



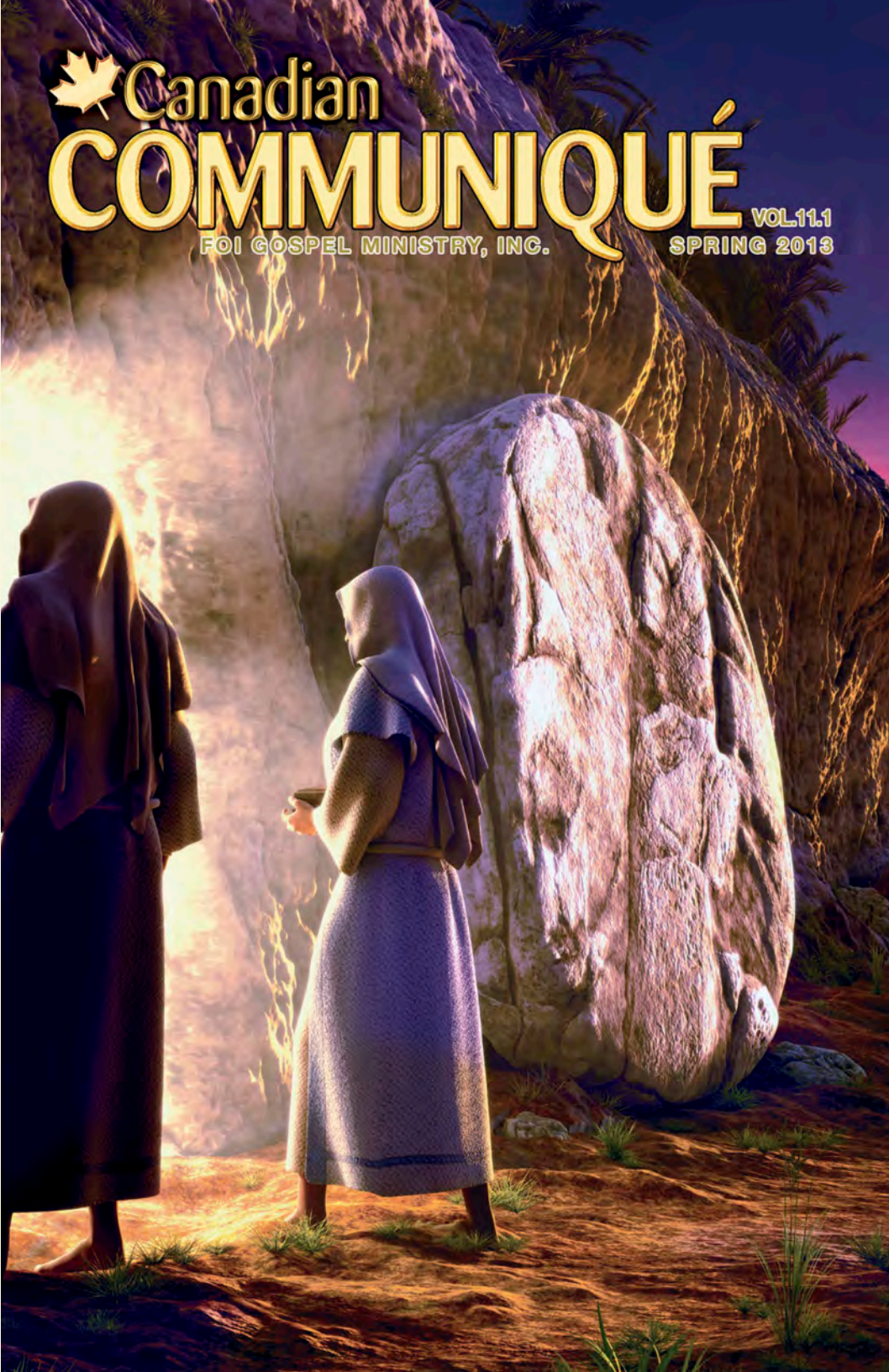
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# The Resurrection Record

By Charles E. McCracken

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Within a decade of the resurrection, the Good News that Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead powerfully rocked the world. The long-term impact of the initial proclamation of the gospel message can be seen today in the 2.18 billion self-identified Christians, who account for almost a third of the world's population. Considering the centrality of the resurrection to Christianity, what historical facts form the foundation for genuine faith? Why do Christians believe that Jesus literally and bodily rose from the grave?

The answer to these crucial questions is open for discovery through the testimony of observers of the event as recorded in the New Testament. Each narrative deserves careful scrutiny.

## Background Facts

An eye witness account of the horrific events leading up to the crucifixion is documented by one of Jesus' closest disciples. The apostle John viewed the mockery of the clandestine trial, watched Jesus

beaten beyond recognition at the hands of the Romans, and helplessly gazed as Jesus strained to carry the cross to Golgotha. John stood at the foot of the cross with Jesus' mother and watched Him writhing in agony and gasping for air. John heard Jesus cry out, "it is finished," and saw His body go limp (Jn. 19:30). John witnessed the Roman guard plunge the head of a spear deep into Jesus' side, and then pronounce Him dead as water and blood flowed from the open wound (Jn. 19:34).

## Early Sunday Morning

The disciples were afraid and confused; the previous week had been traumatic. It is not difficult to imagine Mary Magdalene's state of mind as she approached the rock-cut tomb in the predawn darkness Sunday morning. From all indications, she was the first to arrive. John's account suggests she scarcely noticed the absence of the soldiers posted to guard the tomb. Her focus was on one conspicuous reality—the huge stone



have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him” (Jn. 20:2).

Peter and John responded with action; they ran to the tomb; John arrived first. Although some commentators like to manufacture a spiritualized explanation, the simple truth is that John arrived before Peter because he was a faster runner. Possibly winded from the sprint, he stopped and looked into the tomb; he may have thought he had seen all there was to see. The Greek word translated ‘saw’ (*blepei*) suggests that he, like Mary, only recognized the obvious—the entrance was open and the linens used to wrap the body were still in the tomb; but, Jesus’ body was not (Jn. 20:4).



Garden Tomb, Photo courtesy FOI Image Archive

Whatever kept John from entering—whether fear of defilement or simply reluctance to go into a tomb—it didn’t stop Peter. A moment later, he pushed past John and was standing inside. From the interior of the sepulcher, Peter surveyed the details. Here the word

that had blocked the entrance to the tomb was gone. Incidentally, Matthew reports that earlier that same morning, “there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door” (Mt. 28:2).

She was so surprised to see the stone gone that she didn’t take time to look inside.

Instead, Mary quickly ran to find Peter, no doubt convinced that he would know what to do. Her assumptions upon seeing the open tomb were revealed in her frantic words; “They



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# Jesus said,



*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. John 14:6.*



*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. John 10:11.*



*I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. John 8:12*



*I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. John 6:35*



*I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. John 10:9*



*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser. John 15:1*



*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. John 11:25*

*For this reason the apostle Paul could say with assurance, "... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" Rm. 10:9-13*

*(Background image: Yuri Chertok/iStockphoto)*

translated 'saw' (*theorei*) conveys the idea of studying or analyzing. Peter saw the linens still lying where the body had been laid; he noted they were undisturbed; they hadn't been unwrapped, but no longer encased Jesus' body. Peter was the first to observe that the napkin originally covering the face of the crucified Lord wasn't with the rest of the grave clothes; instead, it was folded and lying off to the side (Jn. 20:6-7). As Peter absorbed and processed the information, John finally entered the tomb. John 'saw' (*eiden*) the same details, but the Greek word used here conveys the idea that he "perceived or understood" the significance of the facts (Jn. 20:8).

While Peter was trying to make sense of the situation, John put the facts together and believed. He didn't understand the finer points, but he knew one thing—Jesus the Messiah had risen from the dead and was alive! How else could the linen strips be left in the grave undisturbed? What other explanation could there be for the napkin being folded and lying in a place by itself? The stone had been rolled away from the door to reveal that Messiah had indeed risen bodily from the grave!

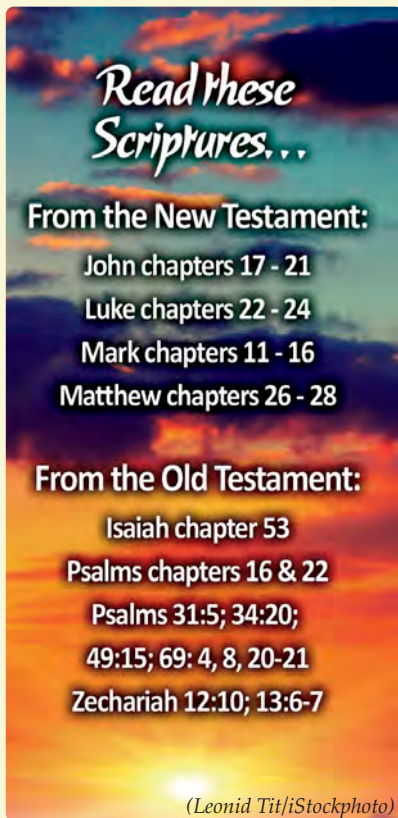
How many times over the previous six months had Jesus specifically instructed the disciples,

"that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day" (Mt. 16:21; Mk. 8:31, Lk. 9:22, 17:25)?

John adds the explanatory comment, "For as yet they [the disciples] did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (Jn. 20:9). Not fully understanding the implications of what they had seen in the tomb, at least John left comprehending the reality that Jesus was alive. It is apparent Peter came to the same conclusion later that afternoon as demonstrated in his sermon on the day of Pentecost

(Luke 24:34; I Cor. 15:5). He told those gathered to hear him preach, "concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:31-32).

By the time Mary returned, Peter and John were gone. Distraught and weeping, she took a closer look and noted the details much like Peter.





*Rock-hewn body bench, courtesy FOI Image Archive*

Studying the interior, she noticed two angels sitting at either end of the rock-hewn body bench. She heard them ask why she was weeping, but the significance of the angels' presence escaped her. Distracted, she answered, "they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him" (Jn. 20:13).

Without waiting for an answer, she came face to face with Jesus. In response to His questions, "why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" she implored, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away" (Jn. 20:15). He only needed to speak her name, and she immediately recognized Him. In a split second, her acute grief was replaced with unbounded joy; she grabbed Him and would not let go. In that moment, she became the first to experience the reality that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. She heard His voice. She saw His face. She touched His glorified body. He was alive!

Shortly thereafter, an angel at the tomb told a group of women, who had come with spices for the embalming process, to quickly spread the word that Jesus was alive. As they

were hurrying to tell the disciples, they saw Him and heard the Lord's greeting, "Rejoice!" (Mt. 28:9).

## *Sunday Afternoon*

These devoted women would not be the only ones to see Jesus alive after the resurrection. Later that day, Jesus appeared to two disciples walking home from Jerusalem.

One was Cleopas, and it is logical to assume the other was his wife, Mary (Lk. 24:18; Jn. 19:25). For at least an hour, they listened as, "He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Lk.24:27). This was not a vision or a transcendental experience. Arriving at the town of Emmaus, they begged the stranger to stay with them, and after accepting their invitation, He joined them for the evening meal. It was then that, "their eyes were opened and they knew Him" (Lk. 24:30).

Peter's encounter with the risen Lord took place in close proximity to His visit with these two disciples. While the details of the conversation are not given, it must have been both



*Garden Tomb monument, courtesy FOI Image Archive*



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Galilee after a night of fishing. Jesus built a fire and when they came ashore, He cooked breakfast with a few of the fish they had caught (Jn. 21:12-14). When Paul recounted the events surrounding the resurrection, he reminded his listeners, “He [Jesus] was seen by over five hundred brethren at once” (1 Cor. 15:6).

## *Concluding Statements*

The resurrection was not an ethereal spiritual event. Jesus rose physically and bodily from the dead and the facts were open for the world to see. He was crucified in Jerusalem. He was placed into a tomb in Jerusalem. On the third day, that same tomb in Jerusalem was empty. He appeared in His resurrection body to the disciples and large groups of people in the environs of Jerusalem numerous times for 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3).

The disciples began announcing His resurrection in Jerusalem. Even James, Jesus’ skeptical half-brother, ultimately believed that Jesus rose from the dead and placed His faith in Him. On the day of Pentecost (Shavuot) fifty days later, three thousand believed in the resurrected Messiah as a result of Peter’s preaching in Jerusalem. The book of Acts records, “the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). The evidence was so compelling, they were convinced that Jesus physically rose from the dead and believed. Remarkably, the apostle Paul, who initially rejected the resurrection and vigorously persecuted Christians, ultimately placed his faith in the resurrected Christ.

It is significant that Jesus did not take a sympathetic tone with the disciples after His death and resurrection. He

reassuring and exhilarating to Peter following his denial of the Lord.

## *Sunday Evening*

Later that evening, He was seen by ten of the disciples who were hiding from the authorities. Jesus suddenly appeared in the room with them despite the fact that the doors were locked (Jn. 20:19). He showed them the scars in His hands, feet and side, and ate broiled fish and a piece of honeycomb in their presence to demonstrate that He was not an apparition (Lk. 24:42; Jn. 20:20).

## *Over the Next 40 Days*

Eight days later, He appeared again and challenged Thomas to actually feel His wounds (Jn. 20:27). The next time they saw Him, the disciples were in

characterized the two on the road to Emmaus as, “foolish ones and, slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken” (Lk. 24:25). Mark records that when He appeared to the disciples in the upper room, Jesus, “rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen” (Mk. 16:14). Jesus also challenged Thomas, “be not faithless, but believing” (Jn. 20:27 KJV).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a non-negotiable and foundational tenet of Christianity. But, the historical record is open for investigation, and the evidence provided in eye witness testimony documents the facts. John’s account concludes with the words, “these are written that you may

believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (Jn. 20:31). Jesus told Thomas, “because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn. 20:29).



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