

# **DELIVERANCE**

## **RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD**

### **The Descent into Hell**

**April 15, 2017**  
**Holy Saturday**

**GOSPEL: Matthew 28: 1-20**

**EPISTLE: Romans 6:3-11**

Today's Gospel lesson is used in Western churches as the Gospel for Easter Sunday; the last few verses (vv.16-20) are generally used for Trinity Sunday in the West, which is the Sunday after Pentecost. In the Orthodox Church, the narrative of the Resurrection (today's Gospel) plus the Lord's commission to evangelize the earth (vv.16-20) is used for Holy Saturday. Easter Sunday (i.e. Pascha in the Orthodox Church) then becomes a victory celebration of light triumphing over darkness and the Sunday after Pentecost becomes All Saints Sunday.

Today's Epistle lesson is used in the West either for Easter or in late June.

#### **Background: The Descent into Hell**

To understand the Orthodox perspective on Pascha (Easter Sunday), it helps to understand the events of Holy Saturday -- when the Lord Jesus descended into hell. The Apostle Paul mentioned that Christ descended into hell (i.e. Hades); by doing so He led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8-9). In writing this, Paul quoted from David (Psalm 68:18), indicating that Old Testament prophecy had predicted this. David used the words "to God the Lord belong escapes from death" (Psalm 68:20). The Apostle Peter also addressed this when he wrote of Christ "preaching to the demons in prison" (1 Peter 3:19).

From an Old Testament prophetic point of view, Holy Saturday is a very important day. Three major feasts existed under Mosaic Law where attendance was mandatory: Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17). Ignoring these feasts resulted in one being cut off from Israel (Numbers 9:10-14). Within these feasts were certain days being proclaimed a Sabbath -- no matter which day of the week it fell on. Of the first three days of Passover in 30 AD, Friday (the 14th of Nisan) was not a Sabbath, Saturday (the 15th of Nisan) was both a Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath and Sunday (the 16th of Nisan) was not a Sabbath. The 14th of Nisan was the day of the slaying of the Passover lamb, and was the day Jesus was crucified. The 16th of Nisan was the day of the offering of the first fruits of the barley harvest and was the day of the Lord's resurrection. Between these two days was the Sabbath of the 15th of Nisan; by being set aside as a Sabbath, it was taught as being very important and holy.

In "leading captivity captive", what Paul is referring to is that of raising the righteous out of captivity in Hades where they had been held captive awaiting their redemption. There are many references to this in the Psalms, but the references are difficult to put in their context. A very helpful reference is the First Century historical account called The Gospel of Nicodemus.<sup>1</sup>

Copyright © Mark Kern 1998

---

<sup>1</sup> Ante Nicene Fathers, vol. 8

This work can be traced to Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both prominent members of the Sanhedrin (Matthew 27:57-60, Mark 15:42-46, Luke 23:50-53, John 19:38-42) who had performed the burial rites for Jesus. Joseph was described as a “rich man” (Matthew 25:57) and Nicodemus was referred to in this work as a toparch (ruler of several cities, compare John 3:1) and the third richest man in Jerusalem. (See Appendix I for a summary of the Gospel of Nicodemus.)

The Gospel of Nicodemus is not a “Gospel” in the sense of the four synoptic Gospels but is an historical account of the death and resurrection of Christ. It has two parts: Part I The Acts of Pilate; Part II The Descent into Hell. There are three versions of each part: Part I has two in Greek, one in Latin; Part II has one in Greek, two in Latin. Thus, one cannot use it word for word like Scripture but one can treat it as an historical source like Josephus’ writings. However, some of the imagery and quotes from Scripture found in the Gospel of Nicodemus are also used in the Orthodox Liturgy for Pascha. Thus it’s applicability.

### *Old Testament Readings on Deliverance*

A large number of Old Testament readings are prescribed for Holy Saturday Vespers having themes of deliverance:

**The Passover Sacrifice (Exodus 12:1-11):** This reading describes how the Passover lamb was to be slain. An unblemished male was to be slain at twilight and its blood was to be applied to the doorposts and the lintel (i.e. the top support of the door frame). Some have suggested that the application of the blood using a branch of hyssop traced the outline of the cross. With the blood on their doors, they would be passed-over when the Lord passed through and struck the land of Egypt (v.13). All this was done to show how Christ, as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36) would be sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7).

**Freedom from Slavery: The Red Sea (Exodus 13:20-15:19):** After Israel left Egypt, Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued Israel with his entire army. The Lord, in a pillar of cloud, led Israel, who was largely unarmed, by day and in a pillar of fire by night (13:21).

Trapped between the mountains, the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s army, the people were terrified and cried to Moses. Moses said, “Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever” (14:13). Moses then stretched his hand over the Red Sea and divided the waters (14:21). Israel crossed on dry ground, and the Egyptians pursued. Moses then stretched his hand over the Red Sea again and the waters inundated the Egyptians (14:22-28). Josephus (1st. Century Jewish historian) added that the return of the waters to inundate Pharaoh’s army involved a violent electrical storm also (Antiquities, II, xvi, 3).

Following their deliverance, Israel sang the song of Moses (15:1-18) accompanied by timbrels, as Miriam led the women in dancing (15:20).

**Jonah and Nineveh:** Jonah 1, 2, 3, 4 : The Book of Jonah is unusual in that the entire focus of the book is the mission of a Hebrew prophet to a Gentile city. Jonah lived in the early 8th Century BC and was told by the Lord to prophesy against Nineveh, a city in Northern Assyria,

600 miles from Jerusalem. Nineveh was an ancient city, was built by Nimrod following the Flood (Genesis 10:11) and was the Capital city of the Assyrian Empire in the late 8th Century BC.

Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah “fled to Tarshish (i.e. Spain) from the presence of the Lord” (1:3). The Lord then sent a fierce storm on the Mediterranean Sea so that the ship was about to break up (1:4). The sailors ascertained by casting lots that the storm came up on account of Jonah (1:7). They therefore asked Jonah what they should do to him in order to calm the storm (1:11). Jonah replied, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea” (1:12). The sailors were unwilling to shed innocent blood and tried rowing harder; when all hope seemed lost, they asked the Lord to forgive them and threw Jonah overboard (1:13-15). Immediately the storm ceased and the sailors all made vows and offered sacrifices to the Lord (1:16). Jonah, however, was swallowed by a great sea creature that the Lord appointed (1:17). According to Tertullian, “Jonah was swallowed by the monster of the deep, in whose belly whole ships were devoured, and after three days was vomited out again safe and sound” (On the Resurrection of the Flesh II, vi, 58). Thus the great sea creature was larger than anything that is common today.

Jonah was in the stomach of the sea creature three days and three nights (1:17). There he prayed for help from the “belly of Sheol” (2:2). “Water encompassed me to the soul of death. The great deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head” (2:5). “Then the Lord commanded the sea creature and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land” (2:10).

Jonah received another vision directing him to go to Nineveh (3:1). This time he obeyed. Walking through the streets, he proclaimed that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days (3:4). Word of his encounter with the sea creature and the storm may have gotten back to Nineveh, because Jonah received instant attention. All the people of Nineveh believed God and began fasting in sackcloth and ashes, including the King of Nineveh (3:5-6). When God saw their repentance, He relented concerning their destruction and spared the city (3:10). Succeeding generations in Nineveh, however, forgot the Lord and about 150 years later, Nineveh was obliterated so completely that it wasn’t until the 19th Century that archaeologists finally discovered its location.

One message for us from Jonah is that “as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great sea creature, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).

Another message for us is “the men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here” (Matthew 12:41, compare also Hebrews 2:3).

**Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath:** 1 Kings 17:8-24: This account took place in the days of Ahab and Jezebel while Elijah withheld rain from the Land for 3 1/2 years. As he entered Zarephath, he asked a widow to bring him some water and bread (v.8). She said that because of the famine, she had only enough flour and oil for one more meal for herself and her son; after that she was resigned to dying of starvation (v.12). Elijah instructed her to use that last little bit to make him a little bread cake, then some for her and her son. “For thus says the Lord, ‘The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty until the day the Lord sends

rain on the face of the earth” (v.14). Jesus later used this account as an example of how “no prophet is accepted in his own country” (Luke 4:24).

While Elijah was staying in the upper room of the widow’s house, her son got sick and died. Elijah raised the child from the dead. According to tradition, the son was the future Prophet Jonah (Prologue, September 22).

This account has a strong message for us: putting the things of God first has significant benefits. The widow had very little; yet by faith she gave of what she had to Elijah. Her benefits were an unlimited food supply, her son resurrected, and her testimony remembered as being greater than all the widows in Israel (Luke 4:25-26).

**Elisha and the Shunammite Woman:** 2 Kings 4:8-37: A very similar situation occurred regarding Elisha. The unnamed Shunammite woman recognized Elisha as a man of God and persuaded her husband to build an upper room and furnish it for Elisha to stay in as he traveled back and forth in the country (vv.9-10). Elisha appreciated this unsolicited kindness and one day asked the woman what he could do for her (v.13). When she didn’t ask for anything at all, Elisha’s servant Gehazi suggested that what she really wanted was a son, since she was barren (v.14). Elisha then told her, “At this season next year, you shall embrace a son” (v.16).

When the child was older, he died of a sudden head injury, perhaps an aneurysm, and his mother laid him on Elisha’s bed in the upper room (vv.18-21). She then saddled a donkey and left with one of the servants to find Elisha at Mount Carmel (vv.22-25). Finding him, she grabbed hold of his feet and wouldn’t let go or leave (vv.27-30). Elisha returned to Shunam with the woman and raised her son from the dead (vv.33-37).

Like the previous reading, this one has a similar message. “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward” (Matthew 10:41). The Shunammite woman brings to mind the activities of the Myrrh-Bearing Women that accompanied Jesus (Mark 15:40-41) and provided for Him out of their possessions (Luke 8:3). The eight Myrrh-Bearing women are remembered in the Orthodox Church on the 3rd Sunday of Pascha.

**The Young Men in the Furnace:** Daniel 3:1-23: During the Babylonian captivity, King Nebuchadnezzar ruled most of the then-known world. Near Babylon, he had a 90 foot tall gold statue (perhaps of himself) made and sent word to all his officials to come bow down to it at the dedication of the statue (vv.1-5). Anyone not doing so was to be thrown into a huge furnace (v.6, 11).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego had been appointed by the Prophet Daniel as officials over the province of Babylon, where Daniel was ruler over the whole province and chief prefect over the Magi (2:48-49). Some of the Chaldeans complained to the king that the Jews (Daniel’s officials) were not obeying the king’s command (v.12). The king was angry and called them in to give an account, threatening them with the furnace, and asking, “What god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?” (vv.14-15) They replied, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (vv.17-18).

The king ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and had his best soldiers throw Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in, tied and bound (vv.19-21). The soldiers died from getting too close to the flames; but the three officials were observed to be loosed and walking about in the flames accompanied by one described as a “Son of the Gods” (vv.24-25). Coming out of the fire, they were not singed, and didn’t even smell like the fire (vv.26-27). King Nebuchadnezzar then issued another decree ordering a very severe penalty for anyone speaking anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego (v.19).

Accompanying this reading on Holy Saturday is the short Apocryphal work from the Septuagint, “Song of the Holy Children”, which documents the words used by Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego as they sang praise to God while walking about in the furnace.

This reading speaks to us of our deliverance from the fires of Hades and hell that we and our brothers and sisters, the saints, are blessed with. Our enemy, here pictured by an ungodly king of this world, endeavors to throw us into the fire, but the Son of God rescues us.

**Abraham’s Sacrifice of Isaac:** Genesis 22:1-18: Another reading for Vespers is the account of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac that was prophetic regarding the Father’s sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son (John 3:16, 1 John 4:9). The Lord had spoken to Abraham, telling him to take “your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you” (v.2). This location was the same place where Solomon later built the first Temple (2 Chronicles 3:1).

After traveling three days, they reached the foot of the mountain (v.4). Abraham told his servants to stay there at the foot of the mountain with the donkey, “and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you” (v.5). As they walked up the mountain carrying the wood, the fire, and the knife, young Isaac asked his father, “Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (v.7). Abraham replied, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (v.8).

Hebrews addresses Abraham’s faith: “(Abraham) concluded that God was able to raise (Isaac) up even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Hebrews 11:19).

# DELIVERANCE

April 15, 2017  
Holy Saturday

## Epistle: Romans 6:3-12

The Epistle lesson for Holy Saturday also emphasizes deliverance:

- We were baptized into Christ's death (v.3)
- We were buried with Him through baptism into death (v.4)
- Just as Christ was raised, so we should walk in newness of life (v.5)
- If we were united in the likeness of His death, so we shall be in His resurrection (v.5)
- We are no longer slaves of sin (v.6)
- Death no longer has dominion over Him (v.9)
- Likewise we are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (v.11)

In the Scriptures, Egypt is often used figuratively as a model of slavery and sin. For example, the Lord delivered Israel from "the house of slavery" (Deuteronomy 5:6, 7:8; Exodus 20:2). And Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin in Egypt (Hebrews 11:25). Holy Saturday speaks of us as being delivered from this slavery also.

The word in verse 5 translated *united* (Greek: *sumphutos*) means to *grow up together with* as a plant grows up together with other plants. Thus John Chrysostom explained this section as follows: "Baptism is the Cross for us. What the Cross then, and burial, is to Christ, that Baptism has been to us, even if not in the same respects. For He died Himself and was buried in the Flesh, but we have done both to sin. Wherefore, he (Paul) does not say, planted together (i.e. united) in His death, but in *the likeness of His death*. For both the one and the other is a death, but not of the same subject. The one is of the Flesh, that of Christ; the other is of sin, which is our own.....Do you believe that Christ died, and that He was raised again? Believe then the same of yourself" (Homily x on Romans 6).

Chrysostom said that there are actually two deaths for us involved here. "The one is done by Christ in Baptism, and the other it is our duty to effect by earnestness afterwards. For that our former sins were buried came of His gift. But the remaining death to sin after baptism must be the work of our own earnestness; however, we find God here also giving us large help (Homily xi on Romans 6).

## Old Testament Readings on Resurrection

As with the Epistle lesson, there are a number of Old Testament readings for Holy Saturday Vespers dealing with various aspects of the Resurrection.

Copyright © Mark Kern 1998

### **The New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34:**

When the Lord instituted “The Lord’s Supper”, He said, “For this is My blood of the New Covenant”... “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s Kingdom” (Matthew 26:28-29, Mark 14:24-25, Luke 22:20).

The New Covenant was prophesied by Jeremiah and Jeremiah’s words were quoted verbatim in Hebrews 8. The basic tenets of the New Covenant are:

- The Lord will put His Laws in their mind and write them on their heart (Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:10)
- He will be their God and they will be His people (Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:10)
- No one will need to be taught; all will know the Lord (Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 8:11)
- He will forgive them and remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 8:12)

These tenets of the New Covenant are present and available now, but as a foretaste. Since the Cup is “My blood of the New Covenant” (Matthew 26:28), we participate in the New Covenant as we participate in the Lord’s Supper by faith. Thus we participate in the Messianic banquet of the Body of Christ. For one to avoid participation in the Lord’s Supper is to exclude himself from the New Covenant. The Lord’s Supper has always been the central focus of the Orthodox worship.

### **Judgment is Removed: Zephaniah 3:8-15:**

The writings of Zephaniah have mixed images of the First and Second Coming of Christ. Some of the things concerning the First Coming are:

- He will give His people purified lips to call on the Name of the Lord (v.9)
- My worshippers will bring My offerings (v.10)
- No one will feel shame (v.11)
- His people will be humble and lowly, and will take refuge in the Name of the Lord (v.12)
- There will be no lies or deceit in their mouth (v.13)
- The judgments against them will be taken away (v.15)

This does not mean that every Christian for the last 2,000 years has always spoken the truth, been humble, etc. There have been many that have come to the Lord’s Supper unworthily. And Jesus even served the cup to Judas, knowing that he would soon betray Him (Luke 22:19-23). However, Paul warned that “he who eats and drinks (of the Lord’s Supper) in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s Body (1 Corinthians 11:29).

### **Passover in the Promised Land: Joshua 5:10-15**

As Joshua led the people into the Promised Land, the Lord spoke to him saying, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you” (v.9). As they celebrated their first Passover in the Promised Land, the manna ceased as suddenly as it started (v.12).

About this time, Joshua was by Jericho preparing for the siege of the city; no one went in or out of Jericho (v.13, 6:1). While there, Joshua looked up and saw a man standing opposite him, sword in hand. Joshua went to him and asked: “Are you for us or for our adversaries?” (v.13). The man said, “No, rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord”. Joshua fell on his face and said, “What has my Lord to say to His servant?” The man said, “Remove your sandals from your feet for the place where you are standing is holy” (vv.14-15).

Manna was God’s special provision to get His people through the wilderness (Exodus 16:35, Numbers 11:7). Jesus called the manna “bread from heaven” and said that the “true bread from heaven is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:32-33). He then went on to say that “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:51). Here He is speaking of the Lord’s Supper, which is God’s special provision for the wilderness of this life.

Once we have arrived in the Promised Land at the Second Coming, the manna will not be necessary and we will drink of the fruit of the vine new with our Lord (Matthew 26:29). At that time, everyone will know the Lord (Jeremiah 31:34), and everywhere will be holy ground. And we will all join the saints and angels in worshipping the captain of the host of the Lord.

### **The Favorable Year of the Lord: Isaiah 61:1-9:**

This passage begins speaking of Christ’s first coming and transitions to His second coming. Early in His three year ministry, Jesus read this passage for the Public Reading of the Scriptures during the Synagogue worship in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-19). After reading it, He proclaimed, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). However, this was too much for Nazareth and they tried to throw the Lord off a cliff (Luke 4:29).

This passage is messianic throughout (*Messiah* means *anointed one*): “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the Lord has anointed Me...” (v.1). In this passage, Messiah will:

- Bring the Gospel to the afflicted
- Heal the broken hearted
- Proclaim liberty to captives
- Restore the sight of the blind (LXX)
- Proclaim the favorable year of the Lord
- Proclaim the day of God’s vengeance
- Comfort all who mourn
- The people of God will rebuild the ancient ruined cities
- Gentiles will be their servants
- They will be priests of the Lord
- They will eat the strength of the Gentiles (LXX)
- They will inherit the land a second time, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads (LXX)
- There will be no shame or humiliation.



### **A Call for the Lord's Return - Isaiah 63:11-64:5:**

In this passage, the people of God recall the days of old when Moses led His people out of Egypt. The imagery refers to the Lord as “His Glorious Arm” which went “at the right hand of Moses who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting Name” (v.12). The writer refers to the Lord as “our Father” (v.16), even though “Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us”. Those who are expected to know God don’t recognize the prophet as one of them. The prophet was asking the Lord to straighten this out.

In his downcast state, he asks that the Lord would “rend the heavens and come down that the mountains might quake at His Presence (64:1); and as fire kindles brushwood, to make His Name known to His adversaries. This is where the Church is now. The Lord will remember those who work righteousness and who remember His ways (v.5).

# RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

## The Descent into Hell

April 15, 2017  
Holy Saturday

### Gospel: Matthew 28:1-20

On the 3rd Sunday of Pascha two weeks from today, the Gospel lesson is the parallel account of the Resurrection from Mark 15:43-16:8. There the focus is on the role of the Myrrh-Bearing Women at the Cross, the Tomb, etc., and the sequence of events at the Tomb. Therefore we will not cover that aspect of the Gospel lesson here.

The use of this Gospel lesson for Holy Saturday takes on a more global perspective than just a remembering of the historical events of that Sunday morning. First, the Gospel lesson describes the events of Sunday morning, yet it is used in anticipation of that on Holy Saturday. Second, the Gospel lesson concludes with the Lord's commission to evangelize the earth. Thus Holy Saturday deals not just with the events, but with the longer term implications of the events.

### The Descent Into Hell: Perspective of the Church Fathers

Athanasius of Alexandria noted<sup>2</sup> the perspective present: while Christ's body was lying in the tomb, He went to preach to the spirits in Hades. His body, Joseph wrapped in a linen cloth, and laid it away at Golgotha. Thus it is shown to all that the Body was not the Word, but the Body of the Word. It was this that Thomas handled when it had risen from the dead. It was in this Body that Thomas saw the print of the nails, which the Word Himself had undergone; though He was able to prevent it, He did not do so. On the contrary, the incorporeal Word made His own the properties of the Body, as being His own Body. The Word was not changed into flesh and bones, as some heretics claimed. If it was, there would be no need for a tomb, for the Body would have descended into Hades leaving the tomb empty.

Ignatius of Antioch stated<sup>3</sup> that Jesus' passion was exhibited to creatures in heaven, creatures on earth and creatures under the earth. We often overlook the last of these.

“Jesus was truly begotten of God and of the Virgin, but not after the same manner. For God and man are not the same. He truly assumed a body; for ‘the Word was made flesh’ (John 1:14) and lived upon earth without sin. For says He, ‘Which of you convicts me of sin? (John 8:46) He really both ate and drank. He was crucified and died under Pontius Pilate. He really, and not in appearance only<sup>4</sup>, was crucified, and died, in the sight of beings in heaven, beings on earth, and beings under the earth. By those in heaven I mean such as are possessed of incorporeal natures; by those on earth, I mean the Jews and Romans, and such

Copyright © Mark Kern 1998

---

<sup>2</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, “Letter to Epictetus”, LIX, 5, Personal Letters.

<sup>3</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, To the Trallians, Chapter 9.

<sup>4</sup> The Arch Heretic Simon Magus was the first to proclaim that Jesus only appeared to be crucified, but was not really. Some of Simon's followers also proclaimed this false idea. By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, when Ignatius wrote his letters, this was a big issue.

persons as were present at that time when the Lord was crucified. By those under the earth, I mean the multitude that arose along with the Lord. For says the Scripture, 'Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised' (Matthew 27:52), their graves being opened. He descended into Hades alone, but He arose accompanied by a multitude; He tore apart that means of separation which had existed from the beginning of the world, and has broken down the middle wall of separation" (Ephesians 2:14).

Rufinus of Aquilea, in his Commentary on the Apostles' Creed, summarized<sup>5</sup> what the Scripture says of Christ's descent into hell.

"That He descended into hell is also evidently foretold in the Psalms, where it is said, 'You have brought Me down to the dust of death' (Psalm 22:15 LXX). And again, 'What profit is there in My blood, when I go down to the pit?' (Psalm 30:9) And again, 'I am stuck fast in deep mire, and there is no standing' (Psalm 69:2 LXX). Moreover, John the Baptist said, 'Are You the Coming One (into hell, without doubt), or do we look for another?' (Luke 7:20) Peter also said that 'Christ being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient in the days of Noah' (1 Peter 3:18-20); where also what He did in hell is declared. Moreover, the Lord says by the Prophet, as though speaking of the future, 'You will not leave my soul in hell, neither will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption' (Psalm 16:10 LXX). Again, in prophetic language, he speaks of the descent into hell as actually fulfilled, 'O Lord, You have brought up my soul from Hades. You have delivered me from among them that go down to the pit' (Psalm 30:3 LXX).

"We speak of the nether world of the dead and the heavenly realm of the angels, because we are bounded by the limits of the body prescribed to us. But to God, Who is present everywhere and absent nowhere, what is the nether world and what is the heavenly realm? The flesh which had been deposited in the sepulcher, is raised, that might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophet, 'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption' (Psalm 16:10 LXX). He returned a victor from the dead, leading with Him the spoils of hell. He led forth those who were held in captivity by death, as He Himself had foretold, when He said, 'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all peoples to Myself' (John 12:32). To this the Gospel bears witness, when it says, 'The graves were opened, and many bodies of saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the Holy City and appeared to many' (Matthew 27:52-53). That city is the one of which the Apostle says, 'The Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all' (Galatians 4:26). He says again to the Hebrews, 'It was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings' (Hebrews 2:10). Sitting on the right hand of God in the highest heavens, He placed there that human flesh, made perfect through sufferings, which had fallen to death by the lapse of the first man, but was now restored by the virtue of the Resurrection. Therefore the Apostle says, 'Who

---

<sup>5</sup> Rufinus of Aquilea, Commentary on the Apostles' Creed, 28-30.

has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 2:6). For He was the potter, 'The vessel which he was making with his hands fell. So he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to him to make *it*' (Jeremiah 18:4 LXX). It seemed good to Him that the mortal and corruptible body, which He had assumed, which was raised from the rocky sepulcher and rendered immortal and incorruptible, He should now place not on the earth but in heaven, and at His Father's right hand. The Scriptures of the Old Testament are full of these mysteries. No Prophet, no Lawgiver, no Psalmist is silent, but almost every one of the sacred pages speaks of them. It seems superfluous, therefore, to linger in collecting testimonies; yet we will cite a few, for those who desire to drink more deeply from the well springs of the divine volumes themselves."

"It is said, 'I lay down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord will help me' (Psalm 3:5 LXX). Again, 'Because of the misery of the poor, and because of the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, said the Lord' (Psalm 12:5 LXX). And in another place, 'You have turned and made me alive, and brought me again out of the depths of the earth' (Psalm 71:20 LXX). He is most evidently spoken of, 'I have been reckoned with them that go down to the pit; I became as a man without help; free among the dead' (Psalm 88:4-5 LXX). It is not said 'a man', but 'as a man'. In that He descended into hell, He was 'as a man'; but He was 'free among the dead', because He could not be detained by death. Therefore in the one nature the power of human weakness, in the other the power of divine majesty is exhibited. Hosea also speaks most clearly of the third day, 'After two days He will heal us; on the third day we shall arise, and live before Him' (Hosea 6:2 LXX). This he says in the person of those who, rising with Him on the third day, are recalled from death to life. They are the same persons who say, 'On the third day we shall live before Him, and shall know Him'. But Isaiah says plainly, 'Who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep' (Hebrews 13:20, Isaiah 63:11). The women saw His Resurrection, while the Scribes and Pharisees and the people disbelieved. This Isaiah foretold, 'Come here, you women that come from a vision; for it is a people of no understanding' (Isaiah 27:11 LXX). The women who went to the sepulcher after the Resurrection, and sought Him without finding, as Mary Magdalene, who came to the sepulcher before it was light, said, weeping, to the angels who were there, 'They have taken away the Lord, and I don't know where they have laid Him' (John 20:13). Even this is foretold, 'On my bed I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not' (Song of Solomon 3:1 LXX). Of those who found Him, and held Him by the feet (Matthew 28:9), it is foretold, in the same book, 'I found him whom my soul loves; I held him, and did not let him go'" (Song of Solomon 3:4 LXX).

Tertullian also pointed out<sup>6</sup> how the Scriptures spoke in great detail about the scene at the Tomb after the Resurrection.

It was very fitting that the man who buried the Lord should thus be noticed in prophecy, and thenceforth be 'blessed'; since prophecy does not omit the pious office of the women who resorted before daybreak to the sepulcher with the

---

<sup>6</sup> Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 43.

spices which they had prepared (Luke 24:1). For of this incident Hosea said, 'Then shall they seek My face. In their affliction they will seek Me early, saying, let us go, and return to the Lord our God; for He will heal us; He will smite, and bind us up. After two days He will heal us. On the third day we shall arise, and live before Him, and shall know Him' (Hosea 5:15-6:2 LXX). For who can refuse to believe that these words often revolved in the thought of those women between the sorrow of that desertion, with which at present they seemed to themselves to have been smitten by the Lord, and the hope of the Resurrection itself, by which they rightly supposed that all would be restored to them? But when 'they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus' (Luke 24:3), 'His burial shall be in peace; He has been removed out of the way' (Isaiah 57:2 LXX). 'Two angels however, appeared there' (Luke 24:4). Just so many honorary companions were required by the word of God<sup>7</sup>, which usually prescribes 'two witnesses'. Moreover, the women, returning from the sepulcher, and from this vision of the angels, were foreseen by Isaiah, when he says, 'Come, you women, who return from the vision' (Isaiah 27:11 LXX); that is, 'come', to report the Resurrection of the Lord. It was well, however, that the unbelief of the disciples was so persistent, in order that to the last we might consistently maintain that Jesus revealed Himself to the disciples as none other than the Christ of the prophets.

Cyril of Jerusalem, speaking at the Church of the Resurrection, which was built over the tomb where Christ was buried, compared<sup>8</sup> some of the words of the Prophets with the events at the Resurrection. Not only did Christ raise the dead with Himself, but the Old Testament foresaw this.

"A garden was the place of His Burial, and a vine was planted there; He had said, 'I am the vine!' (John 15:1) He was planted in the earth in order that the curse which came because of Adam might be rooted out. The earth was condemned to thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:18); the true Vine sprang up out of the earth, that the saying might be fulfilled, 'Truth sprang up out of the earth, and righteousness looked down from heaven' (Psalm 85:11). And what will He that is buried in the garden say? 'I have gathered My myrrh with My spices': and again, 'Myrrh and aloes, with all chief spices' (Song of Solomon 4:14, 5:1). Now these are the symbols of the burying; and in the Gospels it is said, 'The women came to the sepulcher bringing the spices which they had prepared' (Luke 24:1); 'Nicodemus also brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes' (John 19:39). And farther on it is written, 'I ate My bread with My honey' (Song of Solomon 5:1 LXX); the bitter before the Passion, and the sweet after the Resurrection. After He rose, He entered through closed doors; but they didn't believe that it was He; for they supposed that they saw a spirit (Luke 24:37). But He said, 'Handle Me and see' (Luke 24:39). Put your fingers into the print of the nails, as Thomas required (John 20:27). And while they yet disbelieved for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, 'Have you here anything to eat?' And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and honeycomb (Luke 24:42). Do you see how it is fulfilled, 'I ate My bread with My honey?'"

---

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1.

<sup>8</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIV, 11-14.

“Before He entered through the closed doors, those noble and brave women sought the Bridegroom. They came to the sepulcher, and sought Him Who had been raised; the tears were still dropping from their eyes, when they ought rather to have been dancing with joy for Him that had risen. Mary came seeking Him, and didn’t find Him; she heard from the Angels, and afterwards saw the Christ. These things had also been written, ‘On my bed I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not’ (Song of Solomon 3:1 LXX). Mary came while it was yet dark and said, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they have laid Him’ (John 20:2, 13). The Angels cured the lack of knowledge; for they said, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead?’ (Luke 24:5) He not only rose, but also took the dead with Him when He rose (Matthew 27:52). But Mary didn’t know this, and in her person the Song of Solomon said to the Angels, ‘Have ye seen him whom my soul loves? *It was* as a little *while* after I parted from them, (that is, from the two Angels), that I found him whom my soul loves: I held him, and did not let him go” (Song of Solomon 3:3-4 LXX).

“After the vision of the Angels, Jesus came as His own Herald, ‘Jesus met them, saying, All hail! and they came and took hold of His feet’ (Matthew 28:9). They took hold of Him, that it might be fulfilled, ‘I will hold Him, and will not let Him go’. Though the woman was weak in body, her spirit was strong. He was dead, whom they sought, yet the hope of the Resurrection was not quenched. The Angel said to them again, ‘Fear not’ (Matthew 28:5); as for the soldiers, let them be afraid, that, taught by experience, they may bear witness and say, ‘Truly this was the Son of God’ (Matthew 27:54). But you should not be afraid, ‘for perfect love casts out fear’ (1 John 4:18). They departed with joy, yet full of fear. This was also written, ‘Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice in Him with trembling’ (Psalm 2:11 LXX); rejoice, because of the risen Lord; but with trembling, because of the earthquake, and the Angel, who appeared as lightning.”

“Though the Chief Priests and Pharisees sealed the tomb; yet the women saw Him, who was risen. Isaiah, knowing the feebleness of the Chief Priests, and the women’s strength of faith, said, ‘Come, you women, who return from the vision; for the people has no understanding’ (Isaiah 27:11 LXX); the Chief Priests lack understanding, while women are eyewitnesses. When the soldiers came into the city to the Chief Priests, and told them all that had happened, the Chief Priests said to them, ‘Say ‘His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept’ (Matthew 28:13). Well did Isaiah foretell this, ‘But tell us, and relate to us another deceit’ (Isaiah 30:10 LXX). For a gift of money, they persuaded the soldiers; but they do not persuade the kings of our time. The soldiers surrendered the truth for silver; but the kings of this day have built this holy Church of the Resurrection of God our Savior, inlaid with silver and wrought with gold, in which we are assembled; and embellished it with the treasures of silver, gold and precious stones. ‘And if this comes to the governor’s ears’, they say, ‘we will persuade him’ (Matthew 28:14). Though you persuade the soldiers, yet you will not persuade the world; for why were Peter’s guards condemned, when he escaped out of the prison (Acts 12:19), yet they who watched Jesus Christ were not condemned? Sentence was pronounced by Herod on those who watched Peter, for they were ignorant and had nothing to say for themselves; while those,

who watched Jesus, had seen the truth, and concealed it for money, but were protected by the Chief Priests. Nevertheless, though only a few of the Jews were persuaded at the time, the world became obedient. Those who hid the truth were themselves hidden; but they who received it were revealed by the power of the Savior, who not only rose from the dead, but also raised the dead with Himself. And in the person of these the Prophet Hosea says plainly, ‘After two days He will heal us; on the third day we shall arise, and live before Him’” (Hosea 6:2 LXX ).

Clement of Alexandria devoted<sup>9</sup> a chapter of his ‘Stromata’ to showing that the Gospel was preached to both Jews and Gentiles in Hades. Christ did this when He descended into hell; the Prophets foretold this, and the Apostles continued the preaching after their deaths.

“The Lord preached the Gospel to those in Hades. The Scripture says, ‘Hades says to Destruction<sup>10</sup>, We have not seen His form, but we have heard His voice’ (Job 28:22). Plainly it is not the place, which heard the voice, but those who have been put in Hades, and have abandoned themselves to destruction, as persons who have thrown themselves voluntarily from a ship into the sea. They are those that hear the Divine power and voice. For who in his senses can suppose the souls of the righteous and those of sinners in the same condemnation, charging Providence with injustice?”

“The Scriptures show that. the Lord preached the Gospel to those that perished in the flood, or rather had been imprisoned, who formerly were disobedient in the days of Noah (1 Peter 3:19-20). It has been shown also, in the second book of the Stromata<sup>11</sup>, that the Apostles, following the Lord, preached the Gospel to those in Hades. For it was requisite that as here, so also there, the best of the disciples should be imitators of the Master; so that He should bring to repentance those belonging to the Hebrews, and they the Gentiles. That is, those who had lived in righteousness according to the Law, who had ended life not perfectly, but sinfully, should have an opportunity to repent. For it was suitable to the divine administration, that those possessed of greater worth in righteousness, and whose life had been pre-eminent, on repenting of their transgressions, though found in another place, yet being confessedly of the number of the people of God, should be saved, each one according to his individual knowledge.”

“Christ also exerts His might because it is His work to save; which He did by drawing to salvation those who became willing, by the preaching of the Gospel, to believe on Him, wherever they were. If the Lord descended to Hades for no other end but to preach the Gospel, it was either to preach the Gospel to all or to the Hebrews only. If to all, then all who believe shall be saved, although they may be of the Gentiles, on making their profession there. God’s punishments are saving and disciplinary, leading to conversion, and choosing rather the repentance than the death of a sinner (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11). Souls, darkened by passions, when released from their bodies, are able to perceive more clearly, because of their being no longer obstructed by the flesh. If, then, Christ

---

<sup>9</sup> Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, VI, 6.

<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew text reads, “‘The Place of Ruin and Death say, ‘We have heard a report about it with our ears’”. The LXX text reads similarly. Clement’s text is slightly different from those today.

<sup>11</sup> Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, II, 9.

preached only to the Jews, who lacked knowledge and faith, it is plain that, since God is no respecter of persons, the Apostles also, as here, so there preached the Gospel to those of the heathen who were ready for conversion. It is well said<sup>12</sup> by the Shepherd, ‘They went down with them therefore into the water, and again ascended. These descended alive, and again ascended alive. But those who had fallen asleep, descended dead, but ascended alive’. Further the Gospel says, ‘that many bodies of those that slept arose’ (Matthew 27:52), plainly as having been translated to a better state. A universal movement and translation took place through the economy of Christ” (John 5:25).

“One righteous man does not differ, as righteous, from another righteous man, whether he is of the Law or a Greek. God is not only Lord of the Jews, but of all men, and more nearly the Father of those who know Him. For if to live well and according to the Law is to live, also to live rationally according to the Law is to live; and those who lived rightly before the Law were classed under faith (Romans 3:29, 10:12), and judged to be righteous, — it is evident that those, too, who were outside of the Law, having lived rightly, in consequence of the peculiar nature of the voice, though they are in Hades and in prison (1 Peter 3:19), on hearing the voice of the Lord, whether that of His own person or that acting through His Apostles, with all speed turned and believed. For we remember that the Lord is ‘the power of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:24), and power can never be weak.”

“So I think it is demonstrated that God being good, and the Lord powerful, they save with a righteousness and equality which extend to all that turn to Him, whether here or elsewhere. The active power of God is everywhere and is always at work. Accordingly, in the Preaching of Peter<sup>13</sup>, the Lord says to the disciples after the resurrection, ‘I have chosen you Twelve disciples, judging you worthy of me’, whom the Lord wished to be Apostles, having judged them faithful, sending them into the world to the men on the earth, that they may know that there is one God, showing clearly what would take place by the faith of Christ. Those who heard and believed should be saved; those who believed not, after having heard, should bear witness, having no excuse to say, ‘We have not heard’”.

“Did not the same dispensation occur in Hades, so that even there, all the souls, on hearing the proclamation, might either exhibit repentance, or confess that their punishment was just, because they didn’t believe? There were some, who had departed before the Advent of the Lord, and did not have the Gospel preached to them, and had no ground for believing or not, to obtain either salvation or punishment. For it is not right that these should be condemned without trial, and that those alone who lived after the Advent should have the advantage of Divine righteousness. To all rational souls it was said from above, ‘Whatever one of you has done in ignorance, without clearly knowing God, if, on becoming conscious, he repent, all his sins will be forgiven him’ (Acts 3:17, 19; 17:30). ‘For, behold’, Moses said, ‘I have set before your face death and life, that you may choose life’ (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19). God says that He set, not that He made both, in order to give the comparison of choice. In another place He says,

---

<sup>12</sup> Hermas (of the Seventy), The Shepherd, III, 16, in Roberts & Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 2.

<sup>13</sup> This document is not in the collection of early writings in Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers.



‘If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken’” (Isaiah 1:19-20).

“David expressly says, ‘Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence’ (Psalm 16:9-11; Acts 2:26-28). As the people of God were precious to the Lord, so also is he who is converted from the Gentiles. For rightly the Scripture says, that ‘the ox and the bear shall feed together’ (Isaiah 11:7 LXX). For the Jew is designated by the ox, from the animal under the yoke being reckoned clean, according to the Law. The bear designates the Gentile, which is an unclean and wild beast. He who is converted from among the Gentiles is formed from a beastlike life to gentleness by the Word; and, when once tamed, is made clean, just as the ox. For example, the prophet says, ‘All the beasts of the field shall bless me’ (Isaiah 43:20). Those who are wild with respect to faith, polluted in life, and not purified by the righteousness, which is according to the Law, are called wild beasts. But changed from wild beasts by the faith of the Lord, they become men of God, advancing from the desire to change to the fact. For some the Lord exhorts, and to those who have already made the attempt he stretches forth His hand, and draws them up. ‘For the Lord of all will not stand in awe of anyone, nor show deference to greatness; because He Himself made both small and great, and He takes thought for all alike’ (Wisdom 6:7 RSV). And David says, ‘The heathen are trapped in the destruction they caused; their foot is caught in the snare they hid’ (Psalm 9:16 OSB). ‘The Lord is also a refuge for the poor man, a helper in seasons of affliction’ (Psalm 9:10 OSB). Those that were in affliction had the Gospel seasonably proclaimed. And therefore it said, ‘Proclaim His dealings among the nations’ (Psalm 9:12 OSB), that they may not be judged unjustly.”

“If, then, He preached the Gospel to those in the flesh that they might not be condemned unjustly, how is it conceivable that He did not for the same cause preach the Gospel to those who had departed this life before His Advent? ‘For the righteous Lord loves righteousness: His face beholds the upright’ (Psalm 11:7 LXX). ‘But he who loves unrighteousness hates his own soul’” (Psalm 11:6 LXX).

“If, then, in the deluge all sinful flesh perished, punishment having been inflicted on them for correction, we must first believe that the will of God, which is disciplinary and beneficent, saves those who turn to Him. Then, too, the more subtle substance, the soul, could never receive any injury from the physical element of water, since it is incorporeal.”

## **The Cover-up By the Jewish Leaders:**

The Chief Priests and Pharisees remembered that Jesus had said that He would rise from the dead after three days (Matthew 27:63). In this they may have been more cognizant of His words than His disciples. But their reaction was to conspire with Pilate to seal the stone and set a 24 hour guard. On this, John Chrysostom comments: “Everywhere deceit recoils upon itself, and against its will supports the truth. Observe: it was necessary for it to be believed that He died, and that He rose again, and that He was buried; and all these are brought to pass by His enemies.” “For if only the soldiers had sealed, they might have said that the soldiers, having given up the body to be stolen, gave His disciples opportunity to feign the history concerning His Resurrection. But now having themselves made it sure, they are not able to say even this.”

“Do you see how they labor for the truth against their will? For they themselves came to Pilate, themselves asked, themselves sealed, setting the watch, so as to be accusers and refuters one of another” (Homily lxxxix on Matthew 27).

This was carried to extreme when some of the guards that had kept watch at the Tomb reported these events to the Chief Priests (v.11). After consulting together, the Chief Priests and elders gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them to say that Jesus’ disciples stole the body by night (vv.12-13). Matthew concludes that this falsehood “was commonly reported among the Jews until this day” (v.15).

Some of the soldiers refused to accept the bribe, however. The centurion at the cross (Matthew 27:54) was also in charge at the tomb. Longinus (his name) and two of his soldiers would not accept the bribe, so the Jewish leaders conspired to kill them also. Hearing of the plot, Longinus and his friends resigned their commission, received baptism from the Apostles, and left for Cappadocia. The Jewish leaders, however, slandered them to Pilate, and Pilate sent other soldiers to hunt them down and behead them (Prologue, October 16).

## **The Logic of the Resurrection:**

In contrast to the campaign of falsehood on the part of the Jewish leaders, we note the disciples reporting events objectively as they happen. For example, the Chief Priests’ conversation with Pilate was reported as “Sir, we remember while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days, I will rise’” (Matthew 27:63). Matthew, one of the Twelve, in writing his Gospel, didn’t have to repeat the term “deceiver”, but he did even though it was derogatory toward himself and his cause. Even after the Resurrection when the Lord met them in Galilee, Matthew reported that “some doubted” (Matthew 28:17). These are not the words of someone who stole the body in order to pretend a resurrection occurred. These are the words of someone who is reporting things objectively as they happen.

John Chrysostom went into this at length. “When should they have stolen Him? On the Sabbath? And how? For it was not lawful so much as to go out (Exodus 16:29). And even if they transgressed the Law, how should they have dared, who were so timid, to come forth (John 20:19)? And how could they also have been able to persuade the multitude (Acts 2:14-36)? By saying what? By doing what? And from what sort of zeal could they have stood in behalf of the dead? Expecting what recompense? What requital? Seeing Him yet alive and merely seized (by

the Jews), they had fled (Matthew 26:56). And after His death were they likely to speak boldly in His behalf, unless He had risen again? And how should these things be reasonable? For that they were neither willing nor able to feign a resurrection that did not take place is plain from all this (Homily lxxxix on Matthew 29).

Responding to the claim of the Jewish rulers that His disciples stole His body, Chrysostom continued, “How did they steal Him? O most foolish of all men! For because of the clearness and conspicuousness of the truth, they are not even able to make up a falsehood. For indeed what they said was highly incredible, and the falsehood had not even speciousness. For how, I ask, did the disciples steal Him, men poor and unlearned, and not venturing so much as to show themselves? (John 20:19) What? Was not a seal put upon it? What? Were there not so many watchmen, and soldiers, and Jews stationed round it? What? Did not those men suspect this very thing, and take thought, and break their rest, and continue anxious about it? And why moreover did they steal it? That they might feign the doctrine of the resurrection? And how should it enter their minds to feign such a thing, men who were well content to be hidden and to live? And how could they remove the stone that was made sure? (A stone 4 feet diameter by 1 foot thick weighs about 2,200 lb.). How could they have escaped the observation of so many? No, though they had despised death, they would not have attempted without purpose, and fruitlessly, to venture in defiance of so many who were on the watch?” (If a centurion was in charge, 100 soldiers were involved!) “...If they did not dare so much as to stand their ground when they saw Him alive (Matthew 26:56), how when He was dead could they but have feared such a number of soldiers?”

“For if the disciples had not strength to watch with Him, and that, though upbraided by Him (Matthew 26:40-46), how could they have ventured upon these things?” If they were going to steal His body, they would have done it the first night before the Jewish rulers set the guard in place (Homily xc on Matthew 28).

Then, of course, there is the testimony of the burial clothes. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had wrapped Jesus’ body in strips of linen with about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, creating a “mummy” or a cocoon (John 19:39-40). This was a burial rite used only by the wealthy. “The body was covered in spices and in paste and these were tied to the body by layers of white roller bandage. The paste hardened and impregnated the bandages until a hard preservative mold or cocoon was formed about the body. A cap was put on the head, and often the jaw was held in position by a bandage under the chin” (Gower, New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, pp. 72-74). When Peter and John came to the Tomb on Easter morning, they “saw the linen clothes lying there” (John 20:5-6). This is the undisturbed 100 lb. cocoon; Jesus had passed through the cloth of the cocoon as He rose, leaving them lying there. No wonder that John saw and believed when presented with this evidence (John 20:8).

From all this, the Resurrection is the only logical conclusion. As John Chrysostom said, “When (the Jewish rulers) confess the body was not there, but the stealing it is shown to be false and incredible -- by their watching it and by the seals and by the timidity of the disciples -- the proof of the Resurrection even now appears incontrovertible” (Ibid.).

**The Great Commission:**

On the evening of the Resurrection, the Eleven minus Thomas were huddled together in the upper room in Jerusalem when the Lord appeared to them (John 20:19). A week later the same thing occurred when Thomas was present (John 20:26). The end of Matthew's Gospel picks up just after this after they all had returned to Galilee to the mountain, which Jesus had appointed (Matthew 28:16; also Matthew 28:7, 10; Matthew 26:32). The occasion described (Matthew 28:16) may be the same event (or series of events) that Paul described where the Lord appeared to 500 brethren at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Included in the Gospel reading for Holy Saturday are Jesus' words, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). Thus the Holy Saturday reading reaches for longer term implications of the Resurrection than is immediately at hand.

At this occasion in Galilee, the Spirit had not yet been given since Christ had not yet ascended. Thus, they are not yet able to do these things (make disciples of all nations) because they don't have the means yet. But they will acquire the means in a few weeks at Pentecost.

John Chrysostom pointed out that when the Lord said, "I am with you", "This He said to the prophets also in the Old Testament continually, as well as to Jeremiah objecting to his youth (Jeremiah 1:6, 8), to Moses objecting to his unskilled speech (Exodus 4:10, 12), and to Ezekiel shrinking from the office (Ezekiel 2, 3). ...And not with these men only did He promise to be, but also with all that believe after them" (Ibid.).

## **APPENDIX I**

### **SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL OF NICODEMUS**

#### **Part II: The Descent into Hell**

Three different versions of the Descent into Hell exist, one in Greek, two in Latin. Some details differ from one version to another, but this synopsis attempts to summarize what is a consensus of all three accounts. In the following, the Greek text of the Descent into Hell is summarized by chapter. Some details mentioned only in the two Latin texts are also included.

**Chapter 14:** Phineas (a priest); Haggai (a Levite) and Adas (a soldier or teacher) came from Galilee and reported to the Pharisees that Jesus was teaching His disciples in Galilee in the days following the crucifixion. They also reported seeing people long dead, including Karinus and Leucius, two sons of the righteous Simeon who held Christ as a baby (Luke 2:25-32).

**Chapter 15:** Nicodemus testified that this is not incredible; Elijah had done that too. Nicodemus counseled that they send soldiers to Galilee to try to find Jesus and ask His pardon for the evil they'd done to Him. This they did. They didn't find Jesus, but they did find Joseph of Arimathea who had been locked in a windowless room by the Sanhedrin for his part in the burial of Jesus, but who had disappeared. They invited Joseph to speak to them: he testified how the Lord appeared to him and had taken him out of the locked room to Arimathea.

**Chapter 16:** They found three priests from Galilee who witnessed the Ascension. Their testimony agreed and by the Mosaic Law, they were legally bound to accept this as factual (Deuteronomy 19:15). Joseph and Nicodemus testified that they had indeed buried Him.

**Chapter 17:** Joseph testified that there were others raised with Jesus, some of whom they know: Simeon and his two sons (Karinus and Leucius) who were buried in the recent past. Joseph suggested going to Arimathea to see them. Thus Annas, Caiaphas, Joseph, Nicodemus, Gamaliel and others went to Arimathea and brought Karinus and Leucius to Jerusalem.

**Chapter 18:** Asked to give an account of their resurrection, Karinus and Leucius separately wrote an account. In Hades, they were with all the righteous that had fallen asleep, when a great light lit up Hades. Isaiah, in Hades, testified that this is what he wrote of (Isaiah 9:1-2) that Zebulon and Naphtali would see a great light. Then John the Baptist arrived in Hades, testifying that he had been preparing the way for the Son of God (Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:4, John 1:29, Luke 3:22). John continued that he had been sent to preach similarly in Hades.

**Chapter 19:** Adam, the first created, then asked his son Seth to tell everyone of an angelic visit by Michael that occurred just before Adam died. Seth explained how the angel told him that 5,500 years after the Creation, the Son of God would become incarnate and would raise up Adam and all those out of him into Paradise. All the patriarchs and prophets exulted greatly.

**Chapter 20:** Then Satan came and said to Hades to be sure to be ready to secure Jesus when He arrived. Hades cautioned Satan that if Jesus could raise the dead with just a single word, how could he withstand Him? Satan called Hades a coward. Hades reminded Satan that Lazarus had

been in Hades' bowels but had been dragged out by force like the flight of an eagle. Hades feared that if Jesus came, He might drag out all the rest from there also.

**Chapter 21:** As they were speaking there was a great voice like thunder: "Lift up your gates O ye rulers; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting gates; and the King of Glory shall come in" (Psalm 24:7). Hades, Satan and their demons immediately went to secure the "gates of brass and bars of iron". The forefathers mocked Satan and David reminded him of his prophecy concerning what was happening here. For example, David had prophesied, "Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors that the King of Glory may come in! Who is the King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates, and lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in! Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts; He is the King of Glory" (Psalm 24:7-10). The ancient doors (Hebrew: *olam*: long duration, antiquity, futurity) have very little meaning aside from the events of Holy Saturday. Again "He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their bands apart. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His loving kindness and for His wonders to the sons of men! For He has shattered gates of bronze and cut bars of iron asunder" (Psalm 107:14-16). These people David also referred to as "prisoners" and "the sons of death" (Psalm 79:11, 102:20).

Again a voice of thunder cried, "Lift up the gates". Satan answered, "Who is this King of Glory?" The angels answered, "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle!" (Psalm 24:8). Immediately the gates of brass were shattered and the iron bars broken. The King of Glory came in the form of a man and lit up all the dark places of Hades.

**Chapter 22:** Then the King of Glory trampled on death by His Majesty and seized Satan by the head and delivered him to His angels to be bound in Hades until His second appearing.

**Chapter 23:** As Hades received Satan, he criticized him saying, "Through what necessity did you have to crucify the King of Glory that He might come here and deprive us of our power? Like a fool, you didn't know what you were doing (compare 1 Corinthians 2:8). Look and see; not one of the dead has been left in here. All that you gained by the tree of knowledge you lost by the tree of the Cross. Now that I have received you, by experience you will learn how many evils I shall do to you."

**Chapter 24:** Then the King of Glory raised Adam and embraced him along with Eve and all the rest of the patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, forefathers and saints. As He was bringing them all out, Adam was filled with joy and said, "I thank Your Majesty, O Lord that You have brought me up out of the lowest Hades" (Psalm 86:13). "I will extol You, O Lord; for You have lifted me up, and have not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Lord God, I cried unto You and You have healed me. O Lord You have brought out my soul from the powers below; You have saved me from them that go down into the pit. Sing praises to the Lord, all His saints, and confess to the memory of His holiness; since there is anger in His indignation and life in His goodwill" (Psalm 30:1-6). All the prophets and saints said, "We thank You, O Christ, Savior of the world, for You have brought our life up out of destruction" (compare Psalm 103:4). As they went, they continued to say, "Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord" (Psalm 118:26, compare Matthew 21:9, 23:39, Mark 11:9, Luke 13:35, 19:38, John 12:13). David sang, "Sing unto the

Lord a new song, for He has done wonderful things; His right hand and His holy arm have brought salvation to Himself. The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness has He revealed in the sight of the heathen” (Psalm 98:1-2).

Before leaving Hades, all the saints asked the Lord to leave as a sign of victory the sign of the Cross in the midst of Hades, which He did.

**Chapter 25:** After leaving Hades, the Lord gave all the saints to the Archangel Michael who brought them to Paradise. Meeting them there were Enoch and Elijah who had never died (Genesis 5:24, 2 Kings 2:11-13). Enoch and Elijah told them that the two of them were to remain there until the end of time at which time they were to be sent by God to withstand Antichrist, to be slain by him and after three days to be raised and snatched up into the clouds to meet the Lord (Revelation 11:3-12, compare 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

**Chapter 26:** As they arrived, they met another man who had the look of a robber and who was carrying a cross. He identified himself as the robber who was crucified with the Lord Jesus and, after rebuking his fellow robber, asked Jesus to remember him when He came in His Kingdom. Jesus had said, “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:39-43). At Michael’s instructions he had been waiting for his brethren the saints to come also. On hearing this, the saints cried out, “Great is the Lord and great is His strength” (Psalm 147:5).

**Chapter 27:** Then Karinus and Leucius testified that these are the things that they saw and heard. They had been sent by Michael to proclaim the Lord’s Resurrection, to be baptized in the Jordan, and to celebrate the Passover of the Resurrection for three days. They said they were unable to stay longer or speak in further detail concerning the mystery of God per Michael’s instruction. Karinus gave his roll to Annas, Ceiaphas and Gamaliel and Leucius gave his roll to Nicodemus and Joseph. Then they were transfigured and disappeared.

Following the disappearance of Karinus and Leucius, there was much weeping and breast beating on the part of the Sanhedrin. For forty days and nights, they lamented, expecting vengeance and destruction from God. The second Latin version closes by saying that God gave them an opportunity for repentance “but they were not found worthy to be turned to the Lord.”