

# Risen on the third day

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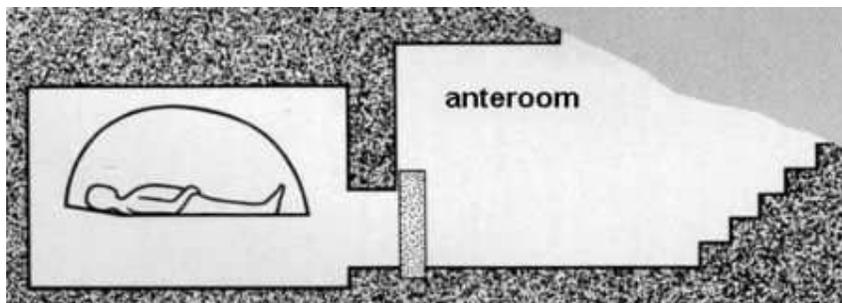
Texts: John 19:38 - 20:10; 1 Cor. 15: 12-20

## 1. The empty tomb

Under dramatic circumstances, Jesus died on the cross. His disciples were desperate. They thought that now all was lost.

On the evening of his execution, the special sabbath of the Passover celebration began, and according to the law, the executed had to be buried on the same day before nightfall (Deuteronomy 21:22f). So now there was an urgency to bury him at least temporarily. There was insufficient time left for a careful preparation of the body for burial, as was done, e.g., for Lazarus.

Joseph of Arimathea had a garden quite close to the place of crucifixion. There, his own new tomb had been cut in the rock. Such a tomb usually consisted of a small chamber, having on its side a stone bench in a niche. The chamber was closed by a large stone, which could be rolled in front of the low entrance opening (*Figure 1*).



Joseph obtained permission from Pilate to take Jesus from the cross. He bought a large linen burial sheet. Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. These are fragrant resins for embalming the dead. So they wrapped his body together with these spices into the sheet and laid him into Joseph's tomb (John 19: 38-42).

After the sabbath, early in the morning, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb. She sees that the stone is moved from the entrance. She runs to Peter and John, lamenting that they had taken away the Lord (John 20: 1-2).

## 2. Drawing up the facts of the case

The two of them run to the tomb, and John arrives first. He looks into the tomb. And this is what he later reported (John 20: 5-7, translated as literally as possible):

**And, bending down to the side,  
he sees the lying-there linen-bandages,  
however, he did not go in.**

**Now comes Simon Peter also, following him,  
and went into the tomb;  
and looks at the linen-bandages lying-there,  
and the sudarium,  
which was on his head,  
not between the linen-bandages lying-there,  
but - out of the way - wrapped up  
onto one place.**

In an extremely terse, yet precise way, John reported the findings. It sounds like a police report, lacking any embellishment or edifying thoughts. What they see convinces them immediately. Now they know that Jesus has risen, although they don't yet understand it (v. 8-9):

Then the other disciple [*that is, John*], who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he *must* rise from the dead.

Do they simply believe it because the body has disappeared? What do they see? What happened? In two booklets, Eberhard Auer published his detailed investigation of this question: "The document of the resurrection of Jesus" and "The third day". ("Die Urkunde der Auferstehung Jesu", Wuppertal: Brockhaus Verlag, 1959; "Der dritte Tag", Metzingen, Württemberg: Ernst Franz Verlag, 1970).

### **3. The linen bandages**

Three times, John mentions the "linen bandages" [*othónia*]. Indisputably, these are not linen sheets, as the word is usually translated, but narrow bandages, with which Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had bound up the body. Apparently, they had torn strips from the large sheet. The bandages are in the plural; at first glance, John saw several bandages. For a burial shroud, they took the large rest of the sheet Joseph had brought. A different word [*sindōn*] is used in Luke 23:53 for a burial shroud.

Why does John emphasize these bandages to such an extent, naming them three times in this short report? Why should these be so important? John stood under the cross when Jesus died, and he probably was present at the burial. Thus, he knew that they had bound up the body using such bandages. And he knew that these bandages must be left there when Jesus was raised from the dead bodily and went away. For otherwise he would have been unable to walk.

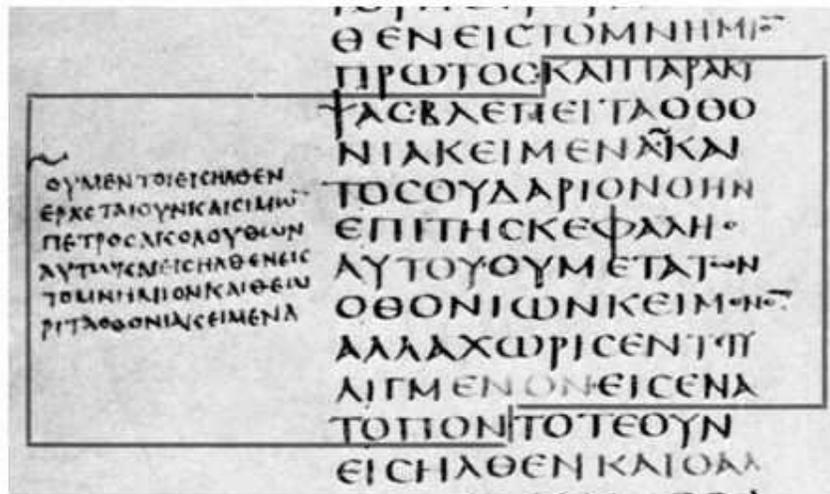
The claim of the body having been stolen is completely implausible: his disciples would never have done such a thing. Also, they would have been unable to do so, because the tomb was sealed and guarded by a watch. And his enemies would have been all too glad to present the body publicly.

### **4. Linen bandages lying there?**

Again three times the bandages are characterized as "lying there". Why should this be so important? Is it not perfectly natural that they are lying there, if they are there at all? The Greek word [*keímena*] can also be translated "being there" or "standing there". It says nothing about the condition of the bandages, nor how they came to be in this state. It does not indicate any movement: "laid", "thrown" or "fallen" would be incorrect translations; for these connotations, the Greek language uses different words.

John emphasized the word "lying there", indicating its importance. This is recognizable by the fact that at its first occurrence, it stands in front of the word "bandages". The second and third times, it stands after the noun, as is normal in Greek. The unusualness of this front position, indicating an emphasis, can also be seen in a correction in the Codex Sinaiticus from the 4th century (*Figure 2*).

The copier wrote correctly: "and bending down to the side he sees". Then, he mistakenly continued reading at the second mention of the bandages, rather than the first, and wrote "the linen bandages lying there", then going on from there. Only when he checked again, he saw that he had missed some lines and wrote in the margin what was missing. But unfortunately, his correction was shifted down, resulting in a duplication of the second wording of the bandages lying there, with the first one getting lost. And it is exactly the first occurrence that has the unusual form of "lying there" standing in front for emphasis. Now the text was really looking fine and correct - but it was too normal. But fortunately, we have a large number of other manuscripts which agree in rendering the text in the unusual form.



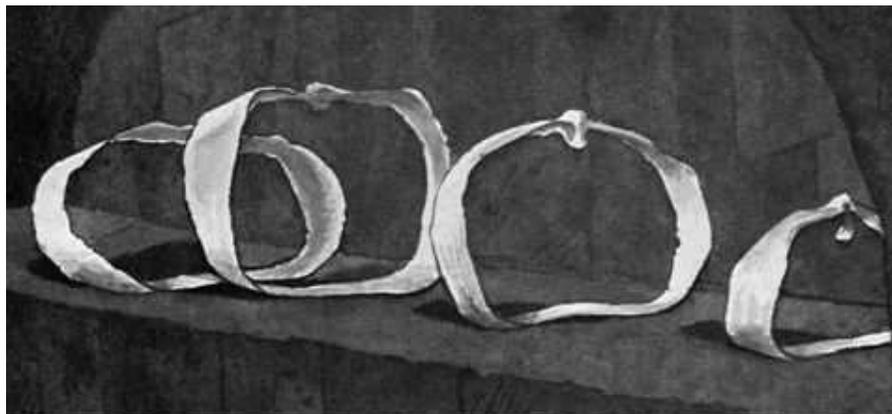
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 place.

~  
 not, however, he went in.  
 Comes now also Simon  
 Peter following  
 him, and went into  
 the tomb; and looks  
 at **the bandages lying**

### 5. Separate linen bandages?

Furthermore, if bandages had been laid down in a haphazard way, one could not have seen at first glance whether it was perhaps but a single one (and all the more so with sheets). But if the sheets had been carefully laid down separately and in order? The text doesn't say so. And grave robbers certainly would not have taken off the bandages, much less tied them away in order. John saw the bandages before even entering the tomb at all. But it was immediately clear to him that there were several of them. How is this possible?

The description of the burial procedure provides a better understanding. The resin mix of myrrh and aloes stiffened the bandages, and on the stone bench in the burial chamber, each one of them retained its original form and position. They were visible as individual loops standing there with spaces in between (*Figure 3*).



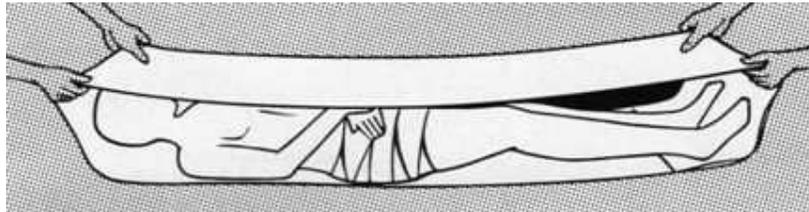
John confirms this interpretation by writing that "however" he first did not go in. The unexpected view of the empty, standing bandage loops gave him such a shock that, for the moment, he was like paralyzed. He had expected that he would not find Jesus' body, because Mary had told them. But this view was entirely unexpected. Of course, the body could not have come out of these bandage loops in a natural way, unless they would have been untied or cut.

## 6. *The sudarium or burial shroud*

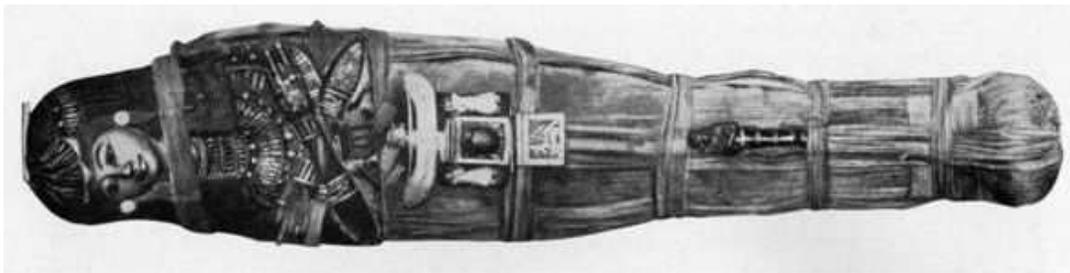
Peter then entered the burial chamber first, before John. And inside, he saw the sudarium, in addition to the bandages. It was wrapped up out of the way, onto *one* place. What was bound around dead Lazarus' head (John 11:44) was also called a sudarium [*soudárium*]. But is the one for Jesus' burial the same kind of cloth? "Sudarium" ("sweat cloth") designates a cloth to be laid directly onto the body, where it can take up the sweat. It says nothing about its size. Joseph bound up the body of Jesus in a linen sheet, which was therefore a large burial shroud.

John uses the definite articles for the bandages and the sudarium. They are therefore the known objects which he had already seen at the burial. He was looking for nothing else in the burial chamber - nothing was missing. Thus, the "sudarium" [*soudárium*] in John 20:7 is the same object as the "linen sheet" [*sindōn*] in Luke 23:53 - and not a scarf like the sudarium of Lazarus.

John says that the cloth had been on Jesus' head (it does not say "his face wrapped with a cloth" as with Lazarus). And the other gospels say that he was wrapped into this cloth. Apparently, Joseph first used the cloth to cover Jesus' nakedness, while he was still hanging on the cross, then slid it over his head and down between his back and the cross. The sheet might have been about 4 meters long and 1 meter wide. So his body was already covered with the shroud when they took him down from the cross. This explains why John called the cloth a "sudarium" - it had lain directly on the skin and had taken up his death sweat and blood (*Figure 4*).



Then they bound him up with a few linen bandages, together with the spices, "as is the burial custom of the Jews" (John 19:40). A similar kind of bandaging can also be seen on the mummy of an Egyptian princess (*Figure 5*).



## 7. *The fact of the resurrection*

After the burial, the shroud had been visible at several places "between" the bandages. But after the resurrection, one could not see it there any more. It was no longer inside the bandages, held together by them. Instead, in an unknown manner, it had come out of the loops. And then, someone had wrapped it together and laid it aside - "onto one place".

As far as the bandages are concerned, John had emphasized that they had remained unchanged since the burial; they had not been moved. But as for the shroud, it says explicitly that, unlike the

bandages, it did not remain in the same place and in the same state - "lying there" -, but that it was wrapped together and brought away; it was moved.

By this state of affairs it was obvious that the body was no longer there. But more than that: it was also clear that it had not been carried away by the gardener or anyone else (*Figure 6*).



John "saw and believed", although he had not yet understood that Jesus had to raise from the dead (John 20: 8-9). On the basis of what he saw, he fully realized that Jesus had come out of the intact, stiff bandage loops by supernatural means, and that he therefore had risen from the dead. The same thing happened to Peter.

## **8. The reaction of the disciples**

In Luke 24:12, we read of Peter, according to the usual translations: "...and he went home marveling at what had happened." But literally it says: "admiring what had happened" or "admiring the result" [*thaumazōn to gegonos*]. It does not say that he was wondering (intransitive, reflexive mode of the verb) what had happened (because this was clear to him), but that he was filled with wonder looking at something (transitive mode of the verb). It is not a question about the event of the resurrection, but apparently about something he had with him. Did he hold the wrapped-up shroud in his hands?

In John 20:10 we read: "Then the disciples went back to their homes." A literal translation would be: "Then the disciples went home again." But the Greek word [*oun*] ("then") is considerably weightier than it appears at first glance. Actually, one should translate it "accordingly" or "therefore". This points to the disciples having drawn a conclusion. The shroud was an objective result of the resurrection. The conclusion of their inspection was clear; there was no need to seek for anything else in the tomb, and they could feel free to go home. Based on their findings, they could say with absolute assurance: "The Lord has risen indeed!" (Luke 24:34) - although they didn't yet understand the Scriptures.

There is a famous "Shroud of Christ", which is being kept as a relic in Turin. It is of the right size, and shows the image of a face near the middle of the cloth - just where one would expect to find it. Cloth samples were dated by C-14 measurements. The results point to the Middle Ages: therefore this material cannot belong to the burial shroud of Christ. But according to other investigations, the samples measured could possibly contain some repair cloth or other substances having gotten in later. That would result in an erroneously young age. To date, researchers could not reach an

agreement about the genuineness or otherwise of the cloth. There is the suspicion that the shroud is shrouded in mystery because the Vatican obstructs a serious investigation of the problem. They certainly would not like to have revered a falsified relic.

## **9. By faith alone**

Anyway, from the point of view of the christian faith, it is better not to have any relics. It is only on exceptional occasions that God gives a miraculous sign, and normally only where someone is ready to believe. Any divine sign will therefore disappear as soon as it has been seen by these believers. Any permanent miraculous sign, such as a relic, will therefore usually be a fake. A relic can never prove God: therefore, relics constitute a spiritual danger.

In the wilderness, the Lord ordered Moses to make a bronze serpent, and any Israelites bitten by snakes were saved when, due to their trusting God's word, they looked up to the serpent (Numbers 21:9). But later, they began to offer incense to this bronze serpent, and King Hiskia had to destroy it (2 Kings 18:4).

On the very evening of the day of his resurrection, Jesus himself stepped into the circle of his disciples. He could go through locked doors. But they also realized that he was living and bodily present. He could eat, and they could touch him.

Thomas wasn't with them on that evening. But he wasn't prepared to accept what they recounted - although he presumably saw the burial shroud. He wanted nothing less than to see and touch the risen one in person. On the following Sunday, Jesus fulfilled his wish. This led to his wonderful confession: "My Lord and my God!" The personal encounter with the risen Lord brought about in him a mighty faith. And this faith was so strong that now no material proofs were necessary any more. There is no mention of his having then in fact put his hand in Jesus' wounds.

At this occasion, Jesus confirmed that faith alone is decisive: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). This certainty of the resurrection of Jesus filled the disciples with an incredible joy. It changed their lives completely.

## **10. The reactions of the enemies**

The bandage loops stiffened by being saturated with the spices constituted an unrefutable visual proof for the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The disciples certainly left them untouched - as a witness for all.

But how would the enemies who saw these bandages have behaved? When the Roman guards had recovered from their shock, they reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And these gathered the Council. Nobody denied that the tomb was empty.

But they bribed the soldiers to claim that the disciples had stolen his body while they were asleep. Sleeping on guard was certainly punishable by death. But the chief priests promised them to intervene with the governor so that he would grant them exemption from punishment (Matthew 28: 11-15).

Had they sent someone to check the tomb? Evidently, apart from the disciples and the guards, someone else saw the standing bandage loops - but then destroyed them. In this way, the lie of the stolen body could spread among the Jews. This would not have been possible if many could have seen the loops.

## **11. God's restraint**

The Jews knew that occasionally dead people had been raised. But all of them died again later. Enoch and Elijah were caught up to God. But even now, we don't know exactly what happened on these occasions - apart from some theological significance such events must have had. Some prophets had written about the resurrection of the people of Israel. But that was a promise due to be fulfilled on the "day of the Lord" only, but not yet during the present gospel time.

The Gentiles, on the other hand, had legends of heroes and kings having come to life again. However, they never meant a bodily resurrection, but only one of the soul ascending into heaven without the body. And this lower opinion of the body is a completely unbiblical idea.

But the claim that even now, before the general resurrection, one who had really been dead rose bodily was entirely unexpected, both for Jews and for Gentiles. This was unique and had never occurred before. And therefore, most people didn't believe it.

Jesus had promised the unbelieving Jews one single sign only, the "sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matthew 12: 38-40). And this sign would demonstrate to them his resurrection on the third day. Now they received this sign in the form of the standing bandage loops.

But even this sign is not unambiguous, but in a way concealed. The disciples' reports are very restrained. The Jews had demanded a spectacular sign; but now, an enigma was standing there. So any hearer and reader remains free to retain doubt and disbelief. God desires that all people come to be saved by faith, but without any compulsion or merely logical arguments. God respects everyone's personality, not making anyone a puppet.

## ***12. He has risen indeed!***

Why do we have to deal with the burial of Jesus and the empty tomb, anyhow? Jesus' bodily resurrection presupposes that he was really dead, not just seemingly so, as certain people claim.

But God's raising Jesus bodily from the dead belongs to the most important claims of the christian proclamation, to the center of the gospel. With it God confirms that he has accepted Jesus' death on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice. It is offered to all and becomes effective for all who believe in Jesus. Thus, John as an eyewitness described an observation which seals the fact that all believers in Jesus are justified with God.

The death of Jesus on the cross and his bodily resurrection are not just a dogma, a statement to believe, but an historical fact. Without this historical fact, there would not be any christian faith. There are those who have tried to reinterpret it as a "spiritual" resurrection. But this is heresy and an offense to God. Paul admits no doubt about this (1 Corinthians 15: 14-20):

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins... If in *this* life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. **But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**