

Synchronizing the Resurrection Narratives, Event #9: Mary Magdalene and a group of women go to the tomb of Jesus (part 1: harmonization by multiplication of events) Mark 16:1-3; Luke 24:1-2.

Review of the resurrection narrative up to this point (I have narrowed down the *approximate* hour of the events; MM is Mary Magdalene):

- Event #1: Saturday, 5:45 p.m., April 4, 33: Two Marys go to “look” at tomb, Matt. 28:1.
- Event #2: Sunday, 3:00 a.m., April 5, 33: Earthquake and angel from heaven, Matt. 28:2-4.
- Event #3: Sunday, 4:00 a.m., MM visits the tomb before daybreak, Jn. 20:1.
- Event #4: Sunday, 4:15 a.m., MM reports empty tomb to John & Peter, Jn. 20:2.
- Event #5: Sunday, 4:30 a.m., Peter and John run to the tomb, Jn. 20:3-9.
- Event #6: Sunday, 4:40 a.m., MM returns to tomb & sees 2 angels, Jn. 20:10-13:
- Event #7: Sunday, 4:50 a.m., MM sees the Risen Lord, Jn. 20:14-17:
- Event #8: Sunday, 5:00 a.m., MM returns to disciples, John 20:18; Mk. 16:9-11.
- Event #9: Sunday, 6:00 a.m., MM & other women go to tomb of Jesus, Mk. 16:1-3; Lk 24:1-2.

Mark 16:1 And when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. ³ And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"

Luke 24:1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

Around sunrise a group of women including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Johanna, and others (Luke 24:10) travel together to the tomb on Resurrection Sunday morning with the intent of gaining access to add spices to the body of Jesus. The fact that Mary Magdalene is with them and does not tell the other women that He has already risen will require some explanation.

However, first I would like to touch on a couple of issues involved in the synchronization of the resurrection narratives. The key to any synchronization of the resurrection narratives is Mary Magdalene. Every gospel mentions her by name. Whenever a group of women is listed, her name

appears first. Tracking her footsteps from Saturday evening through Resurrection Sunday enables us to tie it all together.

There is more than one way to synchronize the accounts, I have chosen the method that accounts for all 165 verses (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21; Acts 1:3-12; 1 Cor. 15:3-8) in chronological order without omitting a single detail. The accounting for all of the verses in chronological fashion is a defeater for anyone who charges them with contradiction. If I can show that there is no contradiction between any of the events, then all such attacks fail by logical necessity. I will admit that it is possible for me to misplace an event. However, my focus is to provide a synchronization that covers all of the verses without omitting any of the details. I am indebted to other scholars who done their own synchronizations (Stephen Kingsley, John Wenham, Tom Howe, Norman Geisler) who themselves disagree on a few minor details—yet nonetheless provide synchronizations that contain no contradictions whatsoever. It is not a matter of what happened but when or in what sequence. As I have mentioned—and historians aver—the fact that there are differences between the accounts demonstrates eye-witness testimony in contradistinction to collusion on the part of the writers. The diversity in the narratives point to the authenticity of multiple witnesses. The diversity is one of the reasons why historians do accept the accounts. Those who professionally debate the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ do so on historical grounds that do not depend on divine inspiration of Scripture or synchronization of the accounts. Furthermore, I know of no historical scholar that discounts the historicity of these accounts—though they may not believe in the resurrection of Jesus per se.

It is important to understand the anti-supernatural presuppositions of our intellectual milieu. For most of church history the accounts were harmonized by multiplying. So, for example, a tension among the Gospel narratives was resolved by multiplying episodes: first an episode with one angel (as in one Gospel) and then another episode with two angels (as in another Gospel), and so on. With the advent of the Enlightenment with its naturalism and Rationalism—with its biased presuppositions against the Bible—such traditional harmonizing are rejected a priori (i.e., before empirical examination of the evidence). However, consider the self-refuting activity of these textual critics as they try to harmonize. Like the traditional method the critics reject, the critical approach resolves the tensions by separating the apparently discrepant bits of texts into separate layers or textual precursors. When they find tensions in the text, these critics postulate different underlying stories or traditions, rather than different episodes of a larger and coherent narrative. And so critical scholars get rid of the tensions they think they find in the text by segregating the apparently incompatible elements into discrete sources, which they suppose to have been combined only later, often crudely, into one narrative. Critical scholarship is thus a harmonization by division. This is all done fiat—ex nihilo.

The result of applying harmonization by multiplication to a narrative or set of narratives is a longer and often complicated story. The result of the critics' harmonization by division is a series of short, relatively simple stories, each of them stripped of tensions and complexities. If historical accuracy is the aim of the critic, there is some reason for wondering whether harmonizing by division really is more likely to give historically accurate results than is harmonizing by multiplication. Is the reality of human history more likely to be simple than complex—especially the “charged” events of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do these narrative puzzle pieces come across as real history eyewitnessed by different

persons with different (but not contradictory) foci, or do they come across as the results of church leaders who colluded together to make up a story for everyone to believe? The resurrection accounts are all divinely inspired with complete accuracy. There is not one error in any of the accounts. It is just a matter of putting the puzzle pieces together. It is a disgrace that there are so many “biblical” scholars who have bought into the negative presuppositions of their age as evidenced by statements like “the accounts can never be harmonized” (a professor from Dallas Seminary) or by pastors who simply ignore them and thus allow the sheep to fend for themselves—often to get bludgeoned when they go off to college or run into a Muslim who commences to tear them to pieces by these accounts recorded in their Christian Bibles. All we have to do is give a plausible account that shows that the verses are not contradictory to shut their mouths. By shutting their mouths, we give them one less excuse to reject Jesus Christ and another opportunity to give pause and think about the glorious truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the next life—when we shall all go to our “reward.”

In Christ,

Pastor Don