



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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## **Matthew 28:1-15** **English Standard Version** **April 21, 2019**

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, April 21, 2019**, is from **Matthew 28:1-15**.

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

**(Matthew 28:1) Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.**

After the Sabbath, on Sunday morning, Jesus rose from the dead. This fact led to the disciples and early Christians meeting together weekly on Sunday, "the first day of the week" (see Mark 16:9; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). Each Sunday in early Christian worship, believers broke bread (perhaps meaning they celebrated the Lord's Supper), perhaps received a collection of money or other gifts (for the widows, orphans, the poor, and to support apostles and missionaries), heard the scriptures read (probably including the Old Testament, gospel portions, and letters from the apostles), and taught or discussed the scriptures. Early in the morning, the women went to care for the entombed body of Jesus. They did not expect to see Him raised from the dead. The "other Mary" was probably the mother of James and John. If the "other Mary" were Jesus' mother, Matthew most

likely would have identified her as Jesus' mother, who would be grieving.

**(Matthew 28:2) And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.**

The earthquake was explained by the coming of the angel to roll away the stone door in front of the tomb (a cave cut from rock) for the women to enter. The angel then sat on the stone, remaining at the tomb entrance. The angel did not come to let Jesus out of the tomb (as Jesus had the stone rolled away for Lazarus to come out of the tomb alive when He called Lazarus to come out). The women found the tomb empty. They did not see Jesus walk out of the tomb when the angel rolled away the stone. Jesus had passed through the solid stone; just as He would later pass through walls or a closed door to appear to His disciples who were fearfully hiding in a locked room (see John 20:19).

**(Matthew 28:3) His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.**

The angel appeared to both the guards and the women. The women were not confused about where Jesus was buried or the location of His tomb (see Matthew 27:61). The guards reacted with fear, similar to the guards' terrified response when Jesus died on the cross and there was an earthquake (see Matthew 27:54). The Bible says we can entertain angels unawares (see Hebrews 13:2). In the case of Jesus' resurrection, both the guards and the women were aware of the angel coming to the tomb to open it, and they were overwhelmed at his appearing.

**(Matthew 28:4) And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.**

The Roman guards had both a physical and mental reaction to the angel. Rather than bravely standing their ground as they had been taught and challenging the angel over his interference, they shook with fear and fell to the ground. Perhaps they had learned from the guards at the crucifixion (or were they the same guards?) that Jesus was the Son of God, so they

expected immediate execution from an angry God at the hands of the angel. The guards collapsed unconscious, and the women witnessed their response to the angel's visitation. The women remained aware of all that was happening around them, and they would later report what they saw.

**(Matthew 28:5) But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified."**

The angel disregarded the unconscious guards and sought to comfort the women who had come to honor Jesus by caring for His dead body (as they supposed) according to their burial practices. The angel reinforced the fact that Jesus had indeed been crucified; that in fact He had died, and He had been buried at that exact location where the angel appeared. The women were right to come there looking for Jesus, but they were not accurate in their thinking, because they expected to find Jesus still dead. They had not understood what Jesus had taught about His death and His resurrection from the dead.

**(Matthew 28:6) He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.**

The angel corrected their thinking and invited them to become witnesses regarding the empty tomb. He declared that they would not find Jesus' body, because Jesus had been raised (though at one time Jesus had been laid in the new empty tomb, in which no other body had ever been laid). Jesus' resurrection had occurred sometime prior that morning, prior to the opening of the tomb by the angel and the earthquake. The angel's perfect timing made it possible for the women to see the guards guarding the tomb, experience the earthquake, and see the stone rolled away before they entered the tomb. There could be no confusion or doubt about someone having come to the tomb earlier to remove Jesus' body.

**(Matthew 28:7) Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you."**

After the women saw where Jesus had been laid and the angel once again

emphasized that Jesus had been dead and had been raised from the dead, the angel told them that Jesus also had the ability to travel to Galilee (He had not just been resuscitated, which would have required months of rehabilitation after being crucified and put into a tomb without proper medical treatment). To overcome His disciples' unbelief, Jesus would later need to demonstrate His fully human resurrected glorified powers by appearing to them in a locked room to convince them that He was alive and well and that they should travel to Galilee to see Him again as He had told them.

**(Matthew 28:8) So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.**

The women believed the angel because he was no ordinary man. His appearance was as lightning, his clothes were snow white, he had defeated the Roman guards, and miracles accompanied his appearing. They witnessed the guards fall in fear. They witnessed the empty tomb. They witnessed the earthquake and the earthquake's perfect timing. They witnessed the angel roll the stone away without the help of other angels or people. Presumably, the disciples felt the great earthquake where they were in hiding, and the women could explain the cause of the earthquake. The women could give good and sufficient reasons for the disciples to believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but the disciples were foolish and slow to believe (see Luke 24:25-26).

**(Matthew 28:9) And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.**

Jesus became the second and ultimate witness that He had been raised from the dead. The Bible teaches the need for two witnesses in case of a trial. Two witnesses to an event should be believed if they are known to be trustworthy. Faithful Jews feared God, and they knew that witnesses would be held accountable by God for bearing false witness or lying. In addition to the events surrounding Jesus' resurrection, both the angel and the living, resurrected Lord Jesus bore witness to the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead. At this point in time, the women worshiped Jesus as would

all those in the early Christian church. Jesus received their worship as was His right as the Son of God. Angels and apostles (no matter what miracles they worked) always refused the worship of those they impressed; saying only God deserved and should be worshiped. Jesus did not refuse to be worshiped. He willingly received the worship of others as God, because He is God—One God in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**(Matthew 28:10) Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”**

This was the second time that the women were told not to be afraid. Though Jesus is the Son of God, He called His disciples “brothers” (see also Hebrews 2:11). He reaffirmed what the angel told the women. Again, the women now have two witnesses to the command that the disciples are to go to Galilee where they will see Jesus alive. The command was given to them twice by two different persons (the angel and Jesus). Obedience to this command would become a test for the disciples, and they failed the test by refusing to believe and remaining in the locked room until Jesus appeared to them to convince them He was raised from the dead—which also gives us more good reasons to believe that the facts presented regarding Jesus’ resurrection are true. The disciples were hard to convince, and only seeing Jesus alive would convince them that He had been raised from the dead.

**(Matthew 28:11) While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place.**

The women went to reveal the good news of Jesus’ resurrection to His disciples as He commanded. The guards went to reveal the “bad news” (from their perspective) to the people responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion and death. They felt the earthquake, and presumably so did the chief priests and the Roman authorities, for the earthquake was great. The guards saw the angel and the empty tomb, and they reported all of this to the religious authorities. The religious authorities were given the facts, but they chose to ignore the facts and began to spread a lie about Jesus and His disciples. Beginning with the preaching of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, their lies were easily refuted and thousands came to believe in Jesus the Messiah.

**(Matthew 28:12) And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers**

The elders of the people were convinced by the facts the soldiers presented to them, but just as they had lied and borne false witness to crucify Jesus, one who was innocent, so they bribed and implicated the guards in bearing false witness regarding His resurrection. To avoid being held responsible by the people for the death of the Son of God, and for other reasons, they bribed the soldiers (another crime by the religious leaders) to join in their lying schemes.

**(Matthew 28:13) and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’**

The lie that the religious leaders devised is highly implausible. The disciples’ hopes were crushed when Jesus died. They went into hiding. They would not venture out of hiding for fear of those who had crucified their leader. But the women did go to Jesus’ grave. The disciples were hiding in fear that they would be found and crucified too, as rebels, to satisfy the blood lust of the religious leaders. The women went to embalm Jesus’ body. None of Jesus’ followers had any reason to steal His body or try to concoct a fraud that would lead to their certain deaths. Jesus’ dead body could not have protected them if they had stolen His body. Everything the Bible teaches about Jesus’ death and resurrection and the response of the religious leaders and the disciples is plausible and consistent with the Old Testament prophecies, Jesus’ prophecies, and the teaching and miracles that Jesus performed during His ministry. Jesus’ disciples certainly would not have had the courage to steal Jesus’ body or fight armed Roman guards to steal a body. They would never have taken the chance of awakening the Roman guards while they slept as they tried to quietly roll away a heavy stone from the door of the tomb. How could the Roman guards have stayed asleep while a stone was rolled away? They also knew that if they slept, they would be killed by the Romans for failure to do their duty (see Acts 16:27).

**(Matthew 28:14) And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”**

Everyone knew that Roman guards are punished for failure to do their duty. Their excuse should have resulted in their execution. So, the religious leaders determined to accomplish their scheme by plotting with the governor or lying to him to keep the guards alive and lying. Still, everyone would have known that the guards should have been executed. Why weren't they executed, people might ask. The guards needed the leaders to protect them as they lied about the disappearance of Jesus' body for them. If they had not been bribed and protected by the Jewish leaders, to try to escape punishment for dereliction of duty the guards would have had to tell the truth about the angel at the tomb, which would not have been believed.

**(Matthew 28:15) So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.**

Even today, various atheists and other religious teachers promote the story concocted by these religious leaders (or some variation of the story) in their efforts to deny the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. This is another Bible prophecy that has been fulfilled. For almost 2,000 years since the gospel of Matthew was written "this story is still told among the Jews to this day."

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Give some of the reasons you personally believe in the resurrection of Jesus.
2. What is the most compelling reason you can think of for believing in the resurrection of Jesus from these verses in Matthew 28?
3. What other reasons can you give for believing in the resurrection of Jesus, either from other parts of the Bible, the experience of others, or your own personal experience?
4. The Bible, along with an old hymn, teach that Jesus lives within our hearts. What difference does Jesus make when He comes to live within our hearts?

5. Why is the resurrection of Jesus important as part of the good news?

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