

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: Jesus, being upset over the death and loss of His friend, was deeply moved and went to the tomb that was in a cave with a stone rolled over it. Jesus said, *roll the stone away*. But, Martha made mention of the smell that would be there, because he had been dead for four days. Jesus responded, *I told you, you will indeed see God's Glory; do you not believe?* So, they rolled away the stone and Jesus thanked the Father for hearing prayers and for the ability of people to believe, and then shouted out *Lazarus come out!* And, he indeed came out enveloped in his grave clothes and Jesus asked that he be unwrapped.

There were many people there because Lazarus was rich and well connected. Many people were astonished, but they did believe. There were many top religious officials who detested Jesus but were there and witnessed this incredible event. Curiously, instead of being in awe in the very presence of God, they rebelled and told the Pharisees; they conspired to kill Him so their position and pride would not be upset! They held a special council to decide what to do with Jesus and what rules to inflict upon the people about Him. Again, they did not desire to search the Scriptures and believe; they were only interested in convicting and getting rid of Him. They were afraid that too many people would follow Jesus and not their rules and control. They even thought this would anger the Romans and used this as a rationale for their conspiracy. From this time on, Jesus was under the sentence of death from the Pharisees. And yet, He continued His ministry, but away from Jerusalem and the pious fraud leaders.

Contexts and Background

This passage depicts a great, impossible-to-duplicate miracle; Jesus raised Lazarus! This passage also shows us that Christ is Lord over both life and death; therefore, we need not fear it when we are in Him. (Mark 5:39). Israel was under Roman occupation. The Romans had taken away many of the influential families' land and turned them into "sharecroppers" and into forced poverty. The smaller families with the smaller farms were driven out of business and left destitute. This is the reason for the prevalent outcry for a Messiah and why so many "would be" messiahs came. Thus, the culture was angry, poor, devastated, and downtrodden while the leadership sought desperately to keep the peace and placate the Romans; this may have helped lead them to miss the real Messiah in their midst. At the same time, the leadership urgently sought to keep their positions at all costs, ignoring the Torah and Law. They made so many rules, the Law and Torah were veiled in legalism as they compromised their faith and rules and doing the opposite of their call. Jesus was their prime threat and they had to get rid of Him because of their pride and faulty mindsets.

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings

- *Deeply moved.* Jesus is identifying with the plight of humanity and the consequences of sin. Although we may not be able to raise the dead, we can come alongside and serve, listen, and be of help in good as well as dire times (Gal. 6:2; Heb. 4:15-16).
- *Tomb / grave.* People then were either buried in the ground or in a cave outside of the city or town limits, fulfilling both Jewish burial laws and Roman law. A tomb could hold many bodies, and many more with the small burial boxes called Ossuaries, much like the one recently discovered that may have belong to James, the brother of Jesus. Most burial sites were owned by clans and rich families. After death, the body was interred into a ground or cave burial in an antechamber. A year later, it was dug up and put into a family crypt and placed into a slot in the wall like a modern safety deposit box. This process could take one to two years. This was done due to land space and expense, The Ossuary would then be placed on a shelf in the tomb. This is still practiced in many parts of the Middle East today.
- *Four days.* Buy this time, it was for sure he was dead and the body would be decomposing. Thus, there was no chance for a cheap magician trick or a "bait and switch." Most Jews believed in a resurrection at the end of the Age.

- *If you believed.* When God works, either people will see it and believe or else they will ignore it, rationalize it away, or just choose not to believe. He never forces us; whether we have faith or we resist Him will be of our choosing, but our ability to choose and have faith is His gift to us (2 Cor. 3:15-16).
- *Glory of God.* This means God is Awesome! This is God's majesty, beauty, eminence, power, and authority that figuratively and literally radiate from the universe. This is who God is and how He appears to man (Ex. 16:10; 24:16-17; 40:34; Isa. 6:3; 40:3; 60:1-22; Habakkuk 2:14; Zech. 2:5; John 1:14; Rev. 4:1-12; 15:8; 21:9-17).
- *Stone.* This refers to a very heavy, cut, disc-shaped stone about three feet in diameter, placed in a carved slot that would take many men to move. This was to protect the bodies from animals and prevent grave robbers from taking any valuables left with the body.
- *Father, I thank you.* This was a heartfelt remark of gratitude that was then a prayer from 1 Kings 18:36. This is also a statement that this miracle will be the work of the Messiah, not just that of helping a friend to demonstrate His role.
- *Lazarus.* His name is an abbreviation of *Eleazar*, meaning "one whom God helps." Because of the travel time, he must have died soon after the messengers delivered their news to Jesus. This is not the same poor person seen in Luke who goes to heaven while his rich master goes to hell and asks if Lazarus can quench his thirst. This Lazarus is obviously wealthy because of the magnitude of his household and admirers (Luke 16:19-31).
- *Lazarus, come out!* This is the voice of God winning out over death and giving validity to Jesus as The Messiah. This is also a call to those who are spiritually dead to awake, trust and obey God, and get rid of pride and pretence (Eph. 2:5).
- *Strips of linen.* Like a mummy, the body was wrapped with sheets of linen soaked in aloes and spices like *frankincense* and myrrh; this was to keep the stench down (Mark 16:1).
- *Grave clothes.* They were long strips of cloth woven very tight with also a tight woven shroud or wrapping placed over to keep the body straight during rigor mortis. So, even though Lazarus was back, he would not be able to walk or talk. This is also a proof he was dead, because a live person would not be able to breathe with that over his face.
- *Jews.* Here, refers to the leaders, not the people group, who were opposed to anything that went against their will and plans, especially what they considered God's rule by their rules and traditions (Matt. 2:1-3,16; 4:12; 14:1-12; 26:3-4; 27:1).
- *Chief priests.* They were the leaders of the Temple but were more like politicians than actual ministers. The Pharisees, however, held more power in Jesus' time. Both groups served as intermediaries between the Romans and the Jews. Their decisions were based on social pressures and whoever was influencing them. Their concern was not for the things of God. This is why Jesus challenged them (Matt. 23).
- *Called a meeting.* This was a private meeting, one that went against the Law and Prophets, to conspire to kill someone who had not broken any laws simply because they did not like what and how He said truth. Who does this? A person who does not want to be convicted or be told what to do or how to behave. They prefer sin and debauchery; their will is superior and God is in their way!
- *Sanhedrin.* They were the aristocracy who acted like a Jewish supreme court, where Jesus was also falsely tried, and consisted of *the full assembly of the elders of Israel*. This was a group of 70 of the top, religious/political leadership for Israel that was made up of the chief priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes, and various elders, and one high priest as the main overseer. They made the major religious and civil governing and religious laws, and they dictated how people were to worship God and practice Judaism They met in the Temple Court or in a secret hall inside called, "Chamber of the Hewn Stone." This chamber is where they held their clandestine sessions; their own Laws from the

Pharisees said these were unlawful meetings. Here, the entire assembly of 70 could have met or just some of the key people in secret and inappropriately (Matt. 2:4; 3:7; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 4:1; 5:21-22).

- *Romans will come.* There was a fear that would-be messiahs who rallied the people for an uprising would invoke a heinous and deadly response from the Romans who were occupying them at this time. The Romans hated civil unrest and anyone claiming to be a king as only Caesar is King (Ironically today we name our dogs Caesar and our children Peter, Paul, Mary and if you are Latino, Jesus.). Like Barabbas' insurrection during Jesus time and the revolts on 68-70AD, the irony even after all the compromise and placation, the Romans laid waste to Israel and destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (Rom. 18:38; 19:12).
- *Caiaphas.* He was a member of the Sanhedrin from 18-36 A.D and the son-in-law of Annas. (Josephus stated he held the longest time in this office because he was a masterful "peace- bringer"). The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of Israel consisting of the *top* Pharisees, Scribes, and Chief Priests (John 11:47-48). They preserved their history and traditions while keeping the peace for Rome. They were also charged with defending the people from the "messianic frauds" of which there were a lot—hundreds, according to Josephus. Their greatest fears were realized as they lost the Temple, their positions, and some even their lives in 70 A.D (John 18:13).
- *One man die for the people.* Jesus was not under official indictment nor had He been convicted of a crime yet; nonetheless, they sought punishment for Him! Even if he was innocent and the Messiah, they did not care; they sought to eradicate Him. This was a philosophical idea that one person was not as valuable as many people, thus it was an honor to sacrifice oneself for the many (Prov. 17:15).
- *Prophesied that Jesus would die.* Meaning the impartation of divinely revealed truth to God's people. The High Priests would often prophecy, sometimes without meaning to do so, as in this case. Jesus would die, but in reality in a mockery to *Caiaphas'* plans, Jesus dies for the sins of the elect to give us salvation.
- *Plotted to take his life.* Literally means "hunting for sport;" in this case—it is God! The hostility between the Jewish leadership and Jesus is now escalating greatly.
- *Ephraim.* Perhaps the city of Ophrah, that was about 15 miles north of Jerusalem.
- *Ceremonial cleansing.* Pools and shrines were very common in the Middle East during biblical times. Some were mineral or hot springs with edifices built around them. Others were shrines to a god. Here there were pools in the Temple courts used for ritual purification ceremonies and the preparation of the festivals like the upcoming Passover (John 2:6-11, 23; 3:25; 5:19-30).
- *Looking for Jesus.* For someone as famous a teacher as Jesus was then, people were perplexed as to why He was not there at this important and required celebration. Jesus had decided to go to another place for the celebration, fulfilling His duty.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications

How do you know that you believe? Not a superficial idea or a creed or even confidence; rather that it is deep and a part of you? Faith comes not just from our profession; it has to also come foremost from our possession! Profession is our utterance that we have it such as our creeds and theology; possession is how it has rooted in us depicted by how we demonstrate it. That our faith is beyond our initial response, that it has grown from emotions to minds to hearts to hands to deeds is an existential, deep-core transformation. Our faith in Christ saves us; but to know for sure if we have truly been saved and if we do glorify our LORD is found in the exhibit of one's Christianity in one's life. No, not that works save us; rather, works—or better said, the living out of the Gospel demonstrates what is also in us. If there is no demonstration of Fruit, character, and/or faith, then the probability is that the "emperor has no clothes on" (Rom. 12; James 2:14-26).

The problem with most people, the barrier we face, is that nothing can happen that does not fit our understanding and view of life and nature. Those with limited education or the over educated will not wrap

their minds over supernatural things because they can't explain it. We have to come to a point of real, convicting trust that spreads throughout who and what we are and becomes what we are, how we are, and what we think and do.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Has someone ever challenged you that you have a lack of belief?
2. What does it mean to you that because of Jesus you have the ability to choose and have faith, that this is His gift to you?
3. Why do you suppose that when God works, either people will see it and believe or ignore it, rationalize it away, or just choose to not believe?
4. Have you ever thanked God for hearing your prayers and for giving you the ability to go to Him and believe? Why would this matter?
5. How do you feel that Jesus identifies with your plight in life, even your wrong choices and the consequences of sin?
6. Why would a religious leader or a church leader today not be willing to search the Scriptures to solve a problem, but rather jump to conclusions to convict and get rid of Jesus?
7. Whom or what do you love? Whom or what do you trust? Whom or what do you serve? How do these crucial questions determine our motivations and actions?
8. Why do so many people prefer sin and debauchery, and believe that their will is superior and God is in their way? Why would a church leader think this way too?
9. Christ is our living Hope that will never fade away. How does this give you the confidence and conviction you need to get through the tough times?
10. What do you feel is missing in you now? Why can't our longings be filled by temporary desires or pleasures, or solving our political problems?
11. How can you better come alongside and serve, listen, and be of help in good as well as dire times for others? How would this glorify God?
12. What does Jesus need to unwrap from you? Pride, anger, fear, disappointment, frustrations, loss, busyness...or? What are you going to do about it?