

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor Emeritus  
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)  
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
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Mark 15:42-16:8      “The Gospel: Death, Burial, Resurrection!”

Intro. The Gospel of Mark begins with the words, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The word “gospel” means good news. Mark’s purpose in writing his gospel account was to tell us the good news of Jesus Christ. I am glad that I have good news to tell today. Jesus of Nazareth was not just a man, but also the Son of God, and today I will share compelling evidence of that truth. Furthermore, we have good news from heaven that God has done something about the sin problem of man. Ever since sin has entered into the human race, our world has been cursed with disease, disaster, crime, violence, and death. The good news is that Jesus bore the suffering, shame, and condemnation of sin. He overcame death, and now we can have victory over sin, suffering and death.

One of the best summaries of the gospel was written by the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:3-4, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” And so there are 3 essential elements of the good news of Jesus Christ. He died for our sins, was buried, and He rose again. And these 3 elements are found in my text today. So let’s look into this text of Scripture and see for ourselves the main aspects of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. First of all:

## I. HIS DEATH WAS PROVEN

Let me take you back to 3:00 p.m. at the cross. Jesus has died. The struggle is now over. The body of Jesus suffers no more pain. He had just cried out, “It is finished!” The saving work which the Father gave the Son to do is finished (John 17:4; 19:30). His spirit has entered Paradise (Luke 23:43).

But did Jesus *really* die? Could the skeptics and infidels be correct that Jesus did not really die, but only *appeared* to die?<sup>1</sup> Is that the explanation of the Resurrection story? Well, the evidence is clear and convincing that Jesus was truly dead. In fact, there were three witnesses of the death of Jesus in Mark’s account. First, His death was proven:

A. By Joseph of Arimathea – In v.43 we read, “Joseph of Arimathea<sup>2</sup>, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.” Clearly, he believed that Jesus was dead. Otherwise, he would not have requested his body for burial. We know very little about this Joseph. We do not read of him before or after this incident that is recorded in all four gospels.<sup>3</sup> What we do know is found in v.43. For example, we know that:

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<sup>1</sup> As claimed by various Gnostic groups. Another view was that he switched places with Simon of Cyrene and Simon was crucified in His place, as mentioned by Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.24.4 (Books, p.264-65).

<sup>2</sup> The exact location of Arimathea is uncertain (Brooks, p.265).

<sup>3</sup> See also Mt. 27:57; Lk. 23:50-51; Jn. 19:38.

1. He Was a Member of the Sanhedrin – That was the ruling council of the Jews.<sup>4</sup> And he was not just a member but a prominent one, according to v.43. Luke says he was a good and upright man (23:50). Luke also makes it clear that he did not agree with the actions of the Sanhedrin regarding Jesus (Luke 23:50, 51a).

2. He Was Rich – In Matt. 27:57 we read, “Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph...” It probably would have taken a man of such political and economic standing to claim the body of Jesus. The fact that he was rich fulfilled the prophecy of Isa. 53:9, which predicted that though the Savior would be despised and rejected of men, He would be “with the rich at His death.” Nicodemus was probably also wealthy,<sup>5</sup> and he assisted Joseph according to John’s gospel (19:39).

3. He Was a Man of Faith – Notice in v.43 that he was “waiting for the kingdom of God.” Here, the word translated “waiting” (*prosdchomai*) means “to wait with expectancy the fulfillment of promises.” He believed God’s promise that the Kingdom of God would be established on earth by the Messiah. And as we shall see, he came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. However:

4. He Was a Secret Disciple – Note that John 19:38 says that Joseph was “a disciple of Jesus but secretly for fear of the Jews.” He was afraid of what people might think if he openly confessed faith in Jesus. He did not want to face the ridicule of the Sanhedrin or lose his seat on the Council. So up to this time he had been a secret disciple. Either he was not at the trial of Jesus, or he kept silent, which must have grieved him and prompted him to overcome his cowardice and claim the body of Jesus for burial.

Why it is that people are this way? Many people will openly identify with a sports team. Are there any Duke fans here today? How about NC State? Oh, people will openly identify with a certain school, or a certain club, but they are silent about any public identification with Jesus Christ. Joseph was like that until now.

The preacher was standing at the door after the service to shake hands. He grabbed Jack by the hand and pulled him aside and said, “You need to join the Army of the Lord!” Jack replied, “I’m already in the Army of the Lord, Pastor.” So the Pastor said, “How come I don’t see you except at Christmas and Easter?” He whispered back, “I’m in His secret service.” Folks, I don’t think the Lord has a secret service here on earth, except for His angels. Joseph of Arimathea came to realize that you can’t be a disciple of Jesus and keep it a secret (Mt. 10:32-33). So notice something else we see about Joseph:

5. He Openly Identified with Jesus - Up until now Joseph was like the one Jesus had talked about, who had covered his light with a bushel. But now Joseph stepped forward to identify with Jesus. There was indeed a change brought about in his life.

Why did Joseph experience such a change? Perhaps his conscience convicted him of his cowardice and not speaking up for Jesus (Jn. 19:38). I have the idea that Joseph was there at the cross. While his fellow Council members were mocking Jesus, he heard those wonderful words of love and grace from the lips of Jesus as He was dying on the cross. Perhaps he witnessed the miracles of Calvary, such as the darkness for 3 hours, the torn veil of the temple, and the earthquake. Perhaps he understood the significance of Jesus’ death on Passover as a sacrificial lamb. So in light of what happened at Calvary, Joseph just could not remain a secret disciple any longer.

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<sup>4</sup> The Romans allowed subject nations to control many of their own affairs.

<sup>5</sup> He was a member of the Sanhedrin (Jn. 3:1). According to Jn. 19:31, he and/or Joseph bought a hundred pounds (latin unit but 75 lbs. U.S.) of myrrh and aloes, which was costly (estimated at over \$100,000 today!).

The same thing should be true today. In light of what Jesus did for you at Calvary, there is no way you can justify being a secret disciple. Jesus *publicly* died for you, and you should at least publicly declare that He is your Savior, if you haven't done so. You should follow him in baptism. I will give you the opportunity to confess your faith in Christ at the end of the message.

So the last of v.43 says that he, "coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus." He desired to assume responsibility for the body of Jesus: to take it down from the cross<sup>6</sup> and to give it an honorable burial. Isn't it interesting that Jesus had a Joseph who cared for Him at His birth, and now He has a Joseph who cared for Him at His death?

This act did indeed take courage, especially to identify with the man who had been crucified allegedly for being a rival to Caesar. By means of what Joseph of Arimathea was now doing he was openly professing before the entire world, including the entire Sanhedrin, that he was a believer in Jesus Christ! Others had honored and confessed our Lord when they saw Him working miracles, but Joseph honored Him and confessed himself a disciple, when he saw Jesus as a cold, blood-sprinkled corpse. He did more than the remaining eleven disciples, who had fled the scene to avoid a similar fate as Jesus!

There is another who bore witness that Jesus was indeed dead. His death was also proven:

B. By Pilate – In vv.44-45 we read, "Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph." Why did Pilate marvel at the news that Jesus was already dead? It was because only 6 hours had passed, and death by crucifixion was generally a very slow process. Sometimes it would take 2-3 days for people to die on a cross. But the fact that His body was released (v.45) for burial is proof that Jesus actually died on the cross, for Pilate would not have released the body without proof that Jesus was dead. So in the providence of God the Roman Governor was strict in his inquiry to determine that Jesus was dead. In fact, our best manuscripts of v.45 have "corpse" (πτομα) instead of "body," a word that clearly refers to a dead body.<sup>7</sup> By the way, the fact that he released the body of Jesus for a proper burial confirms that Pilate thought that Jesus was innocent.

Furthermore, the death of Jesus was attested to:

C. By the Centurion – In v.39 the Centurion had confessed that Jesus was the Son of God. Yet in v.45 we see that the Centurion certified that Jesus was dead. In fact, the Gospel of John tells us that his soldiers *made sure* that Jesus was dead. One of them took a spear and thrust it into His side, and out came blood and water (John 19:34), a clear sign that death had taken place. There was no doubt; Jesus was dead.

So the evidence is very clear. Mark gives three witnesses that Jesus died. Yes, the gospel declares that He died for us.

So we have seen that the death of Jesus was proven. Now let's move on to the second main scene where we see:

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<sup>6</sup> Yes, Joseph was the one who saw to it that the body of Jesus was taken down from the cross.

<sup>7</sup> See how that word is used in Mt. 24:28; Mk. 6:29; Rev. 11:8-9.

## II. HIS BURIAL WAS PREPARED

It was important that His body be prepared for burial to provide evidence of the resurrection that would take place. For example, His body was missing from the tomb but not His grave clothes (John 20:5-8). If His body was stolen surely most of the grave clothes would've been taken as well.

In other countries the Romans allowed some crucified victims' bodies to be left on the cross, to be eaten by vultures and other such creatures. But for the Jews, it was against their law to leave a dead body on a "tree" or cross overnight (Deut. 21:23), especially on the Sabbath. However, that did not mean that Jesus would normally have received a proper burial. If it had been left up to the enemies of Jesus, His body could have been disposed of by casting it into the burning garbage dump of Jerusalem (Gehenna).<sup>8</sup> But God would not allow that. So who was going to take care of a proper burial? There is no evidence that the brothers of Jesus were in Jerusalem. The disciples had fled (Matt. 26:56), and not one stepped forward to claim the body of Jesus for burial.<sup>9</sup> The women had no clout with the Roman authorities. Who would even have a proper place of burial readily available? Most of His followers were from Galilee, not Jerusalem. So His burial was prepared:

A. By Joseph of Arimathea – Beginning in the last of v.45 we read that Pilate "granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen..." (-v.46a). God made sure that His Son Jesus would have an honorable burial. So after Joseph had received permission, he took the body of Jesus down from the cross<sup>10</sup> and wrapped it in linen. Now white linen in the Bible is symbolic of righteousness (Rev. 19:8). The priests and Levites wore linen (Ex 28:39, 42; 39:27-29; Lev. 6:10; 1 Chr. 15:27), as well as heavenly beings (Ez. 10:2-7; Dan. 10:5; 12:6-7; Rev. 15:6; 19:14). Though Jesus died like a criminal, He never sinned even one time (Jn. 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22). He did not die for His sins, but for the sins of others. He was righteous and it was proper for him to be buried in white linen.

Do you realize that you must have complete righteousness to enter into heaven? You can't get into heaven clothed in the dirty rags of sin (Isa. 64:6). And Jesus is the only one who can clothe you with the white linen of righteousness, for He is the only One who died to wash away your sins. The hymn writer wrote, "When he shall come with trumpet sound, Oh may I then in Him be found, dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before His throne." When I go to heaven, I will not get there by my own righteousness, but by the shed blood and righteousness of Jesus.

Then the last of v.46 says, "And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb." In the providence of God Jesus was buried in the manner of a rich man. A tomb hewn out of rock was expensive. There would be an entrance chamber and at least one burial shelf.<sup>11</sup> A large round stone was cut to cover the entrance. It was probably like a large millstone fitted into a slot cut in the limestone on an incline.<sup>12</sup> God providentially prepared everything for the resurrection of His Son Jesus.

So His body was prepared not only by Joseph, but it was also to be prepared:

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<sup>8</sup> However, a quick and decent burial was typical among the Jews, even for enemies and criminals (2 Sam. 21:12-14; Josephus, *War* 3.8.5).

<sup>9</sup> Unlike the disciples of John the Baptist (Mt. 14:12).

<sup>10</sup> None of the accounts mentions washing the body, but that probably was done hurriedly (Brooks, p.267).

<sup>11</sup> Typically, the body would decompose for about a year, and then the bones would be gathered into a bone box, and the burial shelf made available for the next corpse. This tomb probably had more than one burial shelf.

<sup>12</sup> The heavy stone was designed to keep out animals, and was probably too heavy for one man to move.

B. By the Women - It is significant that:

1. They Noted the Place of Burial – In v.47 we read, “And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid.” The Father in heaven took care that at every step there were faithful witnesses, including the place of His burial. The New King James uses the word “observed” (*theoreo*) to bring out the fact that they did more than give a passing glance. Furthermore, the verb is in the imperfect tense, which indicates they kept observing very carefully and intently the location of the tomb, for they intended to come back to that very spot after the Sabbath. You can be sure that they did not come back to the wrong tomb!

2. They Purchased the Ointments for Burial - Chapter 16 picks up with Saturday after 6 P.M. The Sabbath was ended. Based on what Mark reports in v.1, we may assume that the women purchased spices early that evening in order that they might go to the tomb the very next morning to anoint Jesus’ body, before decomposition would take place.<sup>13</sup>

In a world of so much death, we should always remember what the Bible says, “It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). We are all going to die, and we naturally shrink from it. When you see a funeral procession, you ought to reflect upon the fact that some day you will go to *your* grave. Soon I will celebrate my 67<sup>th</sup> birthday, and the older I get the more death is becoming a reality. Do you have hope beyond the grave? Or do you just ignore the cold hard reality of death? The believer in Jesus has hope and comfort as he faces death and the grave. Jesus Himself was once in a grave on our behalf, but as we shall see, He has risen from the grave, and has robbed death of its sting. As surely as He rose again victoriously from the tomb, so surely will all who believe in Him rise gloriously on the day He appears.

Burial also pictures what Jesus has done to our sins. As the hymn writer proclaimed, “living He loved me, dying He saved me, buried He carried my sins far away.” You can have the assurance that your sins have been buried with Jesus, and the stone of forgetfulness has sealed them from the mind of God forever. The Bible says that our sins are removed as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). The Bible says that God has cast our sins into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19).

We have seen that His death was proven, and His burial was prepared. Now let’s move to the last scene where we see:

### III. HIS RESURRECTION WAS PROCLAIMED

This is what we celebrate on this Easter Sunday! It is true that these women should have paid more attention to the Lord’s repeated prediction that He would rise again on the third day.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, while we may criticize their lack of faith—a lack which they shared with the male disciples—let us not overlook their exceptional love and loyalty. They were at the cross when Jesus died, in Joseph’s garden when their Master was buried, and now very early in the morning,<sup>15</sup> they<sup>16</sup> leave to go once more to the tomb, in order to anoint the body of Jesus. To get up so early to show love and honor to One that their nation had despised was an impressive act indeed. These

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<sup>13</sup> This seems to support the belief that Jesus died on Friday. That time of year especially the tomb would have been cool, thus limiting decomposition. Ps. 16:10 says, “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”

<sup>14</sup> See Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34; and 14:28. Even His enemies knew of His prediction of the resurrection (Mt. 27:63).

<sup>15</sup> The same combination of Greek words is found in Mk. 1:35, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” It was still dark when they left (Jn. 20:1) but the sun had arisen by the time they arrived.

<sup>16</sup> Luke says Joanna (see Lk. 8:3) was also with them (24:10).

holy women had such love and devotion because they had experienced our Lord's pardoning mercies. Their hearts were full of gratitude to Him.

Why is it that we see so little of this strong love for Jesus among Christians today? There is only one answer. It is weak faith and a low sense of gratitude to Christ.

So notice how the resurrection of Jesus was proclaimed. First of all:

A. By the Stone – In v.3 we read, “And they said<sup>17</sup> among themselves, ‘Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?’ On the way toward the tomb the women became concerned<sup>18</sup> about the huge stone in front of the tomb's entrance. In fact, according to v.4, it was “very large.” They didn't have the strength to move it. None of the male disciples accompanied them. But suddenly they saw—probably at a turn in the path—that the heavy stone had already been removed! (v.4). What had taken place? Matthew, by divine inspiration, supplies the answer: prior to their arrival, “Suddenly there was violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, stepped forward, rolled away the stone and was sitting on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his garment white as snow” (28:2-3). Why did the angel remove the stone? Not to enable Jesus to get out (see John 20:19, 26) but to enable these women, and also Peter and John, to enter the tomb, to witness the evidences of the resurrection.

The empty tomb alone would have been insufficient evidence of the resurrection. So not only was the resurrection proclaimed by the open tomb, but also:

B. By the Angel – After the angel rolled the stone away, either he or a different angel moved inside the tomb. So it says in v.5, “And entering the tomb, they saw a young man<sup>19</sup> clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed” (*ekthambeo*). Of course they were alarmed by what they had just witnessed. So the angel said in v.6, “Do not be alarmed...” They need not fear the angel, nor fear what happened to the body of Jesus. Now notice what the angel came to do:

1. He Proclaimed that Christ Is Risen! - He said in the middle of v.6, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen!” What a contrast! Jesus was indeed crucified. He was stone, cold dead, but now He is risen! Actually, the Greek verb is a passive, “He was raised,” from the dead, that is by God. The good news is that Jesus is alive from the dead. And every Sunday ought to be a celebration of the fact that Jesus is alive. Though we rightly preach Christ crucified, a dead Savior cannot save anybody. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is as much a part of the Gospel message as His sacrificial death on the cross (1 Cor. 15:1-8). The Resurrection proves that God had accepted His sacrifice for our sins (Rom. 4:25) and that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God (Rom. 1:4).

Argumentation: The angel gave additional evidence that Jesus had risen. He said in the last of v.6, “He is not here. See the place where they laid Him,” no doubt pointing to that very spot. We know from John's gospel (20:5-8) that the body was missing, but the grave clothes were still there! The fact that the tomb was empty has been well attested and established. In order to deny the

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<sup>17</sup> The imperfect tense indicates that they kept questioning each other regarding this problem, unless this was an inceptive imperfect, “they began to ask.”

<sup>18</sup> What a striking picture we have in this simple narrative of the experience of many Christians! How often believers are oppressed and cast down by anticipation of trouble, and yet, in the time of need, find the thing they feared removed and the “stone rolled away,” so to speak. We carry mentally tomorrow's troubles, as well as today's. And often, very often, we find at the end that our doubts and alarms were groundless and that the thing we dreaded most has never happened at all. Remember, God lovingly and sovereignly controls future events.

<sup>19</sup> Luke mentions a second angel (24:4).

resurrection of Jesus, you need to come up with a credible explanation of what happened to the body of Jesus. Do you have any other explanation?

Over in Jerusalem there is one tomb that many believe was the tomb of Jesus. At one time there was a heart-shaped baptismal pool made right in front of that tomb. And early believers would be baptized in such a way that when they came up out of the water, they would face the empty tomb of Jesus. They are alive with Christ, the risen Savior!

The angel not only proclaimed that Christ was risen, but furthermore:

2. He Gave an Important Command – In v.7 he said, “But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.” The women were to be the first messengers of the glorious Resurrection! Though according to v.8, they initially failed to do so out of fear,<sup>20</sup> we know from other gospel accounts that they did tell the disciples, especially after Jesus appeared to them (Mt. 28:9).

Even so, we are to be messengers of wonderful news that Jesus is alive! Let us not allow fear to keep us from telling others that Christ is risen! Will you do so today?

The angel not only announced the resurrection and commanded the women to tell others the good news, but furthermore:

3. He Gave a Message of Forgiveness - Note that the angels still called them “His disciples,” even though in the hour of bitter trial they had left Him and fled. Also notice that the angel said, “and Peter.”<sup>21</sup> Why was Peter singled out? It is because he was guilty of those terrible denials accompanied by an oath. No doubt he was still grieving over his denials of Christ. Observe in this passage the great kindness of God towards His backsliding servants. All were to be pardoned and restored to favor—including Simon Peter. What encouragement Peter received when he heard that he was singled out for forgiveness and restoration as an apostle (cf. Jn. 21:15-17). He was even restored to leadership as an apostle (Acts 2).

Have you strayed away from God, or failed to confess Him when you should have? I want you to know that God will forgive you. Come back to Him this Easter Sunday. God is more than willing to forgive, based on the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus.

Furthermore, as we have received forgiveness from God, let us follow God’s example and never be unforgiving towards other people. If Christ is so ready to forgive us, we ought to be very ready to forgive others. Is there someone you haven’t forgiven? Perhaps there is a family member you have not forgiven. Go to them this Easter Sunday, and extend the same grace to them, and this will be a glorious day indeed!

Conclusion: They were told that Jesus was going before them to Galilee. There they would see Him again. Well, I have good news for us today. Because Jesus rose from the dead, He has gone before us to heaven, and there we shall see Him unless we see Him first at His second coming. What a joyful hope we have!

Do you have this hope? Do you know that your sins are forgiven? Have you been a secret disciple? Isn’t it time that you publicly confess Jesus as your Savior? I can think of no better day to do so than Easter Sunday. Be courageous and do it today!

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<sup>20</sup> Most of our best manuscripts of Mark in with this verse. It may seem to be a strange ending, but Mark’s purpose may have been to encourage Roman Christians to not be fearful, but be courageous like Joseph of Arimathea in identifying with Jesus.

<sup>21</sup> Mark is the only gospel writer to add this notation.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: Mark* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956); James A. Brooks, *New American Commentary: Mark* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961); H.A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Mark* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1948); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2007; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 6/24/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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