

The predominant explanation that the Jews used to try to discredit the resurrection of Jesus was that the disciples had stolen His body so that they could claim that He had risen from the dead (Matt. 28:11-15). However, the disciples proved to be among the most skeptical when eyewitnesses reported to have seen Jesus alive and did not believe until they saw Him with their own eyes.

Verses 1-8: The day after the sabbath, Mary Magdalene and a small group of other women got up early in the morning were bringing spices to the sepulcher where Jesus was buried so that they could anoint His body. On the way, they were concerned about the stone blocking the entrance to the sepulcher but when they arrived they found that it had already been rolled away. Entering the sepulcher, they became afraid at the sight of an angel sitting on one side of the chamber but the angel told them not to be afraid because Jesus had risen from the dead. The angel then sends the women to tell the disciples that Jesus was risen and that He would meet them in Galilee as He had promised.

9 Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.

Mark briefly alludes to a scene that John describes in more detail (John 20:14-18), where Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene at the sepulcher. Mark mentions that Jesus had cast “seven devils” out of Mary, as does Luke (Luke 8:2). Being delivered from being possessed by seven demonic spirits would make anyone grateful, which would explain why Mary was among the first to arrive at the sepulcher after the sabbath. Her early arrival gave her the opportunity to be the first to see Jesus after His resurrection.

10 And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11 And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.

“And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept” – Mary went to the disciples to tell them what she had seen as she had been instructed by the angel (v. 7) and by Jesus (Matt. 28:10). She finds them still mourning the death of Jesus. Jesus had told them that He would be crucified and then rise from the dead on the third day, but they were obviously not expecting the resurrection to happen. They were mourning, indicating that they believed that Jesus’ death was permanent.

“And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not” – She tells them all that she had seen that morning. The evidence that Jesus was alive was: 1) the sepulcher was empty (v. 6b); 2) the angel’s testimony that Jesus had risen (v. 6a); 3) Mary had seen Jesus with her own eyes. However, the disciples did not believe her or the women with her (**Luke 24:11** “*And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not*”).

12 After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. 13 And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.

“After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country” – Mark is summarizing the incident of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). Mark says that Jesus appeared “in another form” and Luke’s account says that their eyes were “holden” (restrained) so that they did not recognize Him at first (Luke 24:16, 31).

“And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them” – When the two men finally recognized that it was Jesus who was with them, He disappeared, after which they immediately came back to Jerusalem that same night to tell the disciples and those who had gathered with them that Jesus was alive and that they had seen Him (Luke 24:31, 33). These two men were the second set of witnesses to come to the disciples testifying that Jesus was alive and the disciples still did not believe.

14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

“Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat” – By now Judas Iscariot had committed suicide (Matt. 27:3-10), leaving only eleven disciples remaining. They happened to be eating a meal at this time when Jesus appears to the group.

“and upbraided [reproach; rebuke] them with their unbelief and hardness of heart” – After all the teaching they received from Jesus and the miracles that they had seen Him perform, they still had not believed Him when He told them beforehand about all that He would suffer, His death, and that He would rise from the dead. He now rebukes them for having such hardened hearts that they would not believe all these things that He had told them.

“because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen” – Not only did they not believe Him when He said He would rise again on the third day, but they had stubbornly disbelieved all of the the eyewitnesses of His resurrection.

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” – This verse parallels the Great Commission given in Matthew (Matt. 28:19-20) as well as the command that Jesus gave them just before He ascended (Acts 1:8). We, as part of His church, are all to do our part in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth so that all can have the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ.

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” – This statement is not saying that baptism is necessary for salvation, and we know that because the criteria for being damned is not “he that believeth not or is not baptized.” Faith is the determining factor of salvation while baptism is an act of obedience that indicates that the believer has repented of his/her sins (**Acts 2:38** “*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*”).

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

“And these signs [mark; token] shall follow [to be present with; to be associated with] them that believe” – Jesus is saying that there will be certain signs associated with those that believe in Him. There are those in Christian circles who believe that these signs should follow all Christians, even to the present day, but it seems that these signs were meant mainly for the apostles, who were given the specific authority to perform such signs. In verses 17-18, the word “shall” is inserted by the translators to indicate that the associated verbs are future-tense (“shall follow,” “shall cast out,” “shall speak,” etc.). There is no indication in the Greek that these things should happen or will always happen – merely that they will happen at some time in the future.

Matt. 10:1 *“And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.”*

2 Cor. 12:12 *“Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.”*

The apostle Paul emphasizes to the Corinthians that not all believers have the same spiritual gifts, including the ones that Jesus mentions in vs. 17-18:

1 Cor. 12:29-30 *“Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?”*

“In my name shall they cast out devils” – This authority was given to the apostles and it is dangerous for those who to whom it has not been given to attempt to use it. The name of Jesus Christ is powerful, but it is not a magical incantation that anyone can use. The seven sons of Sceva discovered this the hard way. **Acts 19:13-16** *“Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”*

“they shall speak with new [fresh; unused] tongues” – This refers to the sign of tongues that began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11). The word “new” refers to languages being spoken that are unknown to the speaker, an obvious miracle. The apostle Paul explained to the Corinthians that the purpose of tongues was as a sign to unbelievers (**1 Cor. 14:21-22** *“In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe”*).

“They shall take up serpents” – The phrase “shall take up” is, like the other “shall” phrases in these two verses, one Greek word. Jesus may have alluded to this sign earlier when speaking to the disciples after they had returned from preaching the kingdom, healing and casting out demonic spirits. They were giddy over the fact that they had authority over the demonic spirits and Jesus spoke of the protection He would give them (**Luke 10:19** *“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you”*). This promise seems to have protected the apostle Paul when he was shipwrecked on Malta (**Acts 28:3-5** *“And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm”*). Paul did not pick up the serpent on purpose, but God protected him from the consequences of its bite. This is in contrast with those who use this verse to justify purposely handling snakes in a worship service. God does not protect many of those who get bitten doing this and they die from the snake bite.

“and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them” – Unlike the other signs mentioned, there is no scriptural example of this sign ever happening. Notice the word “if,” indicating that drinking poison was not an intentional thing, but if it happened by accident (or perhaps an intentional poisoning by an enemy of the gospel) then God would protect the believer who drank the poison.

“they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” – Many examples of this sign being exercised are recorded in the book of Acts. Along with the authority to cast out demonic spirits, this authority was given specifically to the apostles by Jesus (Matt. 10:1).

Verses 19-20: When Jesus finished speaking to the disciples, He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9). The disciples then obey Jesus’ commands and preach the gospel everywhere they went, being accompanied by the signs that were promised. These final verses of Mark (vs. 15-20) seem to summarize things recorded in the first chapter of Acts (Acts 1:8-9).