

Terebinth Tree

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Lord, you know everything...

John 21:17



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Prologue

Room for Human Error

‘Therefore, my dear ones, as you have always obeyed [*my suggestions*], so now, not only [*with the enthusiasm you would show*] in my presence but much more because I am absent, work out (cultivate, carry out to the goal, and fully complete) your own salvation with reverence and awe and trembling (self-distrust, with serious caution, tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against temptation, timidly shrinking from whatever might offend God and discredit the name of Christ). [*Not in your own strength*] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [*energizing and creating in you the power and desire*], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight.’¹

Godly grace and human responsibility in man’s battle against sin – man’s responsibility to take a stand against sin and God’s grace to persuade and empower him to oppose sin and to execute good intentions. The working and interrelationship of these two concepts, grace and responsibility, illustrate one of the biggest mysteries of the Christian life. A great mystery and apparent contradiction, which, just like the immensity of God’s love and the immeasurability of His Creation will forever be outside the reach of human understanding for as long as man will be on this earth. In spite of our responsibility and God’s empowerment and persuasion our sinful nature will still cause us to stumble from time to time in our battle against sin. This brings an even more unexplainable dimension of God’s love to the fore, namely His willingness to leave room for human error.

Each believer has a personal responsibility to treat sin seriously in his or her life. Sin is not something to be taken lightly after one has received God’s forgiveness and salvation, since if we really do love the Lord Jesus Christ we would do our utmost to keep His commandments.² We have to address sin in our life of whichever type, form or nature it may be. It cannot be otherwise since sin assails His holiness and the price Jesus has paid for our sins on the cross is immeasurable and boundless in value, greater than anything the human mind will ever be able to determine or deliberate on.³

¹ Philippians 2:12-13 (AMP)

² If you [*really*] love Me, you will keep (obey) My commands (John14:15 AMP). For the [*true*] love of God is this: that we do His commands [*keep His ordinances and are mindful of His precepts and teaching*]. And these orders of His are not irksome (burdensome, oppressive, or grievous) (1 John 5:3).

³ [*Live*] as children of obedience [*to God*]; do not conform yourselves to the evil desires [*that governed you*] in your former ignorance [*when you did not know the requirements of the Gospel*]. But as the One Who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all your conduct and manner of living. For it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy. And if you call upon Him as [*your*] Father Who judges each one impartially according to

God's grace is revealed by not expecting from us to lead a holy life in our own strength, but by empowering us in this regard by His indwelling Spirit. He not only gives us the strength to do His will, but He also gives us the desire to do it.

God will never compel us to live a holy life. The believer's responsibility therefore implies a daily submission to the Holy Spirit, Who reveals a holy jealousy by not wanting to share us with the world.⁴ It implies the believer frequently requesting God for His Spirit to be a greater reality in his or her life – to become more sensitive to sin and to make the 'will' and the 'work' a greater reality in his or her life.⁵

Something we should never lose sight of is that even as we as believers exercise our responsibility in the correct manner by making the right choices in our battle against sin we can never deserve anything as a result of this, not even God's favour since God's grace remains sovereign and supreme. All that we are and all which we have received must be seen as grace – our redemption, salvation and justification in Christ Jesus as well as our spiritual empowerment to walk the path of sanctification. No initiative we take to resist sin can earn us anything.

Taking everything into consideration we must still remember that all believers live in a sinful world and as a result of our sinful nature we will never be without sin as long as we remain on this earth. No matter how good our intentions might be and although we are assisted by the Holy Spirit we will still often stumble while executing our responsibilities.⁶ With this reality as background we can again just stand in awe before God's love and grace which leaves room for stumbling sinners and for continuous forgiveness after repentance.⁷ This room which He allows in the execution of our responsibilities results in spiritual growth by making mistakes, but it never implies an indifference towards sin. God's room for human

what he does, [*then*] you should conduct yourselves with true reverence throughout the time of your temporary residence [*on the earth, whether long or short*]. You must know (recognize) that you were redeemed (ransomed) from the useless (fruitless) way of living inherited by tradition from [*your*] forefathers, not with corruptible things [*such as*] silver and gold, But [*you were purchased*] with the precious blood of Christ (the Messiah), like that of a [*sacrificial*] lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:14-19)

⁴ You [*are like*] unfaithful wives [*having illicit love affairs with the world and breaking your marriage vow to God*]! Do you not know that being the world's friend is being God's enemy? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world takes his stand as an enemy of God. Or do you suppose that the Scripture is speaking to no purpose that says, The Spirit Whom He has caused to dwell in us yearns over us and He yearns for the Spirit [*to be welcome*] with a jealous love? (James 4:4-5 AMP)

⁵ If you then, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts [*gifts that are to their advantage*] to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask and continue to ask Him! (Luke 11:13 AMP).

⁶ If we say we have no sin [*refusing to admit that we are sinners*], we delude and lead ourselves astray, and the Truth [*which the Gospel presents*] is not in us [*does not dwell in our hearts*]. (1 John 1:8 AMP)

⁷ If we [*freely*] admit that we have sinned and confess our sins, He is faithful and just (true to His own nature and promises) and will forgive our sins [*dismiss our lawlessness*] and [*continuously*] cleanse us from all unrighteousness [*everything not in conformity to His will in purpose, thought, and action*]. (1 John 1:9 AMP)

error reflects a unique dimension of His grace and forgiveness, which just like all the other dimensions of His love, can only fill us with adoration and awe. We can only stand in awe that God knows man, that He *knows everything*. He knows how difficult it is for us at times to resist sin, how fragile the believer's faith and courage may be from time to time and He also knows when there is heartfelt repentance.

One of the most touching narratives in the Bible which tells of God's room for human stumbling, is the account of Peter's denial the night in the courtyard of Caiaphas' palace when he indicated that he did not know Jesus and that he did not want to be associated with Him. This is a narrative of the heart and it is so extraordinary and special that it is almost impossible to express its true sentiment in words.

Peter's Denial

It all started earlier that night in the Garden of Gethsemane when Peter, together with all the other disciples, took flight, when they deserted the Master and were scattered like sheep without a shepherd.⁸

The mob was moving forward determinately, meandering through the olive grove like a living organism. Armed with sword and club and with cold, stony faces, which were lit up sporadically by torches and lamps, they came to take hold of Jesus, to bind Him and lead Him away so that He may be condemned.

After Judas' kiss of betrayal Peter wanted to make a stand at first. In his impetuosity he had the courage to take on the whole armed mob on his own. He drew his sword and took a wild swing at the person closest to him, which happened to be Malchus, a slave of the high priest. His intention was to separate Malchus' head from his shoulders, but he only succeeded in depriving him of one of his ears. Only after Jesus reprimanded Peter of his thoughtless behaviour did reality dawn on him. His courage left him and then he fled hotfoot into the night together with the rest of the disciples. He ran into the protective cover of darkness unaware of the olive branches leaving red welts across his face, arms and upper body.

It was only later that Peter would partly come to his senses. Maybe it was the cold night air or the burning pain from the olive branches, but somewhere between Gethsemane and the palace of Caiaphas Peter could find enough courage to follow Jesus and his armed escort at a distance. At first he followed reluctantly since his courage was at a low, but in the end he proceeded as far as the courtyard of the high priest's palace with the aid of John.

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⁸ Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:27

What happened in Gethsemane was actually preceded by Jesus' prediction earlier that evening while they were partaking of the Passover in the upper room and after the Twelve were in each other's hair arguing about whom of them must be seen as the most important. Jesus' warning was disturbing or rather ominous to say the least. Satan asked permission from God to put Peter and his fellow disciples to the test, to sift them like wheat, but Jesus assured Peter that he had already interceded for him before the Father. In the process Peter would not lay down his faith permanently never to take it up again, but in the end he would make a turnabout after which he should strengthen his fellow believers.⁹ To Peter this warning was totally inappropriate, if not uncalled for. How could the Master question his loyalty? Was he not indeed the leader of the Twelve? Peter's reaction was self-assured and thoughtless. Even though all the other might desert Him, he was willing to be thrown into prison with Jesus, even to face death together with Him. His faith and trust in the Master was as steady as a rock. It would definitely not falter nor fail.

Only much later that evening Peter would grasp the full meaning of the Master's answer – words which would stick to his mind for a long time while eating piecemeal into his conscience.

'...I tell you, Peter, before a [*single*] cock shall crow this day, you will three times [*utterly*] deny that you know Me.'¹⁰

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We find Peter in the courtyard at the back of the high priest's palace near the well where he was warming his hands at a fire since the night air was cold, nearly as cold as the anguish which has taken hold of his heart.¹¹ He tried his utmost to stay unnoticed among the slaves and guards, but the glow from the fire lit up his face and it was a slave girl of the high priest who recognised him first.

'You are surely one of them, one of the followers of the Galilean who was brought here a short time ago'

Peter's denial was brusque with an edge to it.

'You don't know what you are talking about. I don't even know Him.'

⁹ 'Simon, Simon (Peter), listen! Satan has asked excessively that [*all of*] you be given up to him [*out of the power and keeping of God*], that he might sift [*all of*] you like grain, But I have prayed especially for you [*Peter*], that your [*own*] faith may not fail; and when you yourself have turned again, strengthen and establish your brethren.' (Luke 22:31-32 AMP)

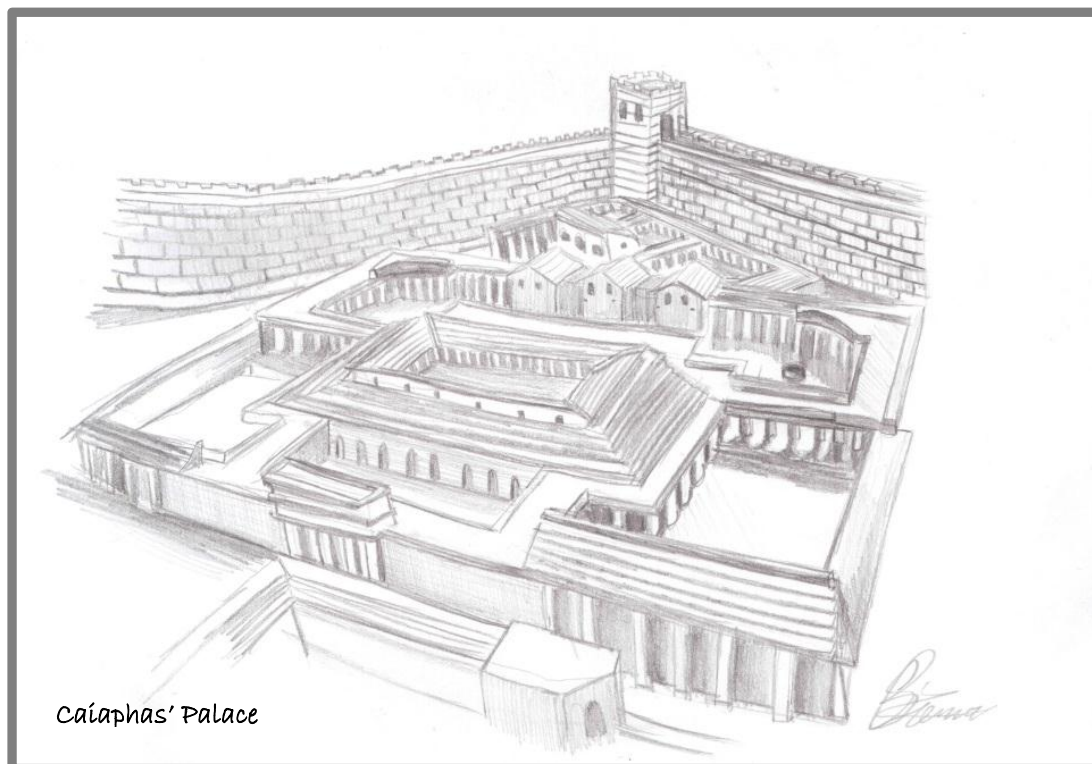
¹⁰ Luke 22:34

¹¹ The description of the events in the courtyards of the high priest's palace is a combination of the various accounts as recorded in the four gospels.

Fear was again getting the better of Peter. It was taking hold of him by the throat and was busy strangling him. He got up nonchalantly and left the fire. After a short while he tried to slip away to one of the anterior courtyards unnoticed. However, another slave girl confronted him just before the colonnade separating the courtyards from one another whilst addressing the bystanders:

‘You know she was right. He was one of them.’

Peter felt like an animal in a cage: ‘No, you are making a mistake. I swear by the holy temple of God that I don’t know this Man.’



At last he reached the anterior courtyard, but it did not provide much relief. It still felt as if the slaves and guards at the fire were staring right through him from behind. He tried to hide in the darkest corner of the courtyard. At first all went well, but just when he thought that everybody had forgotten about him, one of the high priest’s slaves recognised him.

‘Did I not observe you with Him in the garden?’

It directed the attention to him once more. All of a sudden several of the bystanders drew closer, crowding him like a predator smelling a prey.

‘You are definitely one of them. There is no doubt about it. Your speech is giving you away as a Galilean.’

To Peter it felt as if he was surrounded by a pack of dogs who were threatening to tear him to pieces. The foul language from his days as a fisherman came back to him all of a sudden. It flowed from his lips, stinging words which gave strength to his denial.

‘May I be cursed if I don’t speak the truth. I really don’t know this Man and I don’t want to know Him either!’

Peter’s words were not even cold when it was as if a tangible silence descended upon the courtyards – almost as if the whole of creation in its infinity was holding its breath. Just for a moment. And then a cock started crowing from somewhere within the courtyard at the back. It reverberated between the walls. The sound bounced back from everywhere and hit Peter at the back of his head, between his eyes and against his temples as if it wanted to fell him to the ground. He looked up, confused and bewildered, like somebody who had just woken from a deep sleep. He stiffened, unable to move, next to him on the stairs stood the Master. At that moment He was just being led from the palace and He looked Peter straight in the eyes with a look that Peter would never forget as long as he lived. It pierced his soul. It was full of sadness, and full of love and concern, but without reproach.

And then Peter broke down, he rushed outside through the entrance to cry his heart out. It was dark and the night enfolded him, from the inside and outside.

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For the rest of that night and the nights following it would prey on Peter’s conscience, without end, the crowing of the cock and his threefold denial. It would devour him, piece by piece. His conscience would not leave him in peace. He was like somebody drowning in a stormy sea. Relentlessly reproach would follow upon reproach, like breakers washing over him, the one after the other, never ending. It felt like he had been tossed in the air, hanging helplessly between heaven and earth somewhere above a threshing-floor like wheat being winnowed.

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The sun had already set and the Sabbath was something of the past. The doors of the room were bolted securely. To one side Peter was hiding in a corner with his face in his hands, almost too scared to breathe. It felt as if the temple guards might at any moment start banging on the door in order to drag them before the Sanhedrin.

Darkness, darker than the darkest night, was taking hold of Peter. The Master was dead and everything was something of the past now, everything they believed in, the kingdom of God and the re-establishment of the Jewish nation, all the things the Master talked about. In the end everything was of no avail. After all the hope, after three years on the

dusty roads of Galilee and Judea, He was only a prophet and not the long awaited Messiah.¹²

But above all Peter missed the Master's company. There was a serious void deep within him which nothing or nobody could fill and in the meantime he was being engulfed by darkness while his conscience would also give him no respite.

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Peter's robe was bound up hurriedly. His arms were moving rhythmically in order to keep up with the rapid motion of his legs. The leather soles of his sandals were battling to find a foothold on the stony path. Somewhere in front of him in the garden was John. To his left a number of cypresses were pointing heavenwards like long slender fingers while to his right a terebinth tree¹³ stood in full bloom, a mass of red like the blood of a paschal lamb, while at the same time also budding with the vivid green of new life.

All these images were being drawn into the confusion of his turbulent mind and it would take some time to settle down. Peter and John were on their way to the tomb since Mary Magdalene and some of the other women came to tell them that they were there early that morning and that they had found the tomb empty. Somebody had taken away the Lord's body! This news upset them severely, so severely that he and John jumped up from where they were having breakfast and they were already through the door when Mary called after them, something about angels at the tomb and having had an encounter with Jesus.¹⁴ An encounter with Jesus! His thoughts kept milling around in his head as if it could not find any direction. How is it possible if Jesus' body is not even in the tomb anymore? It is a known fact that women are emotional and unstable beings and that they are unreliable witnesses. The shock and distress of the empty tomb must have been too great and too sudden.

¹² One may conclude from the events following immediately on Jesus' crucifixion that the disciples were in serious doubt regarding His Messiahship. See *Addendum 1: The Disciples' [Doubt and Despair](#)* for an additional exposition in this regard.

¹³ The terebinth referred to in this case is *Pistacia palaestina*, a deciduous tree or shrub with bright red clusters of smallish flowers, which appear, together with new copper-green foliage, on the male plant at the time of the Jewish Passover. It is amazing that this terebinth species, which in all probability was in full bloom during Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, may be seen as a symbolisation of the blood of the paschal lamb (red flowers) and of Jesus' resurrection and the new life it involves for believers (copper-green foliage). The flowers and foliage refer to the righteousness, salvation and justification of sinners.

¹⁴ It is assumed that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene while she was on her way to the disciples to tell them that the tomb was empty as portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 28:8-9). John mentions that Jesus appeared to Mary only after she returned to the empty tomb with Peter and John (John 20:11-18). For a possible explanation of these presumably contradicting portrayals of Jesus' appearance to Mary see *Addendum 3: [Contradicting Events](#) at the Tomb?*



Peter's thoughts kept swirling and milling around. Any form of faith and hope had disappeared, while his conscience had become raw – as red and raw as the flowers of a terebinth tree. How could he have turned and run with the other disciples the night terror took hold of them. If he only had enough courage to stand fast. And then he denied and rejected the Master – three times before the cock started crowing. After that he became totally unstuck. He could not even find enough courage to be present at the crucifixion. The Master had died and now the Jewish leaders had even taken His body away out of pure enmity and malice. He, Peter, had blood on his hands.

In front of him Peter could see the tomb with the stone rolled away, just as the women had said. John had already come to a standstill and he was stooping in order to look into the open grave. When Peter reached him he knew that it was true. John stood to one side now, dejected, the expression on his face told but one thing. The grave was empty! They had taken Him away indeed!

Peter was exhausted from the run. He stumbled into the grave, bewildered and confused, and saw the grave cloths lying there and then he knew! It struck him like a blinding light from heaven, a light full of grace and love and truth. It broke through the darkness flooding his mind, his soul and his spirit. It lit up his whole being and he knew that he knew. The grave cloths were not crumpled or rolled up. They were still lying in the form of a human body, undisturbed. Nothing could hold Him back, not the grave cloths, not the

tomb, not even death, nothing! Jesus had risen, He had truly risen! It was as real to Peter as if the Master was standing right in front of him looking him straight in the eyes.¹⁵

Behind him he heard John entering the tomb and he heard him gasping for breath and then he knew that John also knew.¹⁶

Full of joy the two disciples turned back from the grave in order to tell the glad news to the other disciples as well. Peter and John began to understand something about what Jesus had talked about earlier, about how He had to be handed over to the Jewish leaders, how He had to die and had to be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights, just as Jonah had been in the belly of the fish, and that He would rise again from the dead on the third day.

However, it would not be long before all the doubt would return, unheeded, unexpected and quietly like a thief in the night, for Satan had not finished sieving yet. For some time to come faith would come and go, rise and fall, like the tides of the ocean.

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Jesus would appear to Peter three times more, twice in Jerusalem and after that at the Sea of Galilee.¹⁷

The first of these three appearances took place late the Sunday evening on the day of Jesus' resurrection. The doors of the room where the disciples had gathered were bolted tightly, out of fear for the Jews. They were imprisoned, dejected and depressed. A small group of men had barricaded themselves behind their own incapability to fully understand.

At that moment the Eleven were listening to Cleopas and his fellow traveller who had reached them out of breath in order to tell them how they had met a man on their way to Emmaus and how he explained the Scriptures to them that the Messiah had to suffer and die and how He had to rise again. It was only later after they had reached their destination and was breaking bread with the stranger that their eyes were suddenly opened and they recognised Him as the Master. Peter and the other disciples found this story hard to believe. The doubt he had experienced earlier was on its way back again and

¹⁵ See Addendum 4: *The [Grave Cloths](#) and Jesus' Appearance to Peter* for an exposition of this conclusion.

¹⁶ *Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, went in too; and he saw and was convinced and believed* (John 20:8).

¹⁷ In Luke 24:34 it is mentioned that Jesus appeared to Peter. Nowhere else in the Bible is anything more said about this initial appearance. For a possible explanation in this regard see Addendum 4: *The Grave Cloths and Jesus' Appearance to Peter*.

these events were now sounding even more implausible than the women's story earlier that morning about angels that appeared to them with the message that Jesus had risen again and Mary Magdalene's claim that Jesus had appeared to her in person. The doubt was now even assailing the image of the grave cloths which he had held so dear up till now and with so much hope and compassion. It was being assaulted with an abundance of venom and viciousness, like a hound which got hold of a hare and was now shaking it in order to tear it apart.

The doors and windows of the room were still bolted when all of a sudden Jesus was standing among them. The one moment they were still listening to the men from Emmaus and the next instant He was there as if He appeared from nowhere and as if He wanted to break through all restraints, even the fear, unbelief and doubt which kept the disciples bounded. The suddenness of it all caught them off guard. They were fear-stricken with white faces and trembling hands as if they had seen a ghost. It was then that the Master showed them His hands and feet with the marks from the nails and invited them to touch Him since it was He, their Master, and not a spirit that came to do them harm. It filled them with gladness, but the gladness was of limited extent as if reality did not really want to become reality. It was as if emotion had left understanding and faith behind somewhere along the way. It was only when they handed Him on His request a piece of grilled fish and a comb of honey and he had eaten it in front of them that reality started dawning on them, softly and slowly like grains of dust lighted up by a sunbeam.

It was again like earlier times when the Master spent time with them to instruct them in matters concerning the kingdom. His voice still carried the same authority. He reprimanded them since they did not believe those who came to witness about His resurrection. With love and patience He again expounded the Scriptures to them just like previous times, what was written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms regarding what happened during the preceding days. At last their minds became unlocked, light streamed in and the Scriptures started making sense all of a sudden. Not only would Christ rise from the dead, but repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His Name to all the nations of the world starting at Jerusalem and those who would be sent forth would be clothed with power from on high.¹⁸

Jesus left them just as suddenly as He appeared. The one moment he was still there and the next moment He was not there anymore. It was not even necessary for anybody to open the door. He departed and the disciples were left behind all by themselves behind locked doors.

While the Master addressed them Peter felt inexplicably drawn to Him and he only then realised how much he had missed Him the last few days. He felt calm and secure since a

¹⁸ Luke 24:44-49

great tranquillity had settled in the room. All doubt was pushed aside for the moment. However, after the Master's departure certain questions would reappear to prey on his mind, just like the remorse in his heart which would not leave him in peace.

What was most worrisome to Peter was what the Master was thinking of him now. At times when their eyes met, he could see no reproof or condemnation, but compassion and understanding instead. Maybe it was just his imagination? But still. The Master had promised that in the kingdom they would sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel,¹⁹ but would there still be any room for him in the Master's future plans after his foolish conduct? The Master had risen. He can now appear and disappear with a body that is not bound by space and time, but where did it leave them as ordinary people with all their limitations? What should they do now and when will the kingdom of David be restored again?

It was only Thomas Didymus who had no part in the events of that evening since he was not present. Later on he made it known that he would not believe unless he had seen the marks left by the nails in the Master's hands and unless he had put his fingers in the marks of the nails and his hand in the spear-wound in His side.

By appearing to His disciples their faith might have been strengthened to a certain extent at first, but not really to the extent which would fill them with excessive boldness. Their faith and confidence were indeed still vulnerable and fragile, since eight days later we find them together again, still behind bolted doors out of fear for the Jews. This time Thomas was with them. Just like the first time the Master appeared all of a sudden in the midst of the disciples as if from nowhere and as if He had just waited for Thomas to be present. He invited him to come and look at His hands and to touch the marks of the nails and the spear-wound. He made it clear that He expected faith from Thomas instead of unbelief. The moment was too much for Thomas and his unbelief had to depart before the reality of it all. He had seen and he had to believe.

It was as if the appearance of the Master had fanned the smouldering doubt in Peter's mind once more. It forced all the questions to the surface again. His mind was still under lock and key as tightly locked as the doors of the upper room. The light did not want to penetrate completely and then there was still his conscience having a go at him.

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From where Peter was sitting he could see a number of fishing boats at the shore of the Sea of Galilee, ready for the night's catch. He felt free all of a sudden. Maybe it was just

¹⁹ Matt 19:28

all the familiar things like the wind and the water, but perhaps it was also all the things they could leave behind in Jerusalem, all the fears and the locked doors. It almost felt like old times when they were still fisherman, he and Andrew and James and John, before the Master had called them to follow Him. In his mind's eye he could hear the sound of the water washing over the pebbles on the beach. It soothed his emotions. It was almost as reassuring and comforting as the Master's voice.

However, these feelings only lasted for a moment and then all the questions and despair flooded his mind again. The Master had sent word that he and the others should come to the Sea of Galilee where He would meet them and that was the reason why they were here now. Or was it only a way of the Master to let them know that they were weighed in the balance and found wanting and that they should rather return to their previous occupation as fishermen?

They were already waiting since early morning here on the slope of the hill, here where the multitudes gathered when He pronounced the Beatitudes. It was late afternoon now, the sun had almost reached the horizon and above them a flock of birds were on their way to their roost for the night, but the Master had still not made His appearance.

Peter's eyes kept roaming across the Sea of Galilee, restless like the wind and the waves, then it settled on the boats at the waterside. Maybe it wasn't such a bad idea to become a fisherman again. He was sure that there would still be space on one of Zebedee's boats, for him and Andrew and James and John. He jumped up all of a sudden. The waiting and uncertainty had become too much.

'I am going fishing. Who is coming with?'

Thomas Didymus, Nathanael, James and John and two others followed him. They set afloat one of Zebedee's boats, but could not catch anything the whole night. They were only floating around aimlessly while toiling with the nets.

The day had already dawned and the boat was only about a hundred metres from the beach when they became aware of somebody standing on the shore. Peter was absolutely sure that he was not there just a moment ago. The stranger's voice carried over the water as clear as a bell.

'Do you have any fish to broil?'

The disciples answered in the negative.

'Cast your net to the starboard side of the boat and you will find plenty of fish there.'

When they reflected on the stranger's request at later stage they could not really tell why they responded to it. Maybe it was the authority of his voice or the caring tone thereof. It

was a voice full of gentleness and full of kindness like a shepherd calling his sheep together.

They have just started hauling in the net when all of a sudden the water was teeming with life. The net was full. It wanted to tear apart. It strained against their hands.

Like a flash it dawned upon John, like the bright morning sun breaking through the clouds. It broke through like the sunlight sparkling on the water and on the wet scales of the fish which were struggling and floundering, just like the day the net also wanted to tear and the boat wanted to sink – the day they left everything to follow the Master, he, John, and Peter, Andrew and James.²⁰

‘Peter, it is Him, the Master, our Master! He has not forgotten about us!’

Peter was swept away by the moment. It totally overwhelmed his emotions. Hurriedly he donned his outer garment, jumped into the water and started swimming to the shore. In the meantime the other disciples were struggling landwards with the boat and the net which was full to overflowing.

On reaching the shore they found a fire with fish and bread on the glowing embers. The meal had already been prepared as if it had appeared from nowhere just like the time when He fed the five thousand and the four thousand.²¹

Jesus sent Peter to go and fetch some more fish. All hundred and fifty three of them were huge, but the net did not tear.

Not much was said during the meal. The disciples were too confused and perplexed. It was the third time Jesus had appeared to them since he had risen from the dead.

After breakfast Jesus called Peter to one side. This time the doors would not remain locked. He looked Peter straight in the eye and asked:

‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you really love me? Do you love me more than being a fisherman at the Sea of Galilee and with a greater devotion than all the other disciples here?’

With a lump in his throat Peter answered: ‘Yes Lord, You know that I love You.’

Jesus’ answer was straightforward and to the point: ‘Then feed my lambs.’

For a second time He asked: ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you *really* love me, do you love me with the same love one ought to have for the Father, with your whole heart, your whole soul, all your mind and with all your strength?’

²⁰ Luke 5:1-11; Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20

²¹ Matthew 14:14-21; Matthew 15:29-39

‘Yes Lord, You know that I *really* love you.’

He answered again: ‘Tend My sheep.’

When Jesus asked the question for the third time it was just too much for Peter. He was deeply moved and he could hardly keep back the tears.

‘Lord, You know everything. You know how I fled into the night and how I denied that I know You. You know how scared I was, how I wondered what has become of You and what was to become of us and how the doubt and uncertainty got stuck in my heart, even after I have seen the grave cloths. You know how intensely I struggled with all these matters. Lord, You know everything. You know that I love You.’

‘Yes, Peter, I know everything. From now on you will serve Me as assistant shepherd and in the end you will even die for Me. And this time you would not run away or deny Me. Come follow Me and tend My sheep.’²²

Peter felt relieved and clean, purified like wheat from which the chaff had been winnowed. He looked up when he heard a dove’s wings fluttering. Just for a moment he saw the white wings as it churned through the air in order to obtain impetus and then the dove took off and disappeared behind a bush, a terebinth bush covered in red with a spattering of green.

Epilogue

Power from on High

The terebinth tree’s red flowers and new foliage during Easter would continue bearing witness of the blood of Jesus that was spilled for our righteousness, continuous forgiveness and new life in the Spirit. Only much later would Peter understand everything completely and would he be prepared fully to tend the Chief Shepherd’s sheep. It happened on the day of Pentecost shortly after Jesus was taken up into heaven, when Peter and the others had gathered in the upper room as usual and were continually devoting themselves to prayer with one mind. The whole house was suddenly filled with the sound of a violent rushing wind, tongues of fire were distributed and settled on everyone present and they spoke of the great deeds of God in various languages.

²² From 1 Peter 5:4 it becomes clear that Peter would never forget the words of Jesus at the Sea of Galilee to tend His sheep: ‘And [*then*] when the Chief Shepherd is revealed, you will win the conqueror’s crown of glory.’ (AMP)

In this way Peter and the others were equipped with power from on high, with the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth Who would become their Companion and Fellow-traveller through life. Peter would at last become the rock of which his name testifies and after that he would never look back again. The capricious and unreliable fisherman from Galilee would soon be given the opportunity to demonstrate the courage and power of a spirit-filled life before the Sanhedrin. Many would come to salvation under his preaching²³ and many would be cured from all sorts of disease.²⁴ Many trials and much suffering would cross his path²⁵ and although Peter would not be without any shortcomings after the events of Pentecost, he would not turn his back on the Master again. At the end of his life he would be crucified and since he did not regard himself worthy of dying in the same manner as the Master he requested that he be crucified head downwards.²⁶



Addendum 1

The Disciples' Doubt and Despair

It seems that after His crucifixion Jesus' disciples might have been in serious doubt about His Messiahship. It seems as if they were wondering whether He might not only be an extraordinary prophet instead of the promised Messiah. This doubt was expressed by Cleopas and his fellow-traveller when they told the Stranger, Who joined them on their way to Emmaus, that in the end Jesus was only a prophet since He was crucified and died on a cross, but that they had such great hopes that He might have been the Messiah Who had come to redeem Israel.²⁷

From the start the disciples had a difficult time understanding precisely what His Messiahship might entail. Although Peter professed at a certain stage on behalf of the Twelve that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God,²⁸ His substitutionary death was

²³ Acts 2:41; 4:4

²⁴ Acts 5:15-16

²⁵ The trials and suffering which every Christian may expect is a prominent theme in Peter's first epistle which indicates that that he could speak from experience (1Peter 1:6-7; 2:19-21; 3:14; 4:1; 4:12-13; 4:19)

²⁶ According to tradition.

²⁷ Luke 24:19-21

²⁸ Matthew 16:16; John 6:69

never part of their expectations of a Messiah. Although Jesus tried to prepare His disciples for His death and resurrection their minds could not really grasp such a possibility. It was completely outside their understanding and field of reference.²⁹ Upon a certain occasion Peter even went as far as to reprimand Jesus when He talked about His suffering, death and resurrection.³⁰ They could therefore not digest His death on the cross at all when it happened in the end and every one of them must have experienced quite an inner turmoil at that stage, especially Peter. This inner conflict must above all be seen in the light of the disciples' perception of the Messiah as a mighty leader Who would save the Jewish nation from Roman bondage. Such a Messianic leader had to triumph over the Roman forces instead of dying on the cross like a criminal.

Although Jesus tried for the last time on their way to Jerusalem to let the Twelve understand exactly what was awaiting Him in Jerusalem,³¹ their own expectations regarding the prompt reestablishment of the kingdom of Israel were only raised the more the closer they came to Jerusalem.³² In Jericho He even tried to explain to His followers by means of a parable that the kingdom He came to establish would be so far outside their field of reference that it would be rejected by the Jews in Jerusalem³³ and that the privileged position the Jewish nation enjoyed up till then would be put in jeopardy by the attitude and conduct of the Jewish leaders.³⁴ The kingdom of God would actually be taken away from them and would be given to another people who would bear fruit worthy of a kingdom.³⁵ However, His words still remained hidden to them and they could not understand at all what He was trying to convey to them.³⁶

With Jesus' entry into Jerusalem the enthusiasm of His followers were consequently driven to a climax. The whole multitude of His disciples,³⁷ among whom the Twelve may also be counted, welcomed Him with great elation as the King of Israel³⁸ and with great expectation about the kingdom of their father David which would now be established.³⁹

Jesus did actually come to Jerusalem to present Himself to the nation as the Messiah and the Son of God, but He did not come to defeat the Romans, but sin and death instead, He came to establish His kingdom in the hearts of men,⁴⁰ by dying on a cross and by rising again on the third day. Captivated by Jesus' triumphant entrance this truth, which Jesus

²⁹ Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 9:9-10; 31-32; Luke 9:43-45

³⁰ Mark 8:31-32

³¹ Luke 18:31-34

³² Luke 19:11

³³ Luke 19:14

³⁴ Luke 19:27

³⁵ Matthew 21:41; 43

³⁶ Luke 18:34

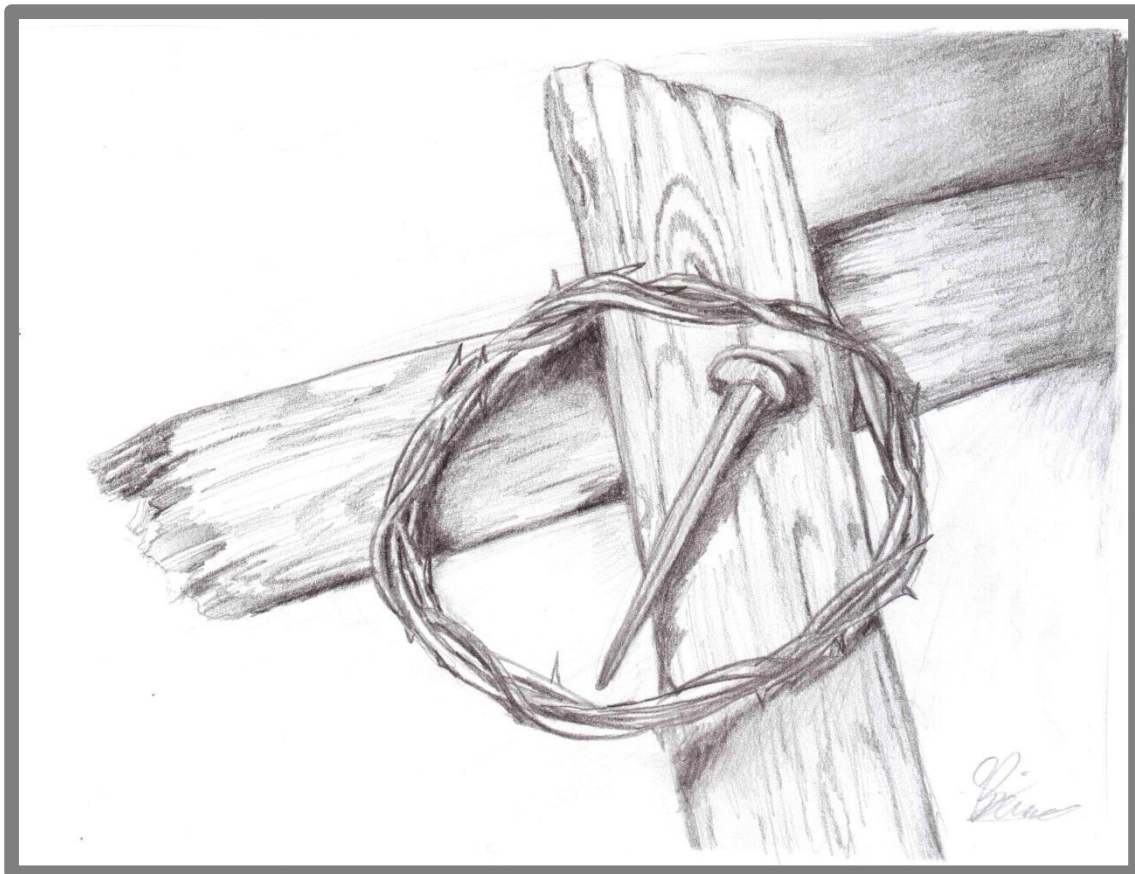
³⁷ Luke 19:37

³⁸ John 12:13

³⁹ Mark 11:10

⁴⁰ Luke 17:21; Romans 14:17

tried to convey to His followers from the beginning, did not really want to settle in their hearts, not even in the hearts of the Twelve. One must accept that under Jesus' teaching the disciples with time did become more and more aware of the spiritual dimension of God's kingdom, but in spite of this awareness their expectations were still aimed at ethnic Israel who would rule over the nations of the world. This distorted perception would stubbornly get stuck in their minds, even after Jesus' resurrection when the scriptures referring to Him were being opened to their understanding and they actually started to realise that it was necessary that He had to die and rise again.⁴¹ Thus they still wanted to know from Him just before His ascension if He was now going to restore the kingdom of Israel.⁴² Only later after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit would they come to fully understand what the kingdom of God was really about.



⁴¹ E.g. John 12:16; Luke 24:27

⁴² Acts 1:6

Addendum 2

The Terebinth Species of Palestine

Two terebinth tree species were found in Palestine during Jesus' time on earth, namely *Pistacia palaestina* en *Pistacia atlantica*.

Pistacia palaestina is a deciduous tree or shrub with bright red clusters of small flowers which appear on the male plants together with the new copper-green foliage during early spring, in other words during the time of the Jewish Passover. The flowers of the female plant are less conspicuous and tend to be more purple in colour. This plant makes an important contribution to the distinctive red colour of the Mediterranean macchia and shrubland of Israel, not only the flower clusters and new foliage in spring, but also the bright red fruit in summer and the colourful leaves in autumn. *Pistacia palaestina* may become a large and impressive tree, although it does not grow very tall (normally not more than 8-10 metre), but rather takes on a spreading form. When damaged by veld fires, man or livestock it tends to become a shrub with a height of only 1-2 metre while it often develops more than one trunk. All parts of the plant have a pungent resinous scent, from there the alternative name of turpentine tree. *P. palaestina* can very easily be confused with *P. terebinthus*. Various older sources refer to the terebinth trees from Biblical times in Palestine as *P. terebinthus*. However, *P. terebinthus* does not occur in Palestine or Israel at all since the western parts of Turkey form the most eastward range of this species.⁴³

Pistacia atlantica grows considerably larger than *P. palaestina* and reaches heights of up to 15 metre with a crown diameter of 30 metre. Older trees have impressive trunks with diameters of up to 2,5 metre. Trees may reach an age of up to 600 years. Unlike *P. palaestina* this species' growth is not restricted when damaged by livestock or veld fires and therefore develops more readily into a tree. The flower clusters of *P. atlantica* are by no means as impressive as those of *P. palaestina*.

It seems as if the terebinth tree was a common tree species during Biblical times. This conclusion is among other things supported by the fact that approximately half of all the wooden domestic objects which were found and classified by means of archaeological excavations in the northern and central parts of Israel were made from the wood of the above-mentioned two tree species.⁴⁴ A degree of uncertainty does exist among Bible translators about exactly which word or words in the Hebrew text should be translated as terebinth, whether *P. palaestina* or *P. atlantica*. Hebrew words in the Old Testament such as *elah*, *ayil*, *elon* and *allon* refer according to Strong⁴⁵ primarily to 'strong' or large trees

⁴³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pistacia_terebinthus

⁴⁴ <http://www.wildflowers.co.il/english/plant.asp?ID=228>

⁴⁵ Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

which may therefore include the terebinth as well as various oak species. Although the micro climate requirements of the relevant large tree species and thus their geographical distribution may be used to try and solve this problem, both *P. palaestina* and *P. atlantica* are often found in nature in association with oak species, *P. palaestina* mostly with *Quercus calliprinos* (Palestine oak) and *P. atlantica* with *Quercus ithaburensis* (Mt Tabor oak). It therefore becomes difficult to link text references with certainty to the geographical distribution of specific species or types.

By making use of current 'Hebrew sources' on the vegetation of Israel a bit more light may be shed on the problem. According to the website *Flowers of Israel* only *elah* refers to terebinth trees (*P. palaestina* en *P. atlantica*), while *elon* and *allon* should be seen as oaks.⁴⁶ References to Pistacia trees in the Old Testament on another website *Wild Flowers of Israel* also make use of the word *elah*.⁴⁷ If one accepts these two websites as authoritative enough it seems as if *elah* might with certainty be translated as terebinth or terebinth tree, although most Bible translations had translated *elah* as oak.

It might be accepted that the terebinth tree with its large spreading crown formed an ideal shade tree during Old Testament times in the land of Canaan with its hot dry climate.⁴⁸ Large solitary terebinth trees, and especially *P. atlantica*, served as important landmarks and resting places and the Bible often refers to specific terebinth trees (*elah*) as if they were well-known to everybody. We read about Jacob who buried all the foreign gods and earrings of his household and all those who were with them under the terebinth tree (*elah*) near Shechem,⁴⁹ the Angel of the Lord Who appeared to Gideon under the terebinth tree (*elah*) at Ophrah,⁵⁰ David who killed Goliath in the Valley of Elah,⁵¹ the old prophet who found the man of God under the terebinth tree (*elah*) after he had brought the word of God to Jeroboam at Bethel,⁵² while King Saul and his sons were buried under the terebinth tree (*elah*) in Jabesh.⁵³ The terebinth tree (*elah*) is also referred to as one of the tree species under which sacrifices were made to idols.⁵⁴ We also read about the long hair of Absalom which got entangled in the low, spreading and dense branches of a terebinth tree (*elah*) while he was riding on his mule underneath such a tree when fleeing from the servants of David in the forest of Ephraim.⁵⁵ This incident makes quite sense if one keeps in mind that both terebinth species tend to take on a dense spreading form, trees with sturdy trunks from which long branches are spreading out with a large number

⁴⁶ <http://www.flowersinisrael.com>

⁴⁷ <http://www.wildflowers.co.il/english/>

⁴⁸ Hosea 4:13

⁴⁹ Genesis 35:4

⁵⁰ Judges 6:11;19

⁵¹ 1 Samuel 17:19; 21:9

⁵² 1 Kings 13:14

⁵³ 1 Chronicles 10:12

⁵⁴ Ezekiel 6:13; Hosea 4:13

⁵⁵ 2 Samuel 18:9-10. Although the Bible only indicates that Absalom's head was caught in an 'oak' tree, it is assumed that it was actually the long hair of his head that got entangled in the branches.

of thin lateral branches. Ezekiel 6:13 consequently refers to the terebinth tree (*elah*) as a thick or dense tree.

It is amazing that one may actually contemplate the fact that the red flowers of *Pistacia palaestina* may during Easter be seen as symbolising the blood of the Paschal Lamb and the new copper-green foliage as symbolising the resurrection of Jesus and therefore the believer's salvation, righteousness, continuous forgiveness and new life in the Spirit. It is also meaningful to realise that it is actually the smaller and less impressive of the two terebinth species of Palestine, which often develops into a shrub, which actually displays more impressive red flowers and green foliage. It may be seen as symbolising Jesus Who humbled Himself by making Himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a slave, and being made in the likeness of man.⁵⁶



⁵⁶ Philippians 2:7

Addendum 3

Contradicting Events at the Tomb?

If we look at the accounts of the events concerning Jesus' resurrection in the various Gospels apparent contradictions concerning matters such as the number of women, the number of angels at the tomb and Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene may be observed. If these facts are not seen in the right perspective it may very easily give cause for doubting the authenticity, reliability and Godly origin of the Bible. A great fuss is often made by unbelievers of these so-called contradictions in the Word of God. Various aspects should be taken into consideration when any 'contradictions' in the Bible are looked at, such as the metaphoric use of language which are often found in the Bible as well as differences in the personalities of the authors who made a contribution to the Bible under guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷ These differences in personalities imply different writing styles and techniques together with different approaches, objectives and target groups. By means of this rich diversity different sides of and approaches to the Truth are revealed, a meaningful diversity within a greater unity. There should be no doubt about the fact that God actually had a specific purpose with each and every apparent contradiction when He had it written down⁵⁸ in the Bible and that a meaningful explanation for each contradiction may indeed be found.

Regarding the number of women at the tomb John only refers to Mary Magdalene⁵⁹ while the other Gospels indicate that other women were also involved. With this statement John does not assert that only Mary Magdalene was present, but since the other women play an insignificant role in his portrayal of the events at the tomb they are simply not mentioned by him. The fact that other women had to be at the tomb with Mary Magdalene according to the Gospel of John is indirectly revealed by Mary's words to Peter and John: 'They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.'⁶⁰

When we turn to the apparent contradictions in Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene one must remember that although all facts mentioned in the Bible are historically correct, it is not always portrayed in the correct chronological order and in many cases the order is rearranged with a specific purpose in mind. There are infinitely more locked up within the pages of the Bible than our ordered, rational Western minds tend to observe, including the portrayal and arrangement of historical facts. According to Matthew Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and the 'other Mary' after they have left the tomb to convey the angel's message to the disciples.⁶¹ If one looks at John's portrayal chronologically it appears as if Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene only after she went to

⁵⁷ See John Haley's *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, Chapter 1.

⁵⁸ See John Haley's *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, Chapter 2.

⁵⁹ John 20:1

⁶⁰ John 20:2 (NKJV Own emphasis)

⁶¹ Matthew 28:8-9

convey the information about the empty tomb to Peter and John and after she had returned with them to the tomb. However, all of this had to be seen against the background of John's approach to the events at the tomb. It may be that John actually did not want to convey the facts in chronologically order for a specific reason. It may just be that he first wanted to talk about that which was of the utmost importance to him, namely Jesus' resurrection and specifically his and Peter's experience thereof by observing the shape of the grave cloths (see Addendum 4). After a very short introduction,⁶² where he does not even mention that Mary Magdalene observed that the tomb was empty (he only mentions that she noticed that the tomb stone was rolled away, but he does mention that she ran from the tomb to tell Peter and John that they have taken the Lord away), he immediately comes to the main point of his narrative and discusses the rest of the introductory events in more detail at a later stage,⁶³ as if he wants to say: 'Do you know what? Peter and I came to this amazing realisation that Jesus had risen from the dead when we observed the shape of the grave cloths and after that we went home again.' The main point of his narrative concludes with this statement and now he takes up the introductory events again by stating that apart from the main events Jesus also appeared to Mary Magdalene after she conversed with the angels at the tomb⁶⁴ and just after she initially observed that the stone was rolled aside and that Jesus' body was taken away.

John's tendency to place events in inverted order is also demonstrated by his portrayal of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. All three of the other Gospels start their portrayal of the events with Jesus who, when they were near Bethphage, sent two of His disciples to the village to fetch a donkey's colt. The disciples laid their garments on the colt and Jesus seated Himself on the garments. Only then is the crowd mentioned who spread their clothing and palm branches before Jesus on the road while cheering Him on as He rode into Jerusalem.⁶⁵ John however, starts his narrative with the crowd who went out to meet Jesus with palm branches while cheering Him on. Only then does he mention Jesus finding a young donkey upon which He rode.⁶⁶

⁶² John 20:1-2

⁶³ John 20:3-10

⁶⁴ John 20:11-18

⁶⁵ Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-38

⁶⁶ John 12:12-15

Addendum 4

The Grave Cloths and Jesus' Appearance to Peter

From the Gospel of John one may reach the conclusion that Peter and John realised that Jesus' body was not removed from the tomb, but that He had risen on grounds of the shape of the grave cloths that were left behind.⁶⁷ We read that Peter entered the tomb and saw the grave cloths lying there (Greek: *keimai*).⁶⁸ According to Strong *keimai* points to something which lies stretched out in a horizontal position on its own or by its own doing. He sees the verb *keimai* as: 'properly reflexive and utterly prostrate.' The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* gives inter alia the following meaning for *reflexive*: '(of a verb) having a reflexive pronoun as its object (as in *to wash oneself*).' It literally means that the grave cloths laid itself down without the intervention of any human being. This initiative or independent act is enhanced even further by the concept *utterly prostrate* or in total submission. *Keimai* must be seen in contrast with the verb *tithēmi* which refers to something that was placed by somebody in a horizontal position. From this we may conclude that the grave cloths seen by Peter did not lie to one side in a bundle after it had been removed from Jesus' body by somebody and after that person or persons had placed it there. The cloths still had the same shape and lay in the same position as when it was winded around His body. Jesus' body was therefore not removed by somebody, but had risen from the dead. The matter of His body simply moved through the cloths as if it never had been swaddled in it. However, the napkin that was around Jesus' head was rolled up and lay separately on its own.⁶⁹ The conclusion that one may arrive at is that while Jesus was rising He took the facecloth from His own face, rolled it up and put it aside. The Gospel of John does not say anything about Peter's reaction when he saw the grave cloths, but it does say that John also entered the tomb and that he saw (in other words he saw exactly the same that Peter saw) and that he believed.⁷⁰ It is also written: 'For as yet they [both Peter and John] did not [up to that stage] understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead'⁷¹ The conclusion that one may come to is that both Peter and John now understood or at least began to understand that Jesus had risen from the dead. According to Luke Peter, after he had seen the grave cloths laying (*keimai*) on its own (without Jesus' body) 'went away, wondering about and marveling at what had happened.'⁷² It can only mean one thing, namely that Peter marvelled at the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. In the Gospel of John the emphasis is placed on John ('the disciple whom Jesus loved') who saw and believed and in the Gospel of Luke the emphasis is on Peter who saw and believed (Luke does not even make any mention of

⁶⁷ John 20:4-8

⁶⁸ John 20:6

⁶⁹ John 20:7

⁷⁰ John 20:8

⁷¹ John 20:9 (NASB)

⁷² Luke 24:12 (AMP)

John seeing the grave cloths). A little bit further on in the same chapter Luke also makes mention of Jesus Who after His resurrection appeared to Peter specifically.⁷³ This emphasis which Luke is placing on Peter reflects Jesus' concern and compassion for Peter who had denied Him. It became clear even before Peter's denial when Jesus told Peter that Satan asked permission to sift the disciples like wheat but that He had prayed specifically for Peter that his faith might not fail.⁷⁴ Something of this concern glimmers through in the Gospel of Mark as well when the angel at the tomb requested the women to go and tell the disciples and especially Peter that Jesus will be going ahead of them into Galilee and there they will see Him.⁷⁵ It also comes very strongly to the fore during Jesus' confrontation with Peter at the Sea of Galilee.⁷⁶

Regarding Jesus' appearance to Peter, as mentioned above, it may be possible to relate this incident directly to Peter's observation of the grave cloths. Without making too much of it, mention is made in Luke 24:34 of Jesus appearing to Peter. Jesus' appearance to Cleopas and his companion on their way to Emmaus and just after that to the disciples in Jerusalem, where they were hiding behind closed doors, form the background of this incident. It is almost as if this appearance to Peter is inserted by Luke between these two events in a somewhat cursory manner, almost as if it is not quite as important as the main events, but that it should rather serve as a confirmation of the main events and that it should therefore not be completely forgotten.

After Jesus appeared to Cleopas and his companion, they returned to Jerusalem immediately in order to communicate this news to the other disciples. Tired and out of breath after their journey of twelve kilometres in the dark, but still full of excitement, they reached the other disciples, but before they could convey their message they were told that the Lord had really risen and had appeared to Simon Peter. Jesus therefore had to appear to Peter somewhere between the events of the morning at the tomb and that same evening, probably even before He appeared to Cleopas and his companion on their way to Emmaus. One may reach the conclusion that Luke wanted to indicate here that this appearance to Peter was the main topic of discussion among the disciples with the arrival of Cleopas and his companion and that it was up till then probably the most important event of the day. However, the importance thereof is replaced immediately by Cleopas and his companion's account of what happened to them and Jesus' appearance while the two travellers from Emmaus were still speaking to the other disciples.

Nowhere else in the Bible is any additional information provided regarding Jesus' appearance to Peter earlier that day.⁷⁷ It is especially strange seen against the

⁷³ Luke 24:34

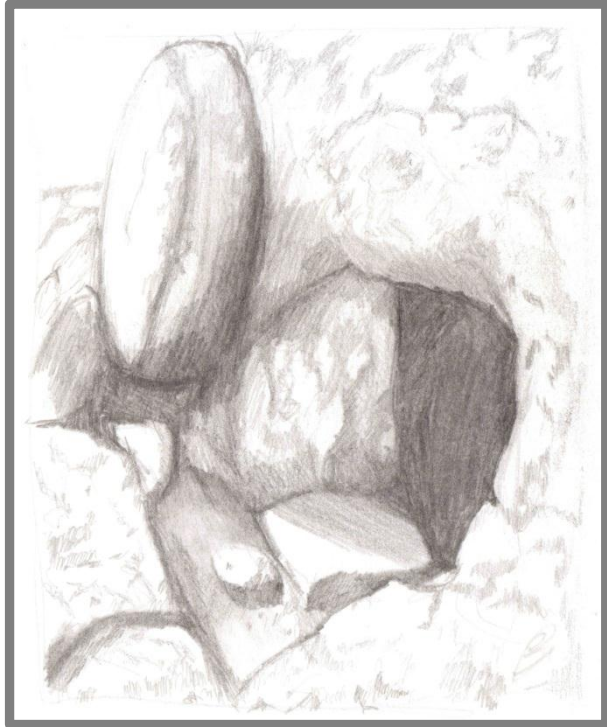
⁷⁴ Luke 22:31-32

⁷⁵ Mark 16:7

⁷⁶ John 21:15-17

⁷⁷ Only on one other occasion is Jesus' appearance to Peter referred to (mentioned) in the Bible, namely 1 Corinthians 15:4-5

background of Jesus' concern for Peter who denied Him, something which is clearly shown in Scripture. Why does Luke mention something which should be of great importance only in a cursory manner while the other gospels do not mention it at all? Why does the Bible not provide a more detail account of this incident? May it be that it was indeed of importance to Luke within the context of his account of the events, but that he does not discuss it in more detail since he has already discussed it in Luke 24:12? What Luke may have actually meant with the words 'The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon,' is that Peter had seen the empty grave cloths lying there in the shape of a human body, thereby realising that Jesus had risen. For Peter it was just as real as if Jesus stood before him in person, informing him that He had risen from the dead. Jesus thus actually appeared to Peter in the shape of empty grave cloths. If it was Luke's intention with these words, it would not be foreign to the rich figurative language which formed such an important part of Near Eastern thought patterns in the past, a metaphorical use of words which is such an inherent part of Scripture. This predilection for metaphors is something that may be very easily overlooked by the modern Westerner with his more concrete way of thinking. According to Haley the Oriental's passionate metaphorical use of words can indeed be seen as one of the most important explanations for certain of the so-called discrepancies in the Bible which may often lead to serious doubt and uncertainty among believers.⁷⁸



Since the Bible is not more specific about Jesus' appearance to Peter we will never be really sure how and when it happened. Although the above-mentioned explanation makes good sense it should therefore only be seen as a possible explanation.

⁷⁸ Haley, John: *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, pp.26-7

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