



# SUNDAY SCHOOL APRIL 20, 2025

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## OLD TESTAMENT

### Psalm 118:14-23

#### *THIS IS THE GATE OF THE LORD*

The Lord is my strength and my might;  
he has become my salvation.

There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:  
“The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;  
the right hand of the Lord is exalted;  
the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.”

I shall not die, but I shall live  
and recount the deeds of the Lord.  
The Lord has punished me severely,  
but he did not give me over to death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord;  
the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.  
The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the chief cornerstone.  
This is the Lord’s doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.

#### *OVERVIEW*

Psalm 118:14–23 is a climactic section in one of the most joyful and celebratory psalms in the Hebrew Bible. It reflects themes of divine rescue, steadfast love, righteous victory, and the reversal of rejection into exaltation. Often recited during festivals like Passover, it becomes even more significant in Christian tradition during Palm Sunday and Easter, due to its messianic and resurrectional overtones.

#### *BIBLICAL CONTEXT*

- Psalm 118 is part of the **Hallel Psalms** (113–118), used during Jewish festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.
- It sits at the end of Book V of the Psalter (Psalms 107–150), a collection emphasizing return, restoration, and gratitude following exile.
- Verses 22–23 are quoted multiple times in the New Testament (e.g., *Matthew 21:42*, *Acts 4:11*, *1 Peter 2:7*) as a messianic prophecy, identifying Jesus as the “rejected stone” turned cornerstone.
- In the immediate biblical setting, this portion likely commemorates a victorious return or deliverance—possibly a king or a priest leading worship after battle, exile, or suffering.



## HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- While the **author is anonymous**, Jewish tradition sometimes associates this psalm with **King David**, especially as a personal psalm of thanksgiving.
- Its use in post-exilic settings suggests it may have been **sung at the rededication of the Second Temple** (circa 515 BCE), possibly during **Nehemiah or Zerubbabel's time**.
- The reference to “the stone the builders rejected” echoes ancient **construction practices**, where imperfect stones were discarded—yet here, God subverts human judgment.
- Politically, the psalm affirms **God's sovereignty** over human leaders or empires (like Babylon or Persia), emphasizing that **God—not kings or conquerors—defines salvation and righteousness**.

## HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Composition Date (Likely):** Between the 10th century BCE (Davidic era) and the 5th century BCE (post-exilic period).
- **Liturgical Use:** During Jewish temple worship, particularly during Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) and Passover.
- **Christian Usage:** Jesus and the crowd sing or reference this Psalm during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)—see *Matthew 21*.
- *Verse 22 became deeply significant in early Christianity as symbolic of Jesus's rejection and resurrection.*

## SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION & MODERN-DAY CONTEXT

### Metaphor: The Rejected Stone Becomes the Cornerstone

- This image conveys how those deemed unworthy or unimportant by society can become foundational in God's plan.
- In modern terms, this passage speaks powerfully to:
  - Marginalized people or communities overcoming oppression.
  - Personal failure or rejection becoming a stepping stone to growth or influence.
  - Leaders or reformers, often initially dismissed, later seen as vital (think of civil rights leaders, reformers, or even whistleblowers).
  - The power of divine justice and timing, where victory does not come through force but through perseverance, faith, and righteousness.

### "The right hand of the Lord does valiantly"

- Emphasizes divine action, not human strength, as the force behind true salvation. In modern life, this could reflect:
  - Recovering from illness or crisis.
  - Social or political reform that comes through persistence and prayer, not merely policy or power.

### "I shall not die, but I shall live"

- A declaration of **hope against despair**, which resonates deeply in contexts of recovery—be it from **addiction, depression, war, or personal tragedy**.
- Spiritually, it is a mantra of **resilience and purpose**: that one is spared not just to exist, but to “**recount the deeds of the Lord**”—a mission-driven life.



## *SUMMARY*

Psalm 118:14–23 is a triumphant expression of faith in God’s deliverance, celebrating how God lifts up the lowly and brings victory out of rejection. Rooted in ancient temple worship and later adopted into Christian messianic imagery, this section blends personal testimony with communal hope.

### **Key themes include:**

- God as strength and salvation.
- Victory and praise in the lives of the righteous.
- A reversal of rejection, where what was cast aside becomes the most essential part.
- Gratitude for life preserved not for comfort, but for active testimony.

In both ancient Israel and the modern world, this passage calls believers to recognize that true authority and transformation come not through power or approval, but through faith, justice, and God’s mysterious workings.



## NEW TESTAMENT (GOSPEL)

### Luke 24:1-12

#### *THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS*

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.

The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to the hands of sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again.”

Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

#### *OVERVIEW*

Luke 24:1–12 **recounts the first Resurrection appearance event**, beginning with several women discovering that Jesus' tomb is empty early on Sunday morning. They encounter two men in dazzling clothes who announce that Jesus has risen. The women report this to the apostles, but their testimony is initially dismissed as nonsense—except for Peter, who runs to the tomb to see for himself.

This passage serves as a key turning point from death to new life and from despair to hope. It also reflects Luke's emphasis on women as faithful witnesses and the gradual realization of Jesus' resurrection among his followers.

#### *BIBLICAL CONTEXT*

##### **Placement in Scripture:**

- Luke 24 is the final chapter of Luke's Gospel.
- It follows Jesus' crucifixion (Luke 23) and leads into the post-resurrection appearances, such as the **Road to Emmaus** (24:13–35) and Jesus' ascension (24:50–53).

##### **Major Themes:**

- **Resurrection and Renewal:** The cornerstone of Christian faith begins here.
- **Role of Women:** Women are the first witnesses to the resurrection, which challenges first-century norms.



- **Faith vs. Skepticism:** The disciples' initial disbelief contrasts with the faith of the women.
- **Fulfillment of Prophecy:** The angels remind the women that Jesus foretold his resurrection.

*See Addendum "Why Women?"*

### *HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT*

#### **1st Century Judea Under Roman Rule:**

- Crucifixion was a Roman method of execution for insurrectionists and criminals.
- Jesus' death by crucifixion would have been perceived as final and shameful; resurrection was *not* an expected outcome in Jewish or Greco-Roman thought.
- Women's testimonies were not legally valid in Jewish court — making their prominent role in this story theologically radical and culturally subversive.

#### **Burial Practices:**

- Tombs were typically sealed with heavy stones and guarded if there was fear of body theft.
- The preparation of spices indicates traditional Jewish burial rites, paused due to Sabbath observance.

#### **Cultural Perceptions of Resurrection:**

- Some Jews (like Pharisees) believed in a general resurrection at the end of time; others (like Sadducees) did not.
- No major religious tradition in the Roman Empire included belief in bodily resurrection in this sense, making the claim both unique and controversial.

### *HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME*

- **Event Timing:** Early Sunday morning, "on the first day of the week," likely **April 5, 33 CE**, by some scholarly estimates.
- Occurs *three days* after Jesus' death and burial (Friday afternoon to early Sunday).
- Within the **Passover week**—a time of spiritual significance and heightened messianic expectation.

### *SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION & MODERN-DAY CONTEXT*

#### **Metaphorical Readings:**

- **The Empty Tomb:** Represents not just Jesus' victory over death, but an *invitation to transformation*. Just as the tomb was found empty, our own expectations of despair may be overturned.
- **Women as First Witnesses:** A metaphor for how God's message often comes through unexpected, marginalized voices. In today's context, this elevates the importance of listening to those whose perspectives are dismissed by societal norms.
- **Disbelief of the Apostles:** Symbolic of how even the most faithful struggle with radical truth. It mirrors our own skepticism in the face of hope or mystery.



### Modern Resonance:

- **Resurrection as Renewal:** Modern readers can see the resurrection as a call to personal and communal renewal. It offers a pattern for those facing grief, injustice, or burnout — life can spring from death.
- **Hope in the Darkest Moment:** This narrative can comfort those who feel that all hope is lost. The resurrection begins not in triumph, but in mourning and confusion.

### SUMMARY

In **Luke 24:1–12**, a group of women discover Jesus' tomb is empty and are told by angelic figures that He has risen, just as He said. They report this to the apostles, who do not believe them. Only Peter checks the tomb himself and leaves amazed. This passage emphasizes the surprise, doubt, and slow realization that the resurrection is real. It marks the transition from despair to joy and challenges social norms by uplifting women as the first messengers of the Good News.



## ADDENDUM

### Today's Scripture Comparison

**Luke** isn't often directly associated with quoting Psalm 118 the same way Matthew, Peter, or Paul are—but there *is* a very thoughtful and thematic connection between **Psalm 118:14–23** and **Luke 24:1–12**, especially in the **Resurrection narrative**.

Let's explore how **Luke 24** and **Psalm 118:14–23** interact, even without a direct quote:

#### 1. Victory over Death

- **Psalm 118:17** – *"I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord."*
- **Luke 24:5–6** – *"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."*

Though not a citation, Luke's resurrection message **embodies the very declaration** of Psalm 118:17. The psalmist's affirmation that he will live to proclaim God's deeds **finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ's resurrection**.

#### 2. Rejected Stone Becoming the Cornerstone

- **Psalm 118:22** – *"The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."*
- Jesus, rejected by religious leaders, crucified, buried—**rises again as the foundation of the faith**.
- While Luke doesn't quote this verse directly, he **frames the resurrection as God vindicating the rejected Jesus**, paralleling the idea of the rejected stone being exalted.

#### 3. Marvelous in Our Eyes

- **Psalm 118:23** – *"This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."*
- The women and apostles in Luke 24 are stunned, bewildered, and amazed—Luke 24:12 ends with Peter "amazed at what had happened." That amazement echoes the wonder of Psalm 118.

#### Liturgical and Lectionary Insight

Psalm 118 is a **traditional resurrection psalm** in both Jewish and Christian practice—especially during **Passover and Easter**. So, its pairing with Luke 24 in the lectionary is more **liturgical and thematic** than textual. It helps the reader interpret the **Resurrection event through the lens of divine victory, reversal, and praise**.

Even though Luke doesn't cite Psalm 118, the pairing tells the faithful:

*"This resurrection is the Lord's doing—and it is marvelous in our eyes."*

Here's a **side-by-side comparison chart** of **Psalm 118:14–23** and **Luke 24:1–12** to show how they complement each other **thematically and liturgically**, even without direct quotation.





Psalm 118:14–23	Luke 24:1–12	Thematic Link
<i>“The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.”</i> (v.14)	Women find the tomb empty—Jesus is not there. (v.1–3)	<b>God as deliverer</b> – Salvation is revealed in the empty tomb.
<i>“I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.”</i> (v.17)	<i>“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”</i> (v.5–6)	<b>Triumph over death</b> – Life conquers death; testimony begins.
<i>“The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.”</i> (v.18)	Jesus endured the cross but was raised.	<b>Suffering is not the end</b> – God redeems through resurrection.
<i>“Open to me the gates of righteousness...”</i> (v.19–20)	The tomb is open; the entry into new life begins.	<b>A new entrance into righteousness</b> – Symbolic “gates” opened.
<i>“I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.”</i> (v.21)	Angels declare God’s response: <i>“He is risen.”</i>	<b>God has acted</b> – The resurrection is the answer to suffering.
<i>“The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”</i> (v.22)	Jesus, once crucified and rejected, is now risen.	<b>Reversal of rejection</b> – Vindication through resurrection.
<i>“This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”</i> (v.23)	Peter runs to the tomb and is amazed. (v.12)	<b>Marvel and awe</b> – The moment is recognized as divine.

## Why Women?

Would it have mattered if the scenario was one of these: "men" found Jesus missing first, or "Peter" found Jesus missing first?

Yes, it would have mattered. Each scenario would shape the tone, theological emphasis, and even the **credibility** of the resurrection narrative in different ways, both then and now. Let’s explore the implications of each:

### Scenario 1: Women (as in Luke) Find Jesus Missing First

#### What Actually Happened, According to the Gospels.

- **Cultural Upside-Down Message:** In first-century Jewish and Roman cultures, women were not considered reliable legal witnesses. For them to be the first to see the empty tomb and hear the angelic message is *radically counter-cultural*.



- This adds authenticity to the account. If you were fabricating a story in that era, you wouldn't invent women as the first witnesses.
- **Theological Implication:** Elevates the marginalized. This aligns with Jesus' ministry of lifting the lowly, the overlooked, and the outsider.
- **Modern Resonance:** Offers a powerful model for inclusion and the validation of unheard voices.

### Scenario 2: Men Find Jesus Missing First

- **Cultural Credibility:** If men had found the empty tomb first, it would've been *instantly* more believable to a 1st-century audience. No one would question the legal reliability of the testimony.
- **Lost Subversion:** However, this version loses the *scandalous grace* of the Gospel—where the first are last, and the last are first.
- **Theological Cost:** It becomes a story that reinforces existing power structures rather than overturning them.

### Scenario 3: Peter Finds Jesus Missing First

- **Restores Peter's Reputation:** Peter had just denied Jesus three times. If he had found the tomb first, it might feel like Jesus was giving him a fast-track redemption.
- **But:** This would place the *emphasis back on the male leader* rather than the communal witness or the surprise of God's ways.
- **Less Emphasis on Faithful Service:** The women had remained faithful, even at the cross and after burial. If Peter was first, that story of devotion would be overshadowed.

### Why Luke's Version Matters Theologically

- Luke is very intentional about **reversals**—the rich and powerful fall, the poor and lowly are lifted. So having women first keeps with his theological narrative. It's not a side note. It's **part of the Gospel's proof**.
- *"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise..."* (1 Corinthians 1:27)

### Modern-Day Implication

If men or Peter had found the tomb first, we might be left with a faith that reinforces hierarchy and authority. But the way it actually unfolds in the Gospels invites everyone—especially the doubted, dismissed, and disheartened—into the resurrection story.