

## A Biblical “Open” Theology

*“And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb”* Luke 24:2

The resurrection changes everything! The stone rolled away from the tomb opened up an entirely new world. A brave new world! The evangelist Luke captures this new reality by telling us that Jesus, whose resurrection from death had opened the tomb, afterward **opened** the eyes of the Emmaus disciples to understand Christ’s suffering and glory from Moses and all the prophets (Luke 24:31). Then they understood what Jesus had told them, for He had **opened** the Scriptures to them (Luke 24:32). Later that day Jesus **opened** the minds of his disciples to understand all that Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms had intended concerning Him (Luke 24:45).<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the open tomb becomes a symbol that finds its meaning in the human suffering and divine glory of Jesus. The fact of the resurrection opens our understanding to the meaning of the Scriptures. The resurrection is the key that unlocks the Bible. It breaks the seals of the ancient scrolls and solves the riddles of revelation. The stone rolled away from the tomb opens up nothing less than the door to a new creation.

Christ’s death and resurrection opened the door into entirely new dimensions of reality, a new world of both space and time.<sup>2</sup> The altogether appropriate symbol of this new world is “the open door,” an entryway into heretofore unimaginable possibilities. After Christ’s reconciling death, doors that were once thought to be utterly impassable burst open all through the New Testament accounts of the evangelists and the apostles.

The first impassable door that was unexpectedly opened up was the veil of the temple, which was suddenly rent asunder from top to bottom (Matt 27:51).<sup>3</sup> The temple veil symbolized the separation of God and man. The Holy of Holies, protected behind the veil, represented the Edenic garden of the presence of God, and the cherubim woven onto the veil (Exod 26:31-33) recalled the angels who barred Adam’s reentry into the paradise of the pleasant garden (Gen 3:23-24). The rending of the veil opened “a new and living way” (Heb 10: 19-22) for man to reenter the presence of God and to partake of the fruit of the tree of life (Rev 2:7). In other words, the door was opened that had for so long separated God and man. In addition to the temple’s torn veil, the middle wall that had partitioned the temple and divided God’s people was taken down (Eph 2:14-22),

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<sup>1</sup> Luke uses the Greek word “open” in the three texts cited. It is clearly the emphatic word in the context of the resurrection narrative.

<sup>2</sup> Jesus taught that His resurrection would be the raising of the Temple (John 2:19). The temple represented both the cosmic house (Psa 78:69), and the cosmic clock (1 Kgs 6:1; Dan 9:25-27; Matt 24:1-3). Jesus’ resurrection thus ushered in a new cosmos and a new aeon.

<sup>3</sup> As if to highlight the rent veil, Matthew tells us that simultaneously the rocks were riven (Matt 27:51) and the graves were opened (Matt 27:52). In short, miraculous life-giving power burst forth from the cosmic “houses” of the temple of Christ’s body, the second temple (or the temple of Herod), and the temple of the earth.

opening up the way for the Jew and the Gentile to be reconciled as one body to God, the new mystery now brought to light (Eph 2:16, 3:3-6).

These remarkable new ways were opened in the temple only because—most miraculous of all—the stone door that sealed the tomb was rolled away (Matt 27:66-28:2), opening up the way from death to life (Matt 28:5-6). Jesus' resurrection thus clarified His claim to be “the door” (John 10:7),<sup>4</sup> for His resurrection directly opened the once impassable barriers separating God and man, Jew and Gentile, and life and death. As a consequence, an entirely new world—full of wonders—opened up!

Emblems of this new world are seen in the eternal city with its gates that are never shut (Rev 21:25) and the open door that could not be closed which Jesus sets before His people (Rev 3:8). The heavens themselves open up before Nathanael (John 1:51), Stephen (Acts 7:56), and John (Rev 19:11). The tabernacle in heaven stands open (Rev 11:19); the Lion of Judah is deemed worthy to open the book and to loose its seven seals (Rev 5:5). Locked doors in this present world miraculously open as well, according to this new dimension of reality, as Christ appears and stands in the midst of His disciples who had previously locked shut the doors out of fear (John 20:19, 26). Prison doors incarcerating God's people are likewise miraculously made to open of their own accord, releasing the apostles from their prisons (Acts 5:19, 12:10). The iron gate automatically opens up before Peter (Acts 12:16), and Paul and Silas are released as the doors of the Philippian jail open up before them (Acts 16:26). Moreover, God opens wide a door of opportunity for His apostle (1 Cor 16:9), an open door of the word (Col 4:3), an open door of faith (Acts 14:27), and an open door for the gospel to be made accessible to the Gentiles (2 Cor 2:12). In short, a new and wonderful new world opens up, filled with heretofore unimaginably free and open access for the people of God. Christ has the keys of death and Hades (Rev 1:18); and He opens so that no one can shut. (Rev 3:7). The resurrection represents the dawn of a new day—filled with miracles of open access that cause us to reimagine the world set before us!

The door that opens up from death to life reinterprets all reality. If death can become life again, what lesser doors can be shut against us? All manner of moral and social barriers fall down. We can learn to love our enemies and thus invite them to become our friends (Matt 5:44). Thieves can become alms givers (Eph 4:28). Slaves can become brothers beloved (Phil 16). Harlots can become holy (Matt 9:10). Publicans can become evangelists (Mark 2:14). And the chief of sinners can become the apostle to the nations (1 Tim 1:5). For in this new and wonderful world, God's will can be done on earth, even as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10).

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<sup>4</sup> Jesus is the fulfillment of the “doors” of safety in the OT. The door of the ark delivered those sheltered behind it into a new cosmos after the cataclysmic judgment of Noah's flood. The door of Lot's house delivered those behind it from the fiery cataclysmic judgment of Sodom. The door of the Passover Lamb delivered those protected by it from the great plague of death upon Egypt. Finally, the door of Rahab protected her household from the seven trumpets of judgment that destroyed Jericho when her hour of great judgment had come.