

John - Chapters 20-21

In the temples and synagogues they had annual readings just like we have the lectionary readings. We've seen before the power of God's ability to time things such as on the reading of the day when it was Jesus' turn to read and comment on the Scriptures and the one that he was given to read was one that He said He had fulfilled.

On the Sabbath that fell during the Feast of unleavened bread, which was considered a different type of Sabbath because it fell during what were considered ordinary or non-holy days of the Feast they had specific readings that they used every year. One was from Exodus, one was from Numbers and the final one was from Ezekiel 37:1-14. So on the Sabbath, the full day that Jesus was in the tomb, if any of his followers had dared go to the temple or synagogue, this is one of the readings they would have heard.

Notice one of the first things Jesus did when he met the disciples in the closed room was to give the Spirit to them by breathing on them, bringing their dry bones to life.

These final chapters of John are chapters of several different endings:

It could end with the crucifixion, burial and the watching of the women. There are those who believe that this is originally where Mark's Gospel ended. Why would a Gospel end here? Perhaps a Paul Harvey sort of thing, where you could read the book but would have to come to church or ask somebody if you wanted to hear, "the rest of the story."

It could end with Thomas' exclamation and Jesus' rebuke of him and blessing on future believers. This is certainly the emotional climax of the book and brings us full circle to the proclamation of Jesus as God that we heard in the prologue.

It could end at the end of chapter 21. This certainly sounds like a conclusion. John reminds the readers of his purpose in writing the book in the first place.

It could end at the end of the book. John may have written the whole thing at once or added this chapter as an afterthought when he wanted to clear up any misperceptions about the rumor that he wouldn't die before Jesus returned. It might damage their faith if he died before Jesus returned.

Don't forget: these people just didn't sit down and start writing and then pass out copies. They made at least one rough draft and then made a final copy and sometimes made changes in the final copy. Some of the odd or misplaced passages of Paul are presumed to be where he's taken the letter before it was copied and sent and added notes in the margin that the copyists had to stick where they thought best.

One of the great unanswerable questions of chapter 20 is who are "we" who testified that John's testimony was true in verse 24? When did they put this attestation to the book before John finishes up in verse 25?

John gives a rather brief summary of the crucifixion and the resurrection. It's clear that he assumes that his readers are familiar with the story and that he doesn't see the need to go into too much detail, such as he only mentions Mary Magdalene going to the tomb but assumes that we'll know that others were there because he quotes her as talking about "we" in verse 2.

John also preserves little details that betray him as an eye-witness as he has throughout the book.

The napkin being folded - There's an e-mail going around since 2007 about the significance of this. It's a wonderful story, it's a shame it's just one of those urban legends that somebody's made up with evidently no basis in historic truth.

seeing the linen cloths "lie" some interpret as meaning that they were still in place like a cocoon or like you do strips of paper mache around a balloon and then pop the balloon, while the strips retain their shape.

difference in resurrection of Jesus and Lazarus and other brought back to life: they were brought back to their same earthly existence and their same body. Jesus is ascended to a new and glorified body such as Paul talked about. He is in a new existence, a new phase, something different.

John believes in verse 8, but we're not told what he believes. We are told that they didn't yet know that the Scripture had said that he would rise. Later in the book of Acts, Peter will preach the first Pentecost sermon and use that scripture in his message: Psalm 16:10

A couple of things that are open to speculation:

1) What did Jesus mean when he told Mary that he had not yet ascended to the Father?

2) What type of body did Jesus have and why didn't people recognize Him?

I Cor. 15:35-44

Ph. 3:20-21

I John 3:1-3

2 Cor. 4:17-5:2

Sunday (the day after the Sabbath) is the Festival of the early First Fruits.

The Jewish thought of the day was that when Messiah came and the Kingdom of God came that it would indeed be a new world, a restored world, so when they saw everything still the same they would've assumed that Jesus had failed, when what had failed was their understanding of the nature of the Kingdom.

Notice that things have changed: Since "It is finished" on the cross there's a new world started that nobody recognizes:

Jesus tells Mary to tell not his disciples, not his followers, not his servants, not even his friends, but his "brothers" about seeing Him. That shows that the work of redemption is done and now the believers are His brothers because they've been adopted by "My God and their God, My Father and Their Father." Romans 8:14-18 Galatians 4:4-7

Jesus breathes on them and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. Doesn't this contradict Acts that says that Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost? Two ways the Spirit is given: indwelling and filling

They were indwelled by the Spirit or they wouldn't have been in the upper room at Pentecost. This wasn't the same as the upper room of the Passover, but it was an upper room in the temple where they gathered, not behind a locked door. Notice that when they were meeting and Jesus appears to them again, it's mentioned that they were behind closed doors, but this time there's no mention of any "fear of the Jews" and the closed door is probably mentioned to emphasize the sudden appearance of Jesus despite the door.

Is this power of forgiving and retaining sins just for the disciples or for the whole church? Just like the binding and loosing that Peter is given in Matthew, what does it mean? It is not a power of setting standards or even of legal authority. They are given the task of spreading the news of salvation: those who accept the message they have the power to bring find their sins forgiven and those who reject it have their sins retained or are still bound.

The commentators see in Thomas' demand for proof not something he actually intends to do but a rejection of what the others have told him about seeing the risen Jesus where they pointed to his pierced hands and feet.

Whatever happened was enough to turn Thomas from a bitter skeptic who demanded concrete evidence into a renewed disciple who immediately proclaimed that Jesus was God and Lord.

Notice in Jesus' rebuke to Thomas that there's a blessing that extends to those of us in the room.

Peter is restored at the end of the book and in Acts is taking a leadership role, even if he does act prematurely in deciding to appoint a new apostle to take Judas' place. As usual, he's being impulsive and getting ahead of the plan, for we'll see that the replacement apostle is to be Paul.