



## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 141

**Women were the first discoverers of the empty tomb** – Women in the first century Palestine were considered and treated as second class citizens, and their testimony was deemed as inferior and inconsequential. Given this, it is remarkable that the Gospels record that the first discoverers of the empty tomb, and also the first ones to whom the resurrected Jesus appeared, were women and not men, who went and told the disciples (Matthew 28:1, 7-10; Mark 16:1-9; Luke 24:9-10; John 20:2, 1-18). This was a great honor bestowed upon the women, a radical departure from the customs of the day. If this was a made up story then surely the male disciples would have been the ones discovering the empty tomb, meeting the resurrected Jesus, and proclaiming His resurrection to others. But this was God's story not man's, with the Gospels describing the reality of what happened and not what was acceptable.

**Christ's disciples died for their beliefs** – Having witnessed the arrest, mocking, beating, humiliation, and shameful and painful death of their Lord, the Bible describes the condition of the disciples as fearful, discouraged, confused and doubtful (Mark 14:67-72; Luke 24:21-24; John 20:11-13, 19a, 24-25). It would seem that at that point any Christian movement would have come to an end. But shortly afterwards we read that the attitude and condition of these disciples changed radically. Their sorrow and anguish turned to joy (Luke 24:40-41; John 16:19-22; 20:19); their doubt turned into belief (John 20:26-28); and their fear and cowardice turned into conviction and boldness (Acts 2:14-47; 4:1-31; 5:17-42, etc.). The apostles of Christ left their ordinary lives, and steadfastly devoted themselves to proclaiming the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. They were mocked, beaten, imprisoned, stoned and persecuted, yet remained unwaveringly faithful to Christ, even willing to die for their faith (Acts 12:1-2). According to tradition most of the apostles endured great suffering and were martyred, being put to death for their faith in their Lord. Such extreme change in attitude and conduct can only be explained by the reality of the resurrection of Christ, that they had seen their crucified Lord risen from the dead.

**Changes to Jewish traditions and rituals** – Jewish people regarded their national traditions, rituals, festivals and other social institutions as extremely important to them and their identity; and having received them from God, they celebrated them, defended them, and since the time of Abraham and Moses passed them down from generation to generation. To forsake these was tantamount to being cut off or alienated from God and His people (Genesis 17:14; Exodus 12:15; 31:14; Numbers 9:13).

But what is remarkable is that after the death and resurrection of Christ, significant Jewish traditions were changed. The offering of animal sacrifices was suddenly discontinued by the disciples of Christ, recognizing that Jesus was the true lamb of God, offered for their sins (John 1:29; Hebrews 9). The Sabbath, the seventh day of rest for the people, was suddenly changed from Saturday to Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection, and thus the day of gathering and worship for the people of God (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10), realizing that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Sabbath, giving eternal rest to His people (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 4:1-11). The Passover meal, which was a reminder of their sufferings in Egypt and their deliverance by God, was transformed by Jesus into the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32), celebrated by His followers, recognizing that He was their Passover (Isaiah 53:7; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19). Also circumcision, the sign of the old covenant, was replaced with baptism, as the sign of the new covenant (Colossians 2:11-12), and the followers of Christ no longer needed to be circumcised but were baptized (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:36-41; Galatians 5:6; 6:15), representing their death and resurrection in Him (Romans 6:4-8).

All of these were radical changes, which no Jew would have initiated and risked being cut-off from their God and community, unless something radical had happened. The glorious resurrection of Christ and His appearance to His disciples was what changed them and their lives forever, and has even since been changing the lives of many people all over the world, who have trusted Jesus as their Lord and Savior.