

Matthew 28:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

Analysis

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. The word 'behold' (ἰδού/idou) demands attention to the extraordinary nature of what follows. A 'great earthquake' (σεισμὸς μέγας/seismos megas) accompanied this divine intervention, echoing the earthquake at Christ's death (Matthew 27:51) and demonstrating creation's response to its Creator's victory over death.

The 'angel of the Lord' (ἄγγελος Κυρίου/angelos Kyriou) is a singular being of remarkable authority, 'descended from heaven' (καταβὰς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ/katabas ex ouranou), indicating direct divine commissioning. Angels serve as God's messengers at crucial redemptive moments—announcing Christ's birth (Luke 1:26-38), ministering after His temptation (Matthew 4:11), and now heralding His resurrection.

The angel 'rolled back the stone' (ἀπεκύλισε τὸν λίθον/apekylise ton lithon)—not to let Jesus out, for He had already risen, passing through grave clothes and sealed tomb in His glorified body (John 20:19). Rather, the stone was removed to let witnesses in, to verify the empty tomb. The resurrection occurred before the stone's removal; this act revealed what had already happened.

The angel then 'sat upon it' (ἐκάθητο ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ/ekathēto epanō autou)—a

posture of triumphant authority over death and the grave. This recalls Christ's own posture of completion and authority (Hebrews 1:3, 10:12). The tomb could not hold Him; the stone meant to imprison the dead becomes a throne for the angelic herald of victory.

Historical Context

Earthquakes were understood in biblical times as manifestations of divine presence and power (Exodus 19:18, 1 Kings 19:11-12). The great earthquake at Christ's death tore the temple veil (Matthew 27:51); this resurrection earthquake announces the new temple—Christ's body raised and glorified.

Roman guards stationed at the tomb (Matthew 27:65-66) would have experienced this terrifying display of divine power. Their role was to prevent the disciples from stealing the body; instead, they witnessed supernatural intervention that left them paralyzed with fear (Matthew 28:4). Later they were bribed to spread false reports (Matthew 28:11-15).

The stone's removal was physically significant—these blocking stones weighed between one and two tons and rolled in a groove. Multiple strong men were required to move them. The women had discussed this problem (Mark 16:3). The angel's effortless removal demonstrated power far exceeding human capacity.

Ancient Jewish and pagan literature contains no credible parallel to this event. Pagan myths of dying and rising gods (Osiris, Adonis, etc.) involved seasonal cycles and mystery cult symbolism, not historical events with named witnesses and verifiable locations.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the earthquake and angelic appearance demonstrate that Christ's resurrection was a cosmic event affecting all creation, not merely a spiritual or subjective experience?
2. What does the angel's authority over death's barriers teach us about Christ's complete victory and our confidence in facing death ourselves?
3. Why does God choose to reveal the resurrection through such dramatic signs rather than subtle or private manifestations?

Interlinear Text

καὶ οἶδού, σεισμὸς ἐγένετο μέγας· ἄγγελος γὰρ κυρίου
And behold earthquake there was a great the angel for of the Lord
G2532 G2400 G4578 G1096 G3173 G32 G1063 G2962

καταβὰς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ προσελθὼν ἀπεκύλισεν τὸν λίθον
descended from heaven and came and rolled back G3588 the stone
G2597 G1537 G3772 G4334 G617 G3037

ἀπὸ τῆς θύρας, καὶ ἐκάθητο ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ
from the door And sat upon it
G3588 G2374 G2532 G2521 G1883 G846

Additional Cross-References

Acts 16:26 (Parallel theme): And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

John 20:1 (Parallel theme): The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

1 Timothy 3:16 (Parallel theme): And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

