



## International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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### **John 20:1-10 Commentary New Revised Standard Version**

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

follow the verse-by-verse [\*International Bible Study 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 Study 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 Study Forum\*](#).

**(John 20:1) Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.**

In Jesus' day, the Sabbath was Saturday. The first day of the week was Sunday. Today, some secular calendars show the first day of the week is Monday: the beginning of a working week. When Mary went to the tomb it was still dark, and John does not tell us whether the sun rose while she stood at the empty tomb door. The tomb was a cave with a stone door that had been rolled away so she could

see into the tomb, though perhaps the light was still dim. The tomb was like the tomb of Lazarus, and before sunset on Friday (the beginning of the Sabbath) Jesus would have been quickly wrapped as Lazarus was wrapped (see John 11:1-44). The other Gospels give even more details about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the guards, and the appearance of angels that John did not need to repeat.

**(John 20:2) So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”**

John, the author of this Gospel, is considered “the one whom Jesus loved.” John never claimed that Jesus loved him more than the other disciples. Jesus loved them all and called them His friends. In his gospel, John never drew attention to himself personally, but kept the focus on Jesus. John did not want to say, “Peter and I” or “Peter and John” because of his humility and objectivity. Mary assumed that Jesus’ body had been “taken” or stolen by people she did not know (notice: she did not assume that Jesus was alive and raised from the dead). She expected His dead body to have been “laid” somewhere after it was taken, but she knew not where that might be. Even though Jesus had foretold His resurrection to them, she never expected that He would be able to walk away from His tomb or talk to anyone again.

**(John 20:3) Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.**

Peter and John took the responsibility upon themselves to verify Mary's report. They were probably staying at the same home in Jerusalem during Passover. The other disciples would probably have been in other homes. After Judas murdered himself, there were now 11 disciples of Jesus, in addition to the women and other friends and followers of Jesus; therefore, they could not all sleep in the same house. When Jesus was arrested most of His disciples fled, but Peter and John followed Jesus to the trial in the high priest's home. John followed Jesus to the cross and to the tomb. John and Mary and some others would have known the exact location of Jesus' tomb, because we can expect them to have helped bury Jesus in the tomb.

**(John 20:4) The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.**

Because John was at the cross, he most likely helped take Jesus' body down from the cross. He probably also helped carry Jesus' body to His burial place, but John does not draw attention to himself in his Gospel by always saying, "I did this." He and Mary knew without a doubt that Jesus was dead, so they expected to find His body in the tomb unless others had removed it. John probably outran Peter to the tomb because he knew exactly where it was located.

After Peter denied Jesus, we have no evidence that Peter went with John to the cross or to the burial site before he and John ran to the burial site on that first resurrection Sunday morning. Mary followed behind them (perhaps with some other disciples of Jesus), and she remained at the tomb after everyone else had returned to their homes.

**(John 20:5) He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.**

John bent down and looked in the tomb. He could see into the cave because of the rising sun. The tomb opening probably faced East, so the rising sun would have shown into the tomb. Today, many Christians are buried so when they rise from the dead, they will be facing East when Jesus Christ comes again. The linen wrappings were most likely white and could be easily seen by Peter and John from outside of the tomb. The wrappings were there, but Jesus body was gone. We do not know why John did not enter the tomb; perhaps he was cautiously thinking about what he saw.

**(John 20:6) Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,**

Peter's personality influenced him to go into the tomb first. Though Peter had denied knowing Jesus during Jesus' trial, many times in the past he had demonstrated his bravery. When Jesus questioned His disciples about who people said He was, Peter was the first to tell Jesus

that He was the Messiah. Peter became a witness to the fact that the burial wrappings were there in the tomb, but Jesus' body was gone. Mary, Peter, and John saw that Jesus' body was gone, and from the Old Testament we know that two witnesses were needed to establish a fact. It would have been highly unlikely that Jesus' body would have been removed by grave robbers and the wrappings left behind. Grave robbers would most likely have carried a body away still wrapped for burial. So, the facts that the wrappings were there while Jesus' body was gone are good evidence for and consistent with the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. As Jesus would later unexpectedly appear in a locked room to meet His disciples, so Jesus could easily pass through the linen wrappings without the need to be unwrapped as they had to unwrap Lazarus after Jesus called him forth from his tomb.

**(John 20:7) and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.**

Much has been said of the wrappings that were left behind. We know that if the body had been stolen, the robbers would not have taken the time to lay the head wrapping carefully and neatly to one side. If left behind, they would have hurriedly tossed the head wrapping aside. Most probably, they would have taken the body still wrapped or they would have left the body after looking for any valuables to steal (perhaps the valuable spices, for

example). The Romans certainly would not have been careful if they had removed His body, but they would not have had any incentive to steal His body. The Jews would not have defiled themselves by touching a dead body, especially during Passover, because they would not even enter Pilate's headquarters for fear of becoming defiled during Passover. The evidence of the grave cloths being left behind is consistent with the fact of Jesus' resurrection. The grave cloths may have lain exactly as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had left Jesus' body, and looked as though Jesus had passed through them and they had collapsed after He rose from the dead.

**(John 20:8) Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;**

John also entered the tomb. He saw exactly what Peter saw and what Mary had reported she saw. Therefore, in his Gospel, John recorded by name that at least three witnesses had seen that the stone had been rolled away and Jesus' body was gone. As John explained in the next verse, they did not yet understand the scriptures nor did they expect the resurrection of Jesus from the dead; therefore, John may have meant that "he saw and believed" that the body of Jesus was gone. John's Gospel reports what he himself witnessed rather than giving a secondhand report of what others experienced. We are not told in the Bible that Peter and John took the grave cloths back with them to their home or what eventually happened

to them, but these grave cloths would have had sacred significance to them, so they might have been carefully preserved by those who loved Jesus.

**(John 20:9) for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.**

Up to this point, they did not remember or understand what Jesus had taught them about His resurrection from the dead or raising up “this temple” in three days. In John 2:19-22, we read, “Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” Peter and John confirmed what Mary had told them, so we do have eyewitness accounts that are consistent with Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and His appearances to His disciples. They had to be convinced by personal experience by Jesus himself that He was alive; so, Jesus found ways to convince them by appearing to them in different ways and times. Because they were so difficult to convince of Jesus’ resurrection, we have good evidence that they were convinced by ample and sufficient proofs that Jesus rose from the dead and lived according to the Scriptures.

**(John 20:10) Then the disciples returned to their homes.**

John reported that Peter and John (and perhaps some other disciples who went with them) returned to their homes instead of going back to the empty tomb, which might be dangerous for them if Jesus' enemies had stolen His body. These "homes" were not their primary homes in Galilee or "second homes" in Jerusalem (for Jesus' disciples too poor to have second homes). These homes were places of residence for His disciples provided by some of Jesus' followers who lived in Jerusalem or these homes were rooms in inns that they would have rented as some of the many pilgrims in Jerusalem did who came to celebrate the Passover. The disciples believed the testimony of Mary, Peter, and John; therefore, they did not need to go see the empty tomb for themselves. Perhaps Peter and John took the grave cloths as evidence that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. No one knew why Jesus' body was gone, but they all believed that His body was gone based on reliable testimony. Mary remained alone weeping at the tomb. Later, Jesus' disciples would gather again, perhaps in the same upper room where they had met to celebrate Jesus' last supper with them, and Jesus would appear to them and convince them He had risen from the dead.

## Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think John omitted from his Gospel some of the important events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus that the other Gospels included; such as, the presence of the guards?
2. What reason did Mary Magdalene give Peter and John for why the tomb was empty? Why do you think she assumed this? Why is her assumption important evidence in support of the fact of the resurrection?
3. What importance do you place on the emphasis John placed on the tomb being empty except for the burial wrappings?
4. John said he believed. What do you think he believed? Give a reason for your answer.
5. Does someone need to see Jesus to become a true believer in Jesus? Why is this truth important for both believers and unbelievers to know?

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