

## Breaking the Silence

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Given the fact that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), it should be no surprise that one of the most disputed days in history “just so happens” to be the most important day for Christians—the day on which Jesus rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12-18). For centuries, critics of Christ have ridiculed the gospel writers’ resurrection narratives, contending that there are blatant contradictions within the accounts. In his book, *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist*, Dan Barker lists no less than 17 “discrepancies” within the resurrection accounts alone (1992, pp. 178-184). In his book *Biblical Errancy*, skeptic Dennis McKinsey lists 20 alleged discrepancies under a section titled, “The Resurrection Accounts are Contradictory” (2000, pp. 447-454). One of the questions that both of these gentlemen ask is, “Did the women tell what happened?” (Barker, p. 183; McKinsey, p. 451).

Allegedly, Mark’s account of the women who came to the tomb on the morning of Jesus’ resurrection disagrees with what Matthew and Luke recorded. Notice carefully what these three gospel writers penned concerning the women following their visit to the empty tomb.

“So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to **bring His disciples word**” (Matthew 28:8, emp. added).

“Then they returned from the tomb and **told all these things** to the eleven and to all the rest” (Luke 24:9, emp. added).

“So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And **they said nothing to anyone**, for they were afraid” (Mark 16:8, emp. added).

Since Matthew and Luke indicated that the women brought word of Jesus’ resurrection to the disciples, while Mark specified that the women “said nothing to anyone,” then supposedly the resurrection narratives prove unreliable. Is this true?

Before answering this question, consider what the prophet Isaiah foretold about the silence of the coming Messiah. He wrote (as if it already had happened):

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, **yet He opened not His mouth**; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers **is silent, so He opened not His mouth** (53:5,7, emp. added).

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would not open His mouth, but would be “silent.” Question: Did Jesus ever speak during His ministry?

Certainly, but this prophecy does not characterize Jesus’ entire ministry. Instead, it refers to the particular time when Jesus was tried and crucified. Still, however, Jesus was not completely silent even during His trial and crucifixion (cf. Matthew 26:64; 27:11; Luke 23:28-31,43). So how could Isaiah describe Him as being “silent”? Aside from the fact that “to open the mouth” frequently meant more than simply to speak or not to speak (see Lyons, 2004), Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled because **there was a particular period of time in which Jesus remained silent**. Mark recorded that Jesus, while being falsely accused, “kept silent and answered nothing” (Mark 14:61; cf. Matthew 26:63). The silence of the Sufferer was momentary, and any attempt to force Isaiah’s prophecy to mean more than temporary silence is unjustifiable.

Similarly, the women who visited Jesus’ tomb following His resurrection “said nothing” **for a period of time**. Barker, McKinsey, and other critics who point to Mark 16:8 as contradicting Matthew 28:8 and Luke 24:9 fail to consider that these verses are incongruous only if the writers were referring to the exact same period of the day. The truth is, **initially**, the women were afraid **and silent**, as Mark recorded. Then, later that day, they broke their silence and “told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest” (Luke 24:9). Mark’s narrative does not contradict Matthew and Luke, but supplements their accounts. What’s more, if Bible critics were to examine **all** of Mark’s resurrection narrative, they would learn that following the women’s temporary silence regarding Jesus’ empty tomb (16:8), Mary Magdalene “told those who had been with Him” (16:10) just as the angel had commanded her and the other women earlier in the day (16:7). Thus, Mark defined what he meant when he wrote “they said nothing to anyone.” They said nothing **for a time**, and then later bore witness of Jesus’ resurrection to the disciples.

### REFERENCES

- Barker, Dan (1992), *Losing Faith in Faith* (Madison, WI: Freedom From Religion Foundation).
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## RESOURCES

**Q** Should Christians let their religious convictions affect their political convictions?

**A** Many Americans will go to the polls next month to indicate their choice of political leaders. It has long been a common sentiment that “religion and politics don’t mix”—meaning that one should keep these two spheres separate and distinct, and that political preference be exercised without the interference of religious opinion. But the Bible contradicts this notion. For the faithful Christian, God’s will naturally permeates every aspect of life and takes precedence over everything and everyone (Matthew 6:33). Every thought and every action is subjected to the scrutiny of Scripture (2 Corinthians 10:5). While many decisions in life are left by God to individual taste and personal preference, nevertheless, every area of life must be approached with a proper understanding of moral and spiritual principles that may impinge on one’s decision-making. The Christian is free to form a personal opinion on many political questions—from whether the government should fund health-

care, social security, and public education, to how foreign policy should be conducted. No one’s soul is jeopardized by the stance taken on these matters. Nor has God ever destroyed cities or nations on account of these political concerns.

But we must face the fact that religious and moral issues are being politicized. Just because politicians seize upon these issues, dragging them into the political arena, does not mean that they are exempt from religious scrutiny. The two premiere moral issues confronting the nation are same-sex marriage and the butchery of unborn babies (from abortion to embryonic stem cell research). Like the great prophets of old (e.g., Amos 7:10ff.; Mark 6:17-18), Christians have the divine obligation to stand firm against all politicians who support such evil behaviors. Indeed, our voting should be guided by the same principle articulated by Jehu when he challenged Jehoshaphat’s political affiliation with King Ahab: “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?” (2 Chronicles 19:2).

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## IN THE NEWS

Terri Schiavo’s husband, Michael, listed three dates on her tombstone. The first is her birthdate (December 3, 1963). The second is the date that Michael believed she “departed from this Earth” (February 25, 1990—the day she was found collapsed on the floor). The third was the day on which he declared Terri was “at peace” (March 31, 2005). His contention was that she officially died in 1990. However, British researchers now may have many people questioning his decision to pull the feeding tube—as well as the diagnosis of “persistent vegetative state.”

Researchers studied a 23-year-old woman who sustained a traumatic brain injury. The MRI technology determined that the young lady’s brain functioned comparably to those of healthy volunteers. Adrian Owen, one of the authors of the study, noted: “What we’ve developed is a method for detecting when someone is aware in the absence of other clinical evidence” (as quoted in Hopkin, 2006). *Nature* staff writer Michael Hopkin remarked:

Neuroscientists have re-ignited the debate over whether patients in a vegetative state are conscious of their surroundings, by claiming that a woman in such a “waking coma” can respond to verbal commands. The researchers say that brain scans show that she can selectively think of performing certain actions, such as playing tennis, on request (2006).

Adrian Owen and his colleagues observed: To address this question of conscious awareness, we conducted a second fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging—BH) study during which the patient was given spoken instructions to perform two mental imagery tasks at

specific points during the scan. One task involved imagining playing a game of tennis and the other involved imagining visiting all of the rooms of her house, starting from the front door. During the periods that she was asked to imagine playing tennis, significant activity was observed in the supplementary motor area. In contrast, when she was asked to imagine walking through her home, significant activity was observed in the parahippocampal gyrus, the posterior parietal cortex, and the lateral premotor cortex. **Her neural responses were indistinguishable from those observed in healthy volunteers performing the same imagery tasks in the scanner** (Owen, et al., 2006, 313:1402, emp. added).

Neuroscientists are planning future studies to ask this young girl a series of “yes” or “no” questions in order to determine her feelings and level of consciousness. This study should go a long way in proving that the term “persistent vegetative state” is not a definitive diagnosis—and likewise remind us all of the innate value of every human life.

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Owen, Adrian M., Martin R. Coleman, et al. (2006), “Detecting Awareness in the Vegetative State,” *Science*, 313:1402, September 8.