

## Synchronizing the Resurrection Appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ – The “Problem” (Part 2- The Narratives Disprove Collusion)

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Before we actually get into the exegesis of the resurrection narratives, I would like to provide a bit of background information on this whole issue by way of a few essays on the “problem.” The skeptic (due in large part to negative presuppositions, -volition) sees contradictions, while the Bible-believer sees differences due to the complementary nature of the narratives among the five writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul) of the resurrection narratives. However, one thing that cannot be reasonably denied by anyone is that there certainly is no collusion among the writers of these narratives. Whether one *wants* to believe that they are contradictions or that they simply complement different details for different emphases by different authors, *everyone* agrees there was absolutely no collusion. The biblical writers did not get together to make up fraudulent resurrection accounts for the purpose of deceiving others. Again, the accounts are simply too “divergent.”

The differences in the resurrection accounts go far to establish the independent credibility of the different writers. This is precisely what a court of *justice* requires in respect of the testimony of witnesses. Should their evidence agree precisely in every word and syllable, this fact would be held by the court proof of conspiracy. Now, had the biblical writers agreed in all particulars, even the minutest, had there been no “discrepancies” in their testimony, the cry of “Collusion, Collusion!” would have passed along the whole line of critics, from Celsus and Porphyry down to Colenso, Renan, and Dan Barker.

How could the resurrection accounts ever get a fair hearing among the critics? If they are alike—either very similar or exact—all kinds of critical theories will be forthcoming that the writers were in cahoots with each other. If they are different, then the critics claim that they cannot be trusted—precisely because they are different. One can always find a reason to believe what one wants regardless of the evidence. Only the theist has the epistemic justification to believe what cannot be denied (self, soul, morality, rationality, meaning in life, love, justice, et al).

So instead of the differences in the resurrection narratives being an embarrassment, they actually become of inestimable value. They show there has been no collusion among the witnesses. Furthermore, the manuscript copies of the Gospels, about five hundred in number, and brought to us from all parts of the world, have not been edited though the collusion of the Church. They have not been tampered with by any religious sect, for the sake of propagating a religious view. The differences are, in fact, evidences of the purity and integrity of the sacred text. They show that the Scriptures which we now hold in our hands in the twenty-first century are identical with those which were received by the Church in the first century as written by the Holy Spirit. Even after two thousand years of attacks on the resurrection accounts due to their differences, the Church has never tried to smooth out those differences. There are differences

because they were written by different authors *independent* of each other and with different emphases.

Different witnesses emphasized different details. This fact of human experience is undeniable. E.g., my wife and I went to Springfield, MO, to watch our daughter in a singing competition. We were both there for the entire night, observed the event, watched her sing and win second place. Yet, when she or I talk about the event, we discuss different details. In one of my conversations with her, I relayed how one of the judges should not have gotten so angry at someone in the audience, and how he later went over to that table where a fight almost broke out. My wife said that she was not aware of that. If a reporter asked me about the night, I would have included that event. My wife would not have. So if each of us gave an account of the night, we both would say that Amy did a fantastic job singing, and that she won a certain amount of money, that her trainer showed up, and her best friend was there for the evening. However, how we would describe these details would “diverge.” Now, if a serious crime was committed and perhaps we were implicated, and law enforcement interrogated us, and we had the exact story to the smallest detail with the exact chronology, what would they suspect? Collusion! They know that it is natural for different people witnessing the same event to have different emphases. This is what we have in the resurrection narrative. Christ really rose from the dead. It is historical and bears all of the marks of historicity, i.e., different perspectives/emphases!

One more thing: at best, any discrepancies in the Gospels concerning the resurrection, at most call into question the issue and nature of *inerrancy*, not the fact of the resurrection (I will cover many of Dan Barker’s logical fallacies when we get into the narratives, e.g., the fallacy of argument from silence). Could one reasonably take the different accounts that my wife and I give about the New Year’s Eve party at our daughter’s singing competition as indicating there really was no competition, and that we must have made up the whole thing *because* we present different details. Certainly, that would be incredulous! Take the ancient burning of Rome. How big was the fire? Who started it? Do these *discrepancies* nullify the general report that Rome indeed burned. The differences (not contradictions) in the Gospels indicate independent accounts. Strictly from a historian’s vantage point, this diversity adds to their credibility, since it indicates that the event is being *attested by more than one source*. Furthermore, these sources were persecuted and martyred for believing in the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ. In sum, the “differences” only provide powerful *independent* confirmation to the historicity of the resurrection accounts. Let us keep this in mind when we go through the narratives.

In Christ,

Pastor Don