

FEMALE WITNESSES TO THE EMPTY TOMB AND RISEN JESUS: THE SITUATION WITH FEMALE TESTIMONY

The gospels tell us that when Jesus was buried after his cruel death by crucifixion in a rich man's tomb that a stone was rolled across the door. We are told in one Gospel only that the tomb was guarded against thieves but an angel appeared and made the guards faint. All the gospels say that in the morning, women came to attend to the corpse and found the tomb opened and Jesus gone. They testified that an angel told them that Jesus rose and they said they saw Jesus raised from the dead.

The Church says that women were said to have found the tomb empty and seen the risen Jesus and since women were not regarded as valid witnesses their story must be true and the gospels didn't make their testimony up.

According to John 20, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb and found it open and Jesus' body was gone. She told two men in white inside the tomb that some they had taken the body. Mary said to those supposed angels, "they have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:2). How does she know he was laid somewhere as if he were reburied? Why not just say the Lord has been removed from his tomb and we don't know where he is? Why is she specific?

She told that to Jesus as well when he mistook him for the gardener. She was very sure and the fact remains we don't know if she was witnessing to knowing somebody took the body or if she was assuming. It was more than just assuming when she said it to two angelic beings if that is what the men in white were. And Jesus did not let her touch him so she had no way of being sure if it was just a vision or had anything to do with the body coming back to life.

We are told that the women must have been there for they were no good for anything else. But the gospels say they were there to respect Jesus and as the gospels say the disciples were in hiding who else was going to go to the tomb? There was no reason to invent the story. The disciples had to be distanced a little from the tomb lest people would say they robbed the tomb of Jesus' body. Matthew says the Jews blamed them.

The most obvious flaw in what the Church says is that first of all, this female testimony doesn't exist. Somebody reporting what the women said is not the women's testimony – it is the testimony of the persons saying they said this! The gospels speak of the women and what they said as part of the story. They say nothing concerning the validity of taking what the women said as testimony. And the women certainly only told a story, they didn't make an official or legal statement out of it. The gospels don't treat them as witnesses but as gossips. If they didn't they would say the women were in the function of true witnesses. If the local liar tells you the house is on fire, you will check it out just in case. It doesn't mean you considered him to be a viable witness.

The Church says the women seeing angels and Jesus is convincing for they did not expect to see anything out of the ordinary. Psychology says that we must treat visions with suspicion if the witnesses expected something to happen. We are told that the women were going to anoint the Jesus corpse indicating that finding Jesus alive would be the last thing on their minds. But taking oils to anoint a risen Jesus makes sense for they would have thought he would be like he was when the girl wiped oil on his feet. The argument is pure thin air.

Women could be legal witnesses but only if there were no men. Maybe that was down to sexism or down to the thought that women had homes to run. The women at the tomb were not legal witnesses so any arguments from case law at the time are just tricks and irrelevant. Historians like Josephus used female testimony. Jesus took the woman's word for it many times in the gospels. The gospels depend on women for information not just with the resurrection so the female testimony for it is nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing in the resurrection accounts mentions a healed and glorious risen Jesus. Resurrection is about a transformation in to a better and eternal existence. Paul even has a Jesus who is more like a wraith. The gospel version is of a Jesus who is just different but that is neither here or there. Resurrection is distinguished from resuscitation. But the two are compatible. The women are only useful if you want to say the disciples were not there the body was found missing. That is too bare on its own so they need to say they seen Jesus. They only testify to seeing Jesus but that is not the same as them being able to witness that he was resurrected.

Christians make a big deal about saying that women were the witnesses to the resurrected Jesus. They say that if the gospel story was invented the women would not be mentioned as witnesses at all. But this overlooks the fact that the gospels are doing the witnessing so it does not matter. Somebody witnessing to what women said does not make women witnesses - it does the contrary. The women are there as part of the story not as witnesses. The gospels do not care why the tomb was empty so it was not considered a sign. Thus there is no reason to think that the women were meant to witness to it. The

Christians oddly say that people writing about the women makes the women witnesses but that could be said of the angels. In fact the witnesses were the angels who said Jesus rose!! They are better as witnesses though the only problem is they never say how they know he rose. Do the gospels worry more about the angels and give the best witness to them than to the resurrection of Jesus? Strangely enough they do! There is more detail about the angels and so what we have is a side issue the witnessing of the angels and then the angels essentially being made the witnesses.

Its lies and stupidity all the time when the Church is involved in anything.

The story of the women would have had to have been invented because if it had been men people would be more likely to believe that the men stole the body. It was a thing that men would have been expected to do. Even if women were bad witnesses the gossellers would have had to invent their presence at the tomb.

Let us suppose the women were considered witnesses. The women were the only ones present at the empty tomb and who might have been the only witnesses the Matthew gosseller could have had any confidence in for he did not trust the guards. Christians reject stories of visions as enough for establishing the resurrection of Christ for most Christians reject the visions of Medjugorje so it follows that the real evidence for the resurrection must come from the women being able to prove that a physical miracle of a body coming back to life happened. The apostles came by later and so cannot count as witnesses of this – and yet the religion insanely claims that they are THE AUTHORITATIVE witnesses and that is why they are special. Christianity then has to fall back on the testimony of women who are never even said to have been reliable. So Christianity is just superstition for how do we know that the women did not see Jesus being stolen from the tomb but tried to cover it up with a resurrection story or the story that Jesus vanished in the tomb for the destruction of his body by God was the prelude to his spiritual resurrection? If the gossellers believed that women were unreliable witnesses and nevertheless made witnesses of them then were they trying to get it across to the Church that the whole story was a pile of nonsense? Christians argue that the absurdity of men who rejected female testimony using these women proves the story true. In other words, the more improbable or incredible a story is the more likely it is to be true! We will believe anything if we follow that principle.

The John Gospel says that the Samaritan woman was regarded as a valid witness for Jesus among the Samaritans who were just as sexist as the Jews (John 4:39). The Mishna says women can be witnesses under certain circumstances like when there are no men ones (Yebamoth 16:17; Ketuboth 2:5; Eduyoth 3:6). The Old Testament speaks of women like Deborah and Ruth and Esther who were valid and trusted witnesses so only heretical Jews comprising a minority among the Sadducees who regarded the Torah alone as scripture could have disparaged female testimony. It is simply a lie that the anomaly of women being witnesses means the story is true. Moreover, the story does not present them as legal witnesses at all and it was the tradition law that had reservations about women but not all agreed. Jesus himself said that women are forbidden to divorce their husbands indicating that they were considered to be valid witnesses by many and he was certainly saying a woman's testimony was valid here. The laws that are supposed to ban female witnesses are really against women being used as witnesses when male witnesses would do but with male witnesses they are okay.

If women were no good as witnesses if men saw the empty tomb, then the women are a strong indication that no man saw the tomb empty and the guards didn't see it and were perhaps never there at all. And that the story of the disciples seeing the tomb was made up. The women were included as witnesses perhaps implying that the gossellers rejected any tradition that women could not testify which makes any argument that since women were made the first witnesses though women were not considered to be any good as witnesses therefore women must have really seen what they said, to be wholly tripe.

Josephus used female testimony when he was putting together a historical account relating to massacres. He used two women's accounts to explain what happened at Masada.

The Church answers that he had no choice. There was no other testimony available for they were the sole survivors. So it says he cannot be used as proof that women were accepted as witnesses.

But the fact remains that they were.

It is indeed true that the Masada women were the sole survivors which was why Josephus respected and utilised this testimony but if you look at the gossellers could it be that their treatment of the female testimony shows that it was the only real testimony? Were the male witnesses lied about or was that testimony so incoherent that it was not testimony at all thus driving the gossellers back to dependence on the women?

Maybe there are other historians whose work is lost who did use female testimony along with men's?

The Church wants to protect its argument that the gospel reliance on women's testimony is so unusual that the women really did see the empty tomb and the angels and maybe Jesus. But that presupposes that the gossellers could have used male testimony only but did not.

There is no evidence whatsoever apart from testimony, that is refuted by Paul who did not need the empty tomb in his system but who in listing the evidence for the resurrection denied the testimony of the women by omitting them, that there was an empty tomb.

The testimony of women then was considered to be better than Christians would have you think (Historical Evidence and the Empty Tomb Story, A Reply to William Lane Craig, Jeffrey Jay Lowder). The gospels were written for Jews in a Gentile culture that regarded women highly and even as potential goddesses. The gospels were chiefly written for the Gentiles therefore the authors couldn't have had a problem inventing women witnesses.

Christians never used the women to provide evidence of the gospel. It was only the male witnesses that were considered necessary. The story of the women at the tomb and finding it empty may have been invented to explain how some of the apostles went to see it vacant. To say the apostles visited the tomb and found it empty is playing into the hands of the critics who were supposedly saying that Jesus' disciples robbed the tomb.

Only Luke and John refer to males who seen the empty tomb. But that was no good for what if the women thought the tomb was empty and left it to tell the disciples which is hardly a good way to verify something so major. You would expect the evidence to be as good as that you would need to jail somebody for murder. It is far from as good as that! Indeed if we are to stake our eternal salvation on such flimsiness then executing murderers on flimsy evidence is sensible in comparison. We would have no right to condemn such executions.

Here is a quote from a scholar: Richard Bauckham expands on this issue after considering a couple of passages from Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, a book (possibly written by a woman) from the relevant period that accords women great prominence and importance in Israel's history.

There are two passages within the book that Bauckham considers where women receive divine revelation, only to be disbelieved by those that receive the information that they pass along.

Here we will discuss one of the two passages that Bauckham analyzes, that being a revelation sent to Miriam, the sister of Moses: The spirit of God came upon Miriam one night, and she saw a dream and reported it to her parents in the morning, saying, "I had a vision this night, and behold a man was standing in a linen garment and he said to me, 'Go and say to your parents, Behold the child who will be born of you will be cast forth into the water; likewise through him the water will be dried up. And I will work signs through him and save my people, and he will exercise leadership always.'" When Miriam reported her dream, her parents did not believe her (31).

Bauckham then elaborates: The parallel to the story of the women at the tomb is striking, though it is Mark and Matthew who have the command of the angel, "Go and tell," and Luke who reports that they were not believed. What is striking about Pseudo-Philo's account is that Miriam's parents are the righteous couple Amram and Jochebed. Amram has been portrayed as a man of great faith and faithfulness to God, approved by God.

There does not seem to be any strong reason in the plot for their failure to believe their daughter's prophetic dream. It seems as though Pseudo-Philo sees their unbelief as the expected reaction, even by such admirable characters as Amram and Jochebed, to a claim by a woman to have received divine revelation. Yet there is no doubt that Pseudo-Philo portrays the revelation given to Miriam as authentic (at the end of the chapter he points out that it was fulfilled: 9:16) and readers are surely therefore entitled to think that Amram and Jochebed should have believed it.

Bauckham goes on to discuss a parallel account of this revelation from Josephus, but at the same time gives us a further glimpse of how divine revelation to women was minimized during that time period: Indirect confirmation of this understanding of the story is provided by the striking parallel and contrast in Josephus, who also records a dream predicting that Amram and Jochebed's child would deliver Israel. In this case, however, the dream is Amram's; it is Amram who then tells his wife about it; and they believe the promises of God (*Antiquities* 2.210-18). Here the revelation is given by God to a man and there is no problem of belief.

Whether Josephus knew the tradition about Miriam's dream and corrected it, or Pseudo-Philo knew the tradition Josephus records and transformed it, we cannot be sure. Josephus was certainly capable of correcting even a biblical text portraying revelation given directly to a woman. Whereas in Genesis Rebekah inquires of the Lord about her unborn children and receives a prophetic oracle about them (*Gen* 25:22-23), in Josephus it is her husband Isaac who prays and receives the prophecy from God (*Antiquities* 1.257). Josephus does not consistently remove every case of God speaking directly to or through a woman that he found in his Scriptures, but he does seem to minimize them, and largely restricts them to a few women whom the Bible calls prophets, such as Deborah (*Antiquities* 5.200-209) and Huldah (*Antiquities* 10.59-61), but not including Miriam, whom the Bible (*Exod* 15:20) but not Josephus calls a prophet. It looks as though Josephus represents an opinion that was disinclined to believe that God communicates revelation directly to women and that Pseudo-Philo was concerned to counter this notion.

In Josephus's retelling of the story of Manoah and his wife (Antiquities 5.276-281) the theme of revelation is subordinated to the picture of Manoah as a jealously suspicious husband of a remarkably beautiful wife. Compare Pseudo-Philo's versionBeyond that, the data from Josephus and Pseudo-Philo seems to indicate that this was in fact a substantial problem when it came to women being used as vessels of revelation, which is pertinent here given that Jesus appears first to women in two of the Gospels, and all of the Gospels tell us that women received the initial revelation through angels of Jesus' being raised from the dead. Bauckham then goes on to draw a connection here to Luke's narrative: In Luke's resurrection narrative the reaction of the apostles to the women's report from the tomb functions similarly to the comparable motif in Pseudo-Philo: It counters the male prejudice about revelation to women. There is no doubt that the apostles ought to have believed the women.

To argue that the gossellers would not have used women as witnesses for their evidence is necessarily flimsy is odd when the fact is the evidence is flimsy anyway!