

Synchronizing the Resurrection Narratives— 4: Event 1 (part 1): Two Marys come to the tomb “late” Saturday Evening, Matt. 28:1.

We begin the synchronization of the resurrection narratives with Matthew 28:1. Since this first verse requires a bit of exegesis, I have included four well-respected versions:

Matthew 28:1 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. (KJV)

Matthew 28:1 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 sepulcher. (NAS, 1971)

Matthew 28:1 Now **after** the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. (NAS, 1995)

Matthew 28:1 Ὀψὲ δὲ σαββάτων, τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων, ἦλθεν Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή, καὶ ἡ ἄλλη Μαρία, θεωρῆσαι τὸν τάφον. (There are no variants in the Greek texts)

There are two temporal phrases in the above passages that tell us when the two Marys went to the tomb. These terms require exegesis. I will cover the first one in this essay; it is the term underlined in the above verses.

Note how the 1995 NAS varies from the KJV and its own 1971 translation: from “in the end” to “after”—the phrase “late on the Sabbath” was changed to “after the Sabbath.” The Greek word is *opse* (Ὀψὲ). In the Jewish method of timekeeping, the days switched from one to the next with the setting of the sun. Orthodox Jews today still use the same reckoning. “Late on the Sabbath” is clearly a reference to the time of day near the end of the Sabbath when the sun was nearing the horizon, about to set. “After the Sabbath,” on the other hand, could mean any time after the Sabbath day was over. The common mistake is to view this visit to the tomb by the two Marys as the same visit recorded in Mark 16 and Luke 24. This error is found in many of the later English Bibles. In the ancient English Bibles it was translated “in the evening of the Sabbath (Cloverdale, et al).”

The fact that the PRIMARY meaning of *opse* is “late” (not “after”) is well documented in all of the standard scholarly Greek lexicons:

Freiberg: ὀψέ adverb; *late, at a late hour*; (1) as a time beginning with the first watch of the night (from 6:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.) *evening* (MK 11.19)

BDAG: 1. pert. to an advanced point of time in the day (usually between sunset and darkness), *late*. pert. specif. to the period between late afternoon and darkness, *late in the day, evening* i.e. *in the evening* Mk 13:35. ὀψὲ οὐσης τῆς ὥρας (s. B-D-F §129) 11:11 v.l. (for ὀψίας). As a predicate (B-D-F §434, 1; also s. Rob. 973) ὅταν ὀψὲ ἐγένετο *when it became evening, when evening came* 11:19.—Used almost like an indecl. subst. (Thu. 3, 108, 3 al. ἐς ὀψέ) μέχρις ὀψέ *until evening* Hs 9, 11, 1; also ἕως ὀψέ (PLond III, 1177, 66 p. 183 [113 AD]) 9, 11, 2.—TMartin, BR 38, '93, 55-69

LOUW-NIDA: ὀψέ ; ὀψιος, α, ον: pertaining to a point near the end of a day (normally after sunset but before night) - 'late, late in the day.' ὀψέ: ὅταν ὀψὲ ἐγένετο, ἐξεπορεύοντο ἔξω τῆς πόλεως 'when it became late, they went out of the city' Mk 11.19. It is also possible to understand ὀψέ in Mk 11.19 as indicating a period of time, namely 'evening' (see 67.197). ὀψιος: ὀψίας ἤδη οὐσης τῆς ὥρας, ἐξῆλθεν εἰς Βηθανίαν 'since it was already late, he went out to Bethany' Mk 11.11.

Liddell and Scott: ὀψέ, ὈΨ'Ε, ὀψέ ὈΨ'Ε Adv. *after a long time, late*, Lat. sero, Hom., etc.; ὀψὲ διδάσκεισθαι or μανθάνειν to be *late* in learning, learn *too late*, Aesch., Soph. 2. *late in the day, at even*, opp. to πρωί, Hom., Thuc., etc.; ὀψὲ ἦν, ὀψὲ ἐγίγνετο it was, it was getting, *late*, Xen.; so, ἐς ὀψέ Thuc. 3. c. gen., ὀψὲ τῆς ἡμέρας *late* in the day, Livy's serum diei, Id.; so, τῆς ὥρας ἐγίγνετο ὀψέ Dem.; ὀψὲ τῆς ἡλικίας *late* in life, Luc.

Thayer: ὀψέ (apparently from ὀπις; see ὀπίσω, at the beginning), adverb of time, *after a long time, long after, late*; a. especially *late in the day* (namely, τῆς ἡμέρας, which is often added, as Thucydides 4, 93; Xenophon, Hellen. 2, 1, 23), i. e. *at evening* (Homer, Thucydides, Plato, others; for רַבָּעַ תָּעַ, Gen. 24:11):

Moulton, Milligan (Greek Lexicon that emphasis Greek of the 1st century) ὀψέ. For ὀψέ, “late,” cf. P Oxy XIV. 1679¹² (iii/A.D.) λείαν γὰρ ὀψαί (l. ὀψέ) σοι ταῦτα ἔγραψα, “for I am writing this to you very late” (Edd.). The word is construed with a partitive gen. in such phrases as P Par 35¹⁵ (B.C. 163) ὀψὲ τῆς ὥρας: cf. Philostratus (*ap.* Kayser II. p. 171⁴) ὀψὲ τῶν Τρωικῶν, “at a late stage in the Trojan war.” This would support the RV rendering of Mt 28¹ ὀψὲ [δὲ] σαββάτων, “late on the sabbath day”;

Gingrich: ὀψέ adv. *late (in the day), in the evening* Mk 11:19; 13:35.

¹Some of these lexicons do include the meaning “after” in their extended/subjective discussions but only in regard to Matthew 28:1, as if it is a special case. Why is it a special case? My point in citing the above definitions is to demonstrate what they explicit list as the *primary* meanings of *opse*: late!

All of the lexicons that are well-accepted by the scholars demonstrate very clearly that the *primary* and *normal* meaning of *opse* is “late,” and even “late in the day, between 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.” The only reason that it is translated “after” is to try to make it fit the other narratives.

The Lockman Foundation, the owners of the NASB, have been asked by various scholars about their change in the translation from “late” (1971) to “after” (1995). Note their response:

This decision was made in the earlier history of the NASB, before the '95 Update. The primary argument for the original choice of “late” is that it is the usual meaning for the Greek word in question (“*opse*”), and the meaning “after” is not attested for in Greek literature until the second century. Matt. 28:1 is the only verse in the New Testament which seems to require “after” as the meaning for the word. So the original translators were hard-pressed to justify “after” as the translation, even though the lexicons provide it for this verse, and instead they explored ways in which “late” could be understood that were consistent with the other gospel accounts.

By their own admission their heuristic in translating *opse* was to make it consistent with the other gospel accounts—rather than translating it according to the original Greek. The problem is that they ended up doing just the opposite and created more problems: their mistranslation actually contributes to a “perceived disharmony” in the Bible. In the next essay we will cover the next mistranslated temporal phrase. Hint: as you can see from the title, this event occurred Saturday evening—not Sunday morning.

In Christ,

Pastor Don