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MATTHEW 28:1 EXPLAINED

Recently someone asked me about the timing of Jesus Christ's crucifixion, death and resurrection. The person questioned that Mr. Armstrong's teaching of a Tuesday evening Passover observance followed by a Wednesday crucifixion and a Saturday evening resurrection was correct. A part of the answer to this question revolved around understanding Matthew 28:1. So in this article we'll take a closer look at this verse. Here it is in the KJV.

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. (Matthew 28:1 AV)

And here is the Greek text of this verse transliterated into our alphabet.

Opse de sabbaton te epiphoskouse eis mian sabbaton elthen Maria Magdalene kai he alle Maria theoresai ton taphon.

[Comment: The Greek alphabet has TWO letters "o", the omicron and the omega, as well as TWO letters "e", the eta and the epsilon. In transliterating Greek words into our alphabet these distinctions are lost, though in the original Greek they obviously make a difference. Thus the Greek word "sabbaton" spelled with the omicron "o" is the singular for "Sabbath", whereas the Greek word "sabbaton" spelled with the omega "o" is the genitive plural meaning "of Sabbaths". I mention this here because in Matthew 28:1 the word "sabbaton" appears twice, in both cases being spelled with the omega "o", thus being the genitive plural in both cases.]

THE CONCEPT OF "THE WEEK"

Where in Jewish society the concept of the seven-day week was well entrenched, this was not a concept that was used in Greek circles in biblical times. Thus in the Greek language of the New Testament period there was not really a Greek word for this concept of a seven-day week. At a later time the Greek language coined the feminine noun "ebdomas, ebdomados" to mean "a week". In modern Greek the word for "week" is the slightly changed word "ebdomada".

Latin didn't really have a word for "a week" either, and so in Latin a week was later simply designated by the expression "septem dies", meaning "seven days".

Coming back to the Greek language: the word for "week" was simply formed from the word "ebdomos", which means "seventh". But in biblical times the Greek language did not yet use the word "ebdomas", and neither did the Latin language at that time use the expression "septem dies" to refer to "a week".

In Old Testament Hebrew, on the other hand, the concept of "a week" was clearly expressed by the word "shabuwa" or "shabua". This Hebrew word "shabuwa" is formed from the Hebrew word "sheba", meaning "seven" and "seventh". This is totally distinct from the word "shabbath", meaning "Sabbath", which is formed from the verb "shabath", meaning "to rest, to cease from work", etc..

So here is what we should keep in mind:

In Hebrew the concept of "a week" was clearly derived from a word that means "SEVEN". This was totally unrelated to the concept of "the Sabbath", which was derived from a word meaning "to rest".

In post-New Testament Greek and Latin the words for "a week" were also derived from words meaning "SEVEN". But these words had not yet been coined by the time the New Testament was being written.

It is for this reason that in the Greek New Testament the concept of "a week" is expressed by the word "SABBATON", which word was simply borrowed from the Hebrew language. This is also the case in the later Latin Vulgate translation of Jerome, where the Hebrew word for "Sabbath" was simply adapted to convey the concept of "a week".

The word "sabbaton" is used 68 times in the New Testament, and is in the KJV translated 37 times as "Sabbath day", 22 times as "Sabbath" and 9 times as "week". It is always the context which has to make clear whether "sabbaton" should be translated as "Sabbath" or as "week".

Let's look at an example that makes quite clear that it really IS used in the New Testament with the meaning of "week". Here is Luke 18:12.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. (Luke 18:12 AV)

The expression here translated as "in the week" is the Greek "tou sabbatou", the genitive singular meaning EITHER "of the SABBATH" OR "of the WEEK". The internal evidence of this verse makes quite clear that here the intended meaning is "of the week", since the expression "to fast TWICE on a specific day (the Sabbath)" doesn't make sense.

So it is clear that the Greek word "sabbaton" in the New Testament can mean either "Sabbath" or "week".

So why is a Hebrew word that inherently means "REST" used in Greek and in Latin to convey the concept of "SEVEN"? The answer to this question takes us to the teachings of the Pharisees.

While in New Testament times the sect of the Sadducees still observed Pentecost always on a Sunday, the sect of the Pharisees had already switched to always observing Pentecost on Sivan 6th. The way the Pharisees justified their Sivan 6th Pentecost was to claim, without any kind of biblical support whatsoever (!), that the word "shabbath" in Leviticus 23:15-16 must also mean "WEEK". This was their way of getting around the day after the seventh SABBATH (which they interpreted as "week") having to always be a Sunday. And in so doing they were also willingly overlooking that the word "shabuwa" means "week", thus eliminating any justification for attaching the meaning of "week" to the clearly different word "shabbath".

And so, because of this wrong pharisaical interpretation of Leviticus 23:15-16, the word "Sabbath" had become associated with the concept of "week". And since New Testament Greek didn't really have a specific word for "week", therefore the writers of the New Testament used the Greek version of the word "Sabbath" (i.e. sabbaton) to also convey the concept of "a week".

So now let's get back to Matthew 28:1.

THE GREEK TEXT OF MATTHEW 28:1 EXAMINED

The first Greek word of this verse is "opse", which is an adverb of time, meaning something like: after a long time, long after, late", etc.. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament has this

additionally to say about this adverb "opse":

"'opse' followed by a genitive seems always to be partitive, denoting 'late in' the period specified by the genitive (and consequently still belonging to it). Hence in Matthew 28:1 'LATE on the sabbath'."

This word "opse" is only used 3 times in the whole New Testament, here in Matthew 28:1 and then twice in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 11:19 and Mark 13:35). What becomes clear when we examine both these other places where this word is used is that it does not really refer to the very early morning ... it really refers to what Thayer's called "LATE IN THE PERIOD SPECIFIED". When applied to a day, it really refers to the time around sunset.

Let's look at the two only other places where "opse" is used.

And when even was come, he went out of the city. (Mark 11:19 AV)

The expression "and when even was come" is the Greek "kai hote opse egeneto", and the translators rendered the adverb "opse" as "even" (or "evening") in this verse. The context makes clear that Jesus Christ and His disciples went out of the city LATE in the day, i.e. close to sunset time.

Here is the other verse.

Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: (Mark 13:35 AV)

The expression "at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning" is the Greek "opse he mesonuktiou he alektorophonias (lit. the voice of the rooster) he proi". Again the translators rendered the adverb "opse" as "evening". The obvious time progression in this verse makes clear that THE EVENING is indeed meant here by "opse".

So the two usages of "opse" in the Gospel of Mark confirm the statement in Thayer's Lexicon that "opse" denotes something LATE in the period specified. This means that VERY LIKELY Matthew 28:1 is not a reference to something "EARLY JUST BEFORE DAWN ON SUNDAY MORNING", but rather it refers to "A TIME JUST BEFORE OR JUST AFTER SUNSET ON SATURDAY EVENING"!

Let's now look at the next important phrase in Matthew 28:1.

The expression "as it began to dawn (epiphoskouse) towards (eis) the first (mian) of the week (sabbaton)" seems to indicate a time just before sunrise on Sunday morning.

HOWEVER ...

The verb "epiphosko" (i.e. epiphoskouse in this particular verse) is a form of the verb "epiphausko", which in turn is a form of the verb "epiphaino", and this verb is constructed from "epi" (a preposition denoting superposition, thus "on, in, upon, unto", etc.) plus "phaino" (a verb that means "to appear, to become evident, to bring forth into the light, come to view", etc.).

Let's move on to the next phrase before we examine this word "epiphoskouse" more closely.

The phrase "towards the first of the week" is "eis mian sabbaton" in the Greek. The expression "mian sabbaton" seems to be a fairly clear reference to "the first day OF THE WEEK". Of interest here is the Greek preposition "eis".

Biblical Greek employed 18 different prepositions, which, in addition to being prepositions, were also used as prefixes for many other words, sometimes even using a combination of two of these 18 prepositions as a prefix for one particular word. These 18 prepositions and how they were used gave a tremendous amount of flexibility to a language that otherwise only had a relatively small vocabulary. However, the meanings of these 18 prepositions were fairly exactly defined.

We in English tend to be far more careless in the way we use our prepositions than biblical Greek would have permitted. In English we sometimes use different prepositions to convey the same basic thought. [Admittedly, when we do this we are being a little careless, but it frequently happens to us nonetheless.] In biblical Greek, by contrast, each of these 18 prepositions had a clearly defined meaning and application, and in some cases they are somewhat difficult to translate into English without becoming extremely verbose in the process.

Coming to the preposition "eis":

The preposition "eis" is the opposite of the preposition "ek". The preposition "ek" denotes outward motion from the interior. And the preposition "eis" denotes motion towards or unto an object with the purpose of reaching or touching it. By the same token "eis" also denotes that the object towards which it is moving has NOT YET BEEN REACHED.

So now let's put this whole phrase together once more.

"Epiphoskouse eis mian sabbaton" basically means: "as it began to appear TOWARDS ("eis") the first day of the week".

Now let's put both the sections we have examined together. Here's what we have as a (as yet) grammatically somewhat unpolished translation:

"And IN THE EVENING ("opse", or "in the end") OF THE SABBATHS, as it began to appear (or shine?) TOWARDS ("eis") the first day of the week (or weeks) came Mary Magdalene ..."

From this description in Matthew 28:1 we can see the following:

- 1) Matthew is telling us about something that took place after TWO Sabbaths had passed.
- 2) The two Marys went in this account to the sepulchre shortly before sunset Saturday evening or else shortly after sunset that Saturday evening.
- 3) The time was moving TOWARDS the first day of the week.
- 4) Perhaps they left their lodgings a few minutes before sunset and then arrived at the sepulchre a few minutes after sunset?

At any rate, I wanted to give this little bit of grammatical background before presenting 6 different translations of this verse (4 in English and 2 in German). The point to note is that these different translations are not simply expressions of the particular translators' personal views ... they do in fact have a sound foundation in the actual Greek text of this verse. And the grammatical information I have

presented above explains that foundation for these different translations.

So now let's look at these different translations of Matthew 28:1.

DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS OF MATTHEW 28:1

1) THE DARBY TRANSLATION OF 1889:

Now late on sabbath, as it was the dusk of the next day after sabbath, came Mary of Magdala and the other Mary to look at the sepulchre. (Matthew 28:1 DBY)

COMMENT: Darby 111 years ago translated Matthew 28:1 to be a reference to Saturday evening, the period of dusk. He also retained the word as "Sabbath" instead of using the word "week".

2) YOUNG'S LITERAL TRANSLATION OF 1898:

And on the eve of the sabbaths, at the dawn, toward the first of the sabbaths, came Mary the Magdalene, and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre, (Matthew 28:1 YLT)

COMMENT: Young translated this verse 9 years after Darby as being a reference to dawn on Sunday morning. However, Young DID clearly retain THE PLURAL FORM "SABBATHS" in both instances in this verse, something Darby had chosen not to do. Young did this because his stated purpose was to provide a LITERAL translation. While Young opted to use the meaning of "dawn" for the Greek "epiphoskouse", Darby's translation demonstrates that it can equally well be a reference to "DUSK". The interpretation of the Greek to mean "dawn" is obviously very heavily influenced by the traditions surrounding an "Easter Sunday morning resurrection".

3) THE AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION OF 1901:

Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. (Matthew 28:1 ASV)

COMMENT: 3 Years later the ASV chose to use the expression "LATE ON THE SABBATH DAY", which has to refer to Saturday evening. Sunday morning simply cannot be described as "late on the Sabbath day". The ASV also changed Young's expression of "at the dawn" to read "AS IT BEGAN TO DAWN TOWARD the first day of the week". This is a somewhat clumsy way of referring to Saturday evening.

4) GREEN'S LITERAL TRANSLATION OF 1993:

But after the sabbaths, at the dawning of the first of *the* sabbaths, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the grave. (Matthew 28:1 LIT)

COMMENT: Like Young 95 years earlier, Green set out to provide a LITERAL translation. That is why he retained the word "Sabbaths" in the plural form in both instances. It seems quite clear that the second use of "Sabbaths" is a reference to the start of the first day of the week, a Sunday (which starts Saturday evening with sunset). Green's reference to "AT THE DAWNING OF THE FIRST (DAY) OF THE SABBATHS (WEEKS)" has avoided stating that this event took place "AT DAWN". In God's way of counting days "the dawning of a new day" takes place at sunset. Green has left this option open by the

use of this somewhat ambiguous expression.

5) ORIGINAL ELBERFELDER GERMAN TRANSLATION OF 1905:

Aber spät am Sabbath, in der Dämmerung des ersten Wochentages, kam Maria Magdalene und die andere Maria, um das Grab zu besehen. (Matthäus 28:1 ELB)

TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH:

"But late on the Sabbath, in the twilight (the German word 'Dämmerung' can refer to both, dusk and dawn) of the first day of the week, came ..."

COMMENT: This translation also left things intentionally vague. To specify "dawn" it could have used the word "MORGENdämmerung" and to specify "dusk" it could have used the word "ABENDdämmerung". By just using the expression "in der Dämmerung des ersten Wochentages" directly after the phrase "late on the Sabbath", this translation strongly IMPLIES that this is a reference to Saturday evening.

6) LUTHER'S GERMAN TRANSLATION, THE 1912 EDITION:

Als aber der Sabbat um war und der erste Tag der Woche anbrach, kam Maria Magdalena und die andere Maria, das Grab zu besehen. (Matthäus 28:1 LUT)

TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH"

"But when the Sabbath was over and the first day of the week started, came ..."

COMMENT: Luther here shows that this is something that occurred at THE START of the first day of the week. The first day starts with sunset on Saturday evening.

To summarize what we have seen:

- 1) Most translators obviously have a very strong bias towards an "Easter Sunday morning resurrection". This bias is bound to influence their thinking in cases that are perhaps less than crystal clear.
- 2) Translators who strive to provide a very literal translation of this verse show quite clearly that it speaks of a time towards the end of "SABBATHS", two Sabbath days having been involved. They were: the First Day of Unleavened Bread, an annual Holy Day, and the weekly Sabbath on a Saturday.
- 3) Authorities in biblical Greek acknowledge that the adverb "opse" conveys the meaning of LATE in the day. This doesn't really tie in with EARLY AT DAWN as many other translations wish to imply in accordance with the popular teachings.
- 4) In line with this meaning of "opse" there are a number of translations that acknowledge this verse to be a reference to something that occurred at dusk, with Darby's Translation being the most outspoken one and actually using the word "dusk".
- 5) So irrespective of the time other gospel accounts may specify for specific events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus Christ, MATTHEW 28:1 seems to me to be a clear reference to something that

took place on SATURDAY EVENING BEFORE AND AFTER SUNSET.

THE REST OF THE CONTEXT OF MATTHEW 28:1

First of all, Matthew 28:1 does NOT say that on this occasion these two women came with spices of any kind. The verse simply tells us that they came "TO SEE" the tomb. This was not a visit for the purpose of embalming the body. They would not have started such a task in the evening. It seems that here in Matthew 28:1 we have the matter that these two Marys had rested on the weekly Sabbath. Then, as sunset was approaching, they decided to take a walk to the tomb, to be sure that they would correctly identify the location of the tomb the next morning when they were planning to come back for the purpose of embalming the body. By the time they arrived at the tomb, the sun had very likely just barely set.

Matthew 28:2-4 shows that there had been a great earthquake earlier (the verb "was" in verse 2 is the second aorist, middle deponent, indicative form of the verb "ginomai" meaning "to be, to come to pass", etc., and the aorist voice here refers to what had taken place earlier), and an angel had descended from heaven and rolled back the stone from the entrance of the tomb, and the Roman guards were in a state of paralyzed shock. The angel then spoke to these two Marys.

Matthew 28:6 reads as follows:

He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. (Matthew 28:6 AV)

This verse makes quite clear that at that point in time Jesus Christ had ALREADY been resurrected. In Matthew 28:7 the angel instructs the women to tell Christ's disciples that Christ has been resurrected, and that they should all go to Galilee where they would see Jesus Christ.

[Matthew 28:8-20 then presents a very condensed account of the events that followed, with the 11 disciples actually going into Galilee and seeing Jesus Christ there on a certain mountain (verses 16-17). Then they must have returned immediately to Jerusalem, where they again saw Jesus Christ (Acts 1:4). This all happened in a period of 40 days (Acts 1:3), and when we consider that they must have travelled on foot around 100 miles or more each way (from Jerusalem to Galilee and back to Jerusalem), then a considerable part of that 40-day period was taken up by this return trip to Galilee. Some of the other gospel accounts fill in some of the details that Matthew's account omits in this very condensed conclusion of Matthew's Gospel. For example, Matthew completely omits any reference to Jesus Christ's two appearances to them, one week apart, where Thomas was only present at the second occasion. This illustrates that Matthew omitted most of the details that follow the time of the resurrection.]

So here is what Matthew 28 shows us about Christ's resurrection:

- 1) Saturday evening after sunset TWO Sabbaths had ended.
- 2) By that time (Saturday evening) Jesus Christ had already been resurrected.
- 3) 3 Days before Saturday evening means that Christ must have been placed in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea on Wednesday evening (Matthew 12:40).
- 4) This means that He must have been crucified Wednesday morning, after having observed the Passover with His disciples on Tuesday evening.
- 5) So when the other gospel accounts speak about people going to the tomb on Sunday morning, then

obviously Jesus Christ was ALSO "already risen".

6) A careful and accurate translation of Matthew 28:1 would obviously TOTALLY DEMOLISH any idea of an "early Easter Sunday morning" resurrection, and thereby completely destroy any possibility of the "Good Friday/Easter Sunday" crucifixion/resurrection scenario. So correct translations of this verse are going to be hard to come by. Yet even the few translations I have quoted earlier, coupled with a rudimentary understanding of some of the actual Greek words in this verse, should enable us to unravel the truth about the timing of the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

7) So Matthew 28:1 fully endorses the timing of the crucifixion and the resurrection as it was always taught by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong.

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