians¹²⁵. Notice the similarity between the mission of the Son of God and the mission of the apostles: they had the same message to proclaim to the same people and they had similar authority.

e. Jesus gave authority to his disciples (20:22-23).

20:22. And on saying (vpaa) this, he blew¹²⁶ (viaa) and said (vipa) to them, “Receive (vmaa) the Holy Spirit.”

20:23. If you forgive (send away)¹²⁷ (vsaa) the sins of any, (these) remain forgiven (sent away)(virp) to them. If you retain (vspa)(the sins) of any (these) remain retained (virp).

The reception of the Holy Spirit was to empower the apostles for their task. Just as Jesus Christ had received the Holy Spirit in unrestricted fullness for the discharge of his own specific mission (1:32-34; 3:34), so the disciples of Jesus now received the Holy Spirit for the discharge of their specific mission. John is not anticipating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit seven weeks later on the Day of Pentecost, which was more public and resulted in the birth of the Spirit-indwelt community, the Church of the New Testament period. He is speaking of a real impartation of the Holy Spirit to the apostles in order to give them *the power and authority* they needed to fulfil their mission. Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit to them by breathing on them. This is the same verb which is used when God breathed the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils¹²⁸. But now Jesus is not imparting life to them, but he is empowering them for their special ministry.

The transference of authority. The action of ‘blowing’ has symbolic meaning (cf. 3:8). It symbolises a specific gift of the Holy Spirit, namely, to speak with authority whether someone’s sin is forgiven or not. This authority of the apostles of Jesus Christ has also been promised in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, namely, to include someone into the Kingdom of God or to exclude him. In all three the above Bible passages, this authority is given to the apostles of Jesus Christ.

The nature of this authority. The great commission and the authority entrusted to the apostles cannot be exercised independent from God. They are indissolubly connected to the presence and reign of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (the Holy Spirit). The apostles have no authority apart from the Holy Spirit. They may not act apart from the Holy Spirit. The

¹¹⁵ cf. Matthew 28:19; Mark 3:14; Luke 24:47-49

¹¹⁶ Mark 3:13-15

¹¹⁷ Acts 1:21-22

¹¹⁸ Acts 1:8

¹¹⁹ Mark 16:15

¹²⁰ Matthew 28:18-20

¹²¹ Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14

¹²² Matthew 16:18-19; 18:18-19

¹²³ Acts 1:21-22

¹²⁴ Luke 24:33

¹²⁵ cf. Matthew 10:32; 28:19

¹²⁶ G: emphusa ó

¹²⁷ G: aphhiémi

¹²⁸ Genesis 2:7

Holy Spirit always speaks in complete agreement with the Word of God (the Bible) (14:26; 16:13-15; cf. 14:6; 17:18)¹²⁹ and acts

in complete agreement with love. Arbitrary pronouncements about the forgiveness of sins, arbitrary exclusion out of the Christian Community (excommunication), arbitrary punishments and curses have no legal power with God in heaven.

On the one hand, the authority of the apostles “to forgive or not to forgive sins” is connected to their task of preaching the gospel and making disciples in the whole world. Without genuine repentance and faith on the part of the believer, there is no forgiveness¹³⁰.

On the other hand, this authority is connected to the sovereign work of God. The passive verbs “their sins are forgiven” or “their sins are not forgiven” show that forgiveness is the work of the sovereign God. The apostles are not given a task and authority independent of God. The apostles are also not given the assurance of infallibility¹³¹.

The task of the apostles of Jesus Christ is to proclaim and to teach, but the prerogative to effectively forgive the sins of people or to retain the sins of people belongs only to God! Later, the apostle Paul correctly says, “The Lord assigned to each his task. I planted the seed. Apollos watered it, but *God made it grow*”¹³²!

The exercise of authority. The Bible describes how this authority of the Spirit of Christ was exercised. In Luke 9:51-56 the disciples James and John exercised authority without the Spirit of Christ by proposing to send fire from heaven on the Samaritan village that refused to receive Jesus and his disciples. Instead Jesus rebuked the disciples.

In Matthew 16:18-19 and 18:19 Jesus gave authority to his apostles to use the keys of the Kingdom when he was building his Church on the foundation of the apostles. With this divine authority the apostles of Christ included the believers from among the Jews¹³³, the Samaritans¹³⁴ and the non-Jews or Gentiles¹³⁵ into the Kingdom. With this divine authority they also excluded liars as Ananias and Sapphira¹³⁶ and the Jewish sorcerer and false prophet Bar-Jesus¹³⁷ out of the Church.

In Galatians 2:11-16 the apostle Paul rebuked the apostle Peter with this divine authority, because he fell back into his old life-style that consisted of keeping the Jewish cultural habits, as not eating together with the non-Jews.

In Acts 13:44-52 the apostle Paul and his co-workers with divine authority left their mission among a particular cultural group of people (in this case, the Jews)¹³⁸ out of protest against their rejection of the gospel and directed their efforts with divine authority to another cultural group of people (in this case, the Gentiles), who responded with joy to the gospel message.

In Acts chapter 15 the apostles together with the elders of the congregation at Jerusalem decided with divine authority of the Holy Spirit that the ceremonial law of the Old Testament (for example: circumcision) was no longer applicable in the New Testament period¹³⁹.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 the apostle Paul gives instructions (commands) with divine authority how Christians must behave especially in the area of sexual morality.

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 Paul pronounced a judgement with divine authority over a brother who lived in serious sexual sin. This person was delivered into the power¹⁴⁰ or evil influence of Satan, in order that his sinful nature and habits may be destroyed and his spirit may be saved at the final judgement. From 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 it becomes evident that this brother repented and turned away from his sexual immorality and was forgiven, comforted and once more affirmed by the love of the congregation.

In Acts 20:17-35; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-21; Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-5 the apostles Paul and Peter gave instructions with divine authority how the flock of God (the Church) must be led. They gave clear biblical instructions with regard to the requirements, tasks and organisation of the elders.

In 1 Timothy 3:14-15 the apostle Paul gave instructions (commands) with divine authority how every congregation must be led, namely, by a council of elders¹⁴¹ and how the elders must behave in their official ministry (shepherding, overseeing, directing, managing, teaching, preaching, discipline and serving).

¹²⁹ Ephesians 6:17

¹³⁰ Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19-20

¹³¹ Galatians 2:11

¹³² 1 Corinthians 3:5-6

¹³³ Acts 2

¹³⁴ Acts 8

¹³⁵ Acts 10 and 11

¹³⁶ Acts 5

¹³⁷ Acts 13

¹³⁸ cf. Matthew 10:14

¹³⁹ cf. Galatians 5:3-4; 6:12-16; Romans 2:28-29; 4:9-14

¹⁴⁰ cf. Romans 1:24,26,28

¹⁴¹ 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:17-21

In 2 John 7-11 and 3 John 9-11 the apostle John gave commands with divine authority how Christians (members of the congregation) must act with regard to false teachers that infiltrate into their congregation and with regard to an authoritarian leader in the congregation.

(IX) 20:24-29. The 6th appearance to the disciples with Thomas.

20:24. But Thomas, one of the Twelve, called (vppp) Didimus (meaning Twin), was (viiia) not with them when Jesus came (viiia).

20:25. So the other disciples were saying (viiia) to him, “We have seen (vira) the Lord!” But he said (viiia) to them, “If I do not see (vsaa) in his hands the mark of the nails and put (vsaa) my finger in the place of the nails, and put (vsaa) my hands into his side, I will definitely not (double negative) believe (vsaa).

20:26. And eight days later his disciples were (viiia) again inside (the house) and Thomas with them. Jesus came (vipn) though the doors had been thoroughly locked (vprp). And he stood (viiia) in their midst and said (viiia), “Peace to you!”

20:27. Then he said (vipa) to Thomas, “Bring (reach out) (vmpa) your finger here and see (vmaa) my hands. And bring (vmpa) your hand and put (vmaa) (it) in my side. And do not become (vmpn) unbelieving, but believing.

20:28. Thomas answered (viao) and said (viiia) to him, “My Lord and my God!”

20:29. Jesus said (vipa) to him, “Because you have seen (vira) me, you have believed (vira). Blessed (are) they who, though not seeing (vpaa), are yet believing (vpaa).”

a. Unbelief (20:24-25).

The first time Jesus appeared to his disciples as a group on the Sunday he was resurrected, Thomas was not with them. The group consisted of ten, but was nevertheless called ‘the Eleven’ in Luke 24:33 or ‘the Twelve’ in John 20:24. The disciples had told Thomas what had happened, but Thomas said he would not believe that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead unless he saw with his eyes the holes in his hands and had put his hand in his side. He did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, and must have felt terrible¹⁴². Thomas demanded empirical proof as if the empirical reality was the only reality.

b. Belief by seeing the resurrected Jesus (20:26-28).

The expression ‘after eight days’ included the Sunday of his first appearance to the disciples as a group and the Sunday of the second appearance to the disciples as a group (cf. 12:1). This time Thomas was present. They probably met at the same place and at the same time, namely, in the evening. The doors remained locked. Suddenly Jesus appeared in their midst, greeted them and directed his attention to Thomas. He invited Thomas to test the conditions he set for himself: to see the marks in his hands, to stick his fingers in the holes in his hands and his hand in his side in order to let go of his doubts and to believe.

Jesus’ love for Thomas had not diminished. He helped Thomas to believe again and never to doubt anymore. Thomas probably did what Jesus said. He and probably also the other disciples saw the marks of Jesus and touched him¹⁴³. They became completely convinced that Jesus Christ was not a mere appearance, ghost or vision, but that he really possessed a physical body of flesh and bones¹⁴⁴. The fact that Jesus Christ had entered right through the locked doors convinced them that the resurrected and glorified body of Jesus Christ was no longer bound to the empirical laws of this earth. Jesus possessed an immortal, glorified and spiritual body that was completely governed by the Holy Spirit¹⁴⁵.

Jesus had also revealed himself as the Omniscient, because he knew exactly what Thomas had thought and said. Thomas rejected his own unbelief and submitted himself to Jesus Christ with the words, “My Lord and my God.” He acknowledged Jesus Christ as his Sovereign Lord and God, who is omniscient and almighty and could be omni-present.

c. Belief by hearing the Word of God (20:29).

The confession of faith of Thomas was genuine. Thomas became a believer by seeing the resurrected Jesus Christ. But Jesus said that becoming a believer by not seeing, but hearing the Word of God is better¹⁴⁶. Jesus called the faith of the Roman centurion, who believed the word of Jesus without seeing, the greatest faith in Israel¹⁴⁷. He rebuked the Jews when he said that they would never believe unless they saw miracles and signs (4:48).

(X) 20:30-31. The epilogue.

20:30. Now Jesus, to be sure, in the presence of this disciples performed (viiia) many other miraculous signs, which are (vipa+) not written (+vprp) in this book.

20:31. But these are written (virp) in order that you may continue to believe (vsaa/vspa) that Jesus is (vipa) the Christ, the Son of God, and in order that by continuing to believe (vppa) you may have (vspa) life in his name.

¹⁴² 1 Corinthians 15:19

¹⁴³ Luke 24:39; cf. 1 John 1:1-3

¹⁴⁴ Luke 24:39

¹⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; Philippians 3:21

¹⁴⁶ Romans 10:14-17

¹⁴⁷ Matthew 8:5-10

a. The signs in the Gospel of John.

A 'sign'¹⁴⁸ is an unexpected mighty work of God in the physical realm that illustrates a truth or principle in the spiritual realm. It is a sign that happens in the creation, but points to salvation. It is a sign that God acts with power, authority and majesty when he reveals himself and his message to people. The *miracles* in the Gospel of John are called *signs*, because they introduce the *teaching* of specific truths with reference to Jesus Christ.

The signs in the Gospel of John are: changing water into wine (2:7-11), healing the royal official's son (4:46-54), healing the lame man (5:1-15), feeding the five thousand (6:1-15), opening the eyes of the man born blind (9:1-7) and raising Lazarus from the dead (11:35-44).

But also the cleansing the temple (2:13-22), the harvest of believers in Samaria (4:28-38), walking on water, calming the storm on the sea and bringing the boat immediately to the shore (6:16-21), the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey (12:12-19), washing the feet of his disciples (13:1-17) and the miraculous catch of fish (21:1-14) are signs!

The greatest signs are the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ (1:1-14), the death of Jesus Christ by crucifixion (19:17-30) and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (20:1-29)!

Jesus performed these signs before the eyes of his disciples so that they may be his witnesses. They could proclaim with great conviction and authority what they had seen, heard and experienced¹⁴⁹. The Gospel of John is the Gospel of signs: it is a written record of the deeds of Jesus Christ in the physical realm and their significance in the spiritual realm. John was selective in his choice of the signs he recorded in his Gospel (21:25).

b. The significance of the signs in the Gospel of John.

The purpose of the signs was not only to *create* faith, but especially to *strengthen* faith that had been awakened by the proclamation of God's Word. Thus, people would *continue* to believe and *persist* in their faith that the Jesus, who lived on earth as Man (i.e. a human being), really was the Christ (i.e. the expected Messiah), the Son of God (i.e. the eternal God who had revealed himself in creation and in time in history). The message of the Bible is that God, without laying down his divine nature, took on the human nature in Jesus Christ and entered his creation and the history of the world. The disciples recognised and acknowledged that Jesus was the Lord (cf. 20:19b-20).

A false teacher, Cerinthus, was a Jew from Alexandria who had become a Christian with a false teaching during the last decades of the first century A.D. He taught that the Creator God stood far apart from the Highest Being, was the God of the Jews and the head of the lower angels. He taught that Jesus was only a human being, the son of Joseph and Mary. At the baptism of Jesus, the divine Aeon 'Christ' united itself with the human 'Jesus', which allowed him to perform miracles. But during his suffering the divine Aeon again separated itself from Jesus so that it was only the human Jesus who suffered.

The apostle John certainly opposed the false teaching of Cerinthus. John taught that Jesus Christ was really Man and really God (1:1,14,18)! He is the Christ, the Messiah (the Anointed One), who fulfilled the predictions and promises in the Old Testament. He is the Son of God, the radiance of God's glory (the divine nature) and the exact representation of his being (the visible stamp of his essence)¹⁵⁰.

The purpose of miracles in the Bible is to point to the reality, truth and presence of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ calls people not to focus on the miracles themselves, but on Jesus Christ, to whom all these miracles point and about whom all these miracles teach. Only the context of a sign will show if that sign has this second deeper spiritual meaning or not. In every case, a sign always points away from itself to the One who performed it!

c. The miracles as signs in the Gospel of John.

(1) Changing water into wine (2:7-11). This miraculous sign intends to show that Jesus Christ is the Mediator and Guarantee of the new and better (superior) covenant¹⁵¹. Jesus Christ has come into the world to fulfil¹⁵² and terminate¹⁵³ the old order of the ceremonial law and to replace it by the new order of worshipping God in spirit and in truth (4:24)¹⁵⁴. The new order surpasses the old order as much as wine surpasses water! The new order: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ resulting in the world wide Body of Christ (the Church) surpasses the old order: the ceremonial law with its animal sacrifices and temple building (2:17-22).

(2) Healing the royal official's son (4:46-54). This miraculous sign intends to show that Jesus Christ is the Omnipotent One¹⁵⁵. He and the word he speaks have power and authority over the physical realm (the body of the boy), over distance (25 kilometres) and over time (on the exact moment he spoke)! Physical science, the three dimensional

¹⁴⁸ G: sémaion

¹⁴⁹ 1 John 1:1

¹⁵⁰ cf. Colossians 1:15;2:9

¹⁵¹ Hebrews 7:22; 8:6

¹⁵² Matthew 5:17

¹⁵³ Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14

¹⁵⁴ cf. Mark 2:18-22

¹⁵⁵ cf. Matthew 28:18

universe and time form no obstacle to Jesus to reveal his power and his love! The official had come to Jesus to see a sensational miracle, but Jesus only spoke his word to him. The official did not see any miracle, but he believed the word of Jesus Christ. He believed even though he saw no miracle!

(3) Healing the lame man (5:1-15). This miraculous sign intends to show that Jesus Christ is the Saviour (cf. 4:42). He came to seek and save what was lost¹⁵⁶. The ultimate purpose of all physical healing is spiritual healing! Some people think that the former disabled man must have committed some terrible sin in his past and that God had punished him with 38 years of disability (paralysis?). Now Jesus warned him not to continue that sin. But this event contains no reference to the cause of his disability, just as with respect to the man born blind (9:1-3). Jesus says nothing about any specific sin allegedly committed in his past, but only, “Do not *continue* to sin!” The word ‘to sin’ means to miss God’s purpose in life, not to live as God intended one to live. Jesus does not refer to his condition in the past, but to his condition in the present. His past physical condition was healed, but his present spiritual condition was not yet healed. He still had not been reconciled to God. Jesus could see in his heart that God had no place in his heart or was not central in his heart. He had changed physically, but not spiritually. Jesus warned him that if he continued to live a life that misses God’s purpose, something worse would happen: he would miss eternal life¹⁵⁷! Physical healing on this side of the grave is always temporary healing! And physical healing without spiritual healing is no real healing at all! Only spiritual healing is eternal and would also include eternal physical healing at the resurrection of the dead! So after Jesus had healed the paralytic physically, he proceeded to heal him spiritually. Jesus transformed not only his physical and temporal life, but also his spiritual and eternal life!

(4) Feeding the five thousand (6:1-15). This miraculous sign intends to show that Jesus Christ is the Bread of life which gives eternal life to those who believe in him (5:35). Jesus did not come to create new things, but to change and transform people. He came to do that in abundance (cf. 10:10b)! In John chapter 2 Jesus did not create wine, but changed water into wine. In John chapter 6, he did not create bread and fish, but multiplied it to a great number of bread and fish. Whoever ‘eats his flesh’ and ‘drinks his blood’, that is, whoever looks to him and believes in him has eternal life (6:40,54).

(5) Opening the eyes of the man born blind (9:1-7). This miraculous sign intends to show that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world (8:12; 9:5) who gives spiritual light (the revelation of spiritual truth and insight into these). First the man born blind received his physical sight and then he received his spiritual sight. He had to go to the pool of Siloam (which means ‘sent’) for the healing of his body, but he had to go to Jesus Christ, the One sent by God (3:17; 34; 5:36-37; 6:57; 7:29; 8:18,26,29) for the healing of his soul.

(6) Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:35-44). This miraculous sign intends to show that Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life (11:25) which gives believers a new spiritual life now and will transform their lowly bodies to be like Christ’s glorious body at the resurrection¹⁵⁸.

c. The purpose of the Gospel of John.

The apostle John says that he had recorded a selection of *miraculous signs* in his Gospel so that his readers may *continue* to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and in order that believing they may *continue* to have life in his name. The Gospel of John begins with the words: “And the Word (Jesus Christ) was God” (1:1). The Gospel ends with the “confession of Thomas, “My Lord and my God” (20:28). The purpose of the Gospel of John is to show that the Man Jesus, who had entered creation and history, was really God (the Son of God) and the visible image of God’s invisible being¹⁵⁹. The resurrection of Jesus Christ and his appearances to his disciples had brought them to this confession.

APPLICATIONS

- 20:5-8. Study the historical evidence concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ and believe it!
- 20:11. The Christian faith regards grieving for losses as a genuine and necessary expression of feelings before healing can take place.
- 20:18. Tell others what you have seen God do in your life.
- 20:21. Learn as much as you can from how Jesus Christ fulfilled his ministry.
- 20:22. Believe that Jesus Christ will equip you for the ministry he calls you to do.
- 20:26-29. Stop doubting and believe the historical facts concerning Jesus Christ. You will be blessed!
- 20:30-31. The miracles of Jesus Christ are above all ‘signs’ that point to Jesus Christ himself and who he is.
- 20:31. Only when you believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah and the Son of God will you receive eternal life.

QUESTIONS

- 20:1. How do you explain that the four Gospels speak about different numbers of women at the tomb?
- 20:2. How do we know that Mary Magdalene was not the only woman at the tomb at that time?

¹⁵⁶ Luke 19:10

¹⁵⁷ Matthew 25:46

¹⁵⁸ Philippians 3:21

¹⁵⁹ Hebrews 1:3

- 20:3-9. What caused Peter and John to believe that Jesus had really been resurrected from the dead?
- 20:12. How do you explain that the four Gospels speak about different numbers of angels at the tomb?
- 20:17. Why does Jesus say to Mary Magdalene that she should not cling to him?
- 20:17. Why does Jesus say to some women that he is going to Galilee and to Mary Magdalene that he is going to return to his heavenly Father?
- 20:21-23. What is the Great Commission according to John?
- 20:22. What is the difference between the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit and Pentecost?
- 20:24-28. What caused Thomas to believe that Jesus had really been resurrected from the dead?
- 20:29. Why are people that have not seen Jesus, but nevertheless believed in him blessed?
- 20:30-31. What is the purpose of miracles in the Bible?