

## Responding to the atheists and skeptics-5: The tomb, angels, and more.

### SUMMARY OF THE RESURRECTION EVENTS

- Event #1: Saturday, 5:45 p.m., April 4, 33: Two Marys go to “look” at tomb then return, 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., April 5, 33: 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 tells disciples who do not believe her, Jn. 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.  
Event #10: Sunday, 6:30 a.m.: Women enter tomb; 3 angels, Mt. 28:5-7; Mk 16:4-7; Lk. 24:3-8.  
Event #11: Sunday, 7:00 a.m.: Women run in fear; Jesus meets them, Mt. 28:8-10; Mk. 16:8.  
Event #12: Sunday, 8:00 a.m.: Women went to tell disciples; soldiers report, Mat 28:11-15.  
Event #13: Sunday, 8:10 a.m.: Once again, the disciples do not believe the women, Lk. 24:9-11  
Event #14: Sunday, 8:30 a.m.: However, Peter runs to the tomb a second time, Lk. 24:12.  
Event #15: Sunday, 8:45 a.m.: Private meeting between Jesus and Peter, 1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34.  
Event #16: Sunday, 10 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Jesus & 2 travelers to Emmaus, Mk. 16:12; Lk. 24:13-32.  
Event #17: Sunday, 5:00 p.m. The 2 travelers tell the 11 Disciples, Mk. 16:13; Lk. 24:33-35.  
Event #18: Sunday, 5:20 p.m. Thomas leaves; Jesus appears, Lk. 24:36-49; Jn. 20:19-25.  
Event #19: 8 days after the resurrection. Jesus appears to Thomas, Mk. 16:14-18; Jn 20:26-31.  
Event #20: 2 weeks after the resurrection. Jesus appears to disciples on shore of Galilean Sea, Jn 21:1-25.  
Event #21: 3 weeks after the resurrection. Jesus appears to eleven disciples on mountain, Matt. 28:16-20.  
Event #22: 40 days after the resurrection. Jesus’s last group appearance, and His ascension into Heaven, Mk 16:19-20; Lk. 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-12.  
Event #23: 3-6 years after the resurrection. Jesus appears to Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9:3-9.

We are now in the final chapter of these studies where I will directly answer the specific **attacks** on the resurrection narratives by various atheists and skeptics. This DDR includes several charges of discrepancy. A good representation of the attacks on the resurrection accounts of Jesus Christ is found at Dan Barker's website, <http://www.ffrf.org/legacy/books/lfif/?t=stone>.

### Was the tomb open when they arrived?

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- Matthew: No (28:2)
- Mark: Yes (16:4)
- Luke: Yes (24:2)
- John: Yes (20:1)

As noted in the exegesis, the visit in Matthew 28:1 refers to Saturday evening before the earthquake and opening of the tomb whereas the other passages refer to Sunday morning after the tomb was opened. It is very unfortunate that the chapter break begins in 28:1. It really should begin in 28:2. Matthew 28:1 refers to pre-Sunday visits which we also find in the other gospels. Therefore, there is no discrepancy.

### Who was at the tomb when they arrived?

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- Matthew: One angel (28:2-7)
- Mark: One young man (16:5)
- Luke: Two men (24:4)
- John: Two angels (20:12)

As noted above in the hour-by-hour chronology, these events took place at different times so it is only natural to expect different things to be witnessed. John 20:12 records Mary Magdalene's visit to the tomb by herself before daybreak when she saw two angels. Matthew, Mark and Luke record the later visit of the women along with Mary around daybreak: when they first "entered" the tomb they *first* saw an angel in the form of a young man sitting at the right of where the body of Jesus was lain; then Luke tells us that while they were in the tomb, "two men" *suddenly* stood by the women and asked them why they were seeking the Living One among the dead (Luke 24:5). A plain reading of the narratives indicate that the "men" were the forms that the angels took. Once again, there is no contradiction: Mary Magdalene saw two angels when she went alone to the tomb before daybreak, and later at daybreak when all of the women entered the tomb they saw one angel at the right of where Jesus had been, and then two "suddenly" appeared and reminded them of the prophecies of Jesus Christ. For more details, see <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/Resurrection-event-10.pdf>

### Where were these messengers situated?

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- Matthew: Angel sitting on the stone (28:2)
- Mark: Young man sitting inside, on the right (16:5)
- Luke: Two men standing inside (24:4)
- John: Two angels sitting on each end of the bed (20:12)

As noted above, each Gospel writer provides a different event—not the same event recorded with contradictory facts. If someone has skeptical presuppositions, he will automatically see contradictions in the different narratives—that is what is expected. However, if four individuals witnessed an accident and each one provided the exact report, there would be charges of collusion. It is expected that each one would provide more details. Again, John records Mary seeing two angels during her visit before daybreak whereas Matthew and Mark record the trip of the women to the tomb where they saw one angel, and Luke notes that two angels/men then suddenly appeared to the women.

### What did the messenger(s) say?

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- Matthew: "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead: and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you." (28:5-7)
- Mark: "Be not afrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." (16:6-7)
- Luke: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." (24:5-7)
- John: "Woman, why weepest thou?" (20:13)

Once again there is no discrepancy—no contradiction, no accounts that flatly contradict each other. This is the issue, right? In John the angel is speaking to Mary Magdalene before daybreak, later at sunrise the women, upon entering the tomb, see an angel who gives them the message recorded in the Matthew and Mark passage above—again, note that Matthew and Mark agree. Then suddenly two more angels appear and give the message found in Luke 24:5-7.

### Did the women tell what happened?

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- Matthew: Yes (28:8)
- Mark: No. "Neither said they any thing to any man." (16:8)
- Luke: Yes. "And they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest." (24:9, 22-24)
- John: Yes (20:18)

In this account we come upon—for the first time!—what can be classified as a genuine discrepancy—a flat out contradiction! Mark writes that the women did not tell anyone whereas the other gospel writers say that the women did tell. This is the only account in all of the attacks that can actually be labeled a contradiction. However, does this contradiction hold up to careful

scrutiny? I think not. The claim actually “proves too much.” To prove that this is a contradiction would require one to argue that the women *never* recovered from their immediate fear or *ever* spoke of their encounter with the angels in the tomb. Ever! Does anyone really believe they *never* told anyone? Never? Never ever ever?

Let’s note the event. The women had seen the angels in the tomb which frightened them so much that they *did not stop to talk about it to anyone as they ran away*— they were scared speechless!

Mark 16:8 And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

*Then* the Lord appeared to them and gave them the comforting words “Fear not.” They fell at His feet and worshipped Him (event #11). This would have relieved their fears which would have enabled them to *then* testify to the men (event #12) as recorded in the other Gospels. No contradiction after all.

**When Mary returned from the tomb, did she know Jesus had been resurrected?**

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- Matthew: Yes (28:7-8)
- Mark: Yes (16:10,11)
- Luke: Yes (24:6-9,23)
- John: No (20:2)

The Synoptic Gospels all agree. John records Mary’s visit before daybreak and at that time she did not know He had risen. No discrepancy and no problems.

### **Review of the atheistic and skeptical charges of “discrepancies” in the resurrection narratives of Jesus Christ:**

1. It is impossible to provide a reasonable and non-contradictory narrative of the resurrection narratives that includes every single passage.

**FALSE:** See above for hour-by hour narrative—not a single passage is omitted. Above is a reasonable account--it is very plausible.

2. There is a contradiction regarding the earthquake occurring after the women visit the tomb (Matt 28:1-2) versus before visiting the tomb.

**FALSE:** Matt. 28:1-2 occurred Saturday evening (see event 1 above) before earthquake and should not be confused with event 9.

3. There is contradiction between the times of morning the women visited the tomb

**FALSE:** Skeptics make the *error* in conflating events 1, 3, and 9.

4. There is discrepancy in the names of the women; or at least we do not know who they were.

**FALSE:** There is no discrepancy. All of the accounts list Mary Magdalene as a principal witness. Lack of ability to identify other Marys is not an argument against the historicity of resurrection accounts in the Gospels.

5. Somehow there must be a conflict among purposes of woman coming to the tomb.

**FALSE:** The Bible is clear that the women came to the tomb at least twice: once before Sunday to see the tomb and *then* on Sunday morning to anoint the body

6. There is discrepancy regarding the tomb being opened

**FALSE:** What is taken as a discrepancy (closed tomb of Matthew) is a previous visit on Saturday when it was closed (before the earthquake).

7. There is a discrepancy on the number of angels they saw

**FALSE:** Different angels were seen at different times. For there to be “objective” discrepancy, the text would have to say something like ‘there was *only* one or two angels.’”

8. There is a discrepancy on where the angels were situated

**FALSE:** The variation of situations are due to the different events.

9. There is a discrepancy between the messages of the angels.

**FALSE:** There is no discrepancy. One angel told Mary Magdalene one thing before daybreak, *then* later one angel gave the women in the tomb another message, and *then* two angels appeared and gave another message.

10. There is a discrepancy on the women “telling others.” This is the only charge that could truly be labeled a “discrepancy.”

**FALSE:** While on the surface it does appear that we have a discrepancy here, a closer look indicates that when we are told that the women did not tell anyone it did not mean that they never told anyone. Even the skeptics do not believe they forever kept quiet. The point of the passage is that they were so afraid that they did not stop to tell anyone as they fled from the tomb. After Jesus appeared to them and encouraged them, of course they would report to disciples as per the other accounts.

11. There is a discrepancy between the Gospels in that the Synoptics say that Mary M. knew that Jesus was resurrected when she returned from the tomb whereas in John she did not know.

**FALSE:** When Mary M. first returned from the tomb before daybreak, she did not know (John). As noted there were several visits and all of the Synoptics agree that later she did know—for the Lord had personally appeared to her later as noted in John.

There are two things I would like to say in regard to skepticism: One in regard to skeptical unbelievers and the other to skeptical believers. As I go through these various skeptical attacks, I am taken back by all of the bluster and blather of the charges of discrepancies. So far, there is only one that can be labeled a discrepancy (see charge #10 above). Even on this one the discrepancy is superficial in that no one (that I know of) really believes they never told anyone. It is one thing not to believe in the narratives or not to be able to put it together. It is quite another to make a blatant charge of contradiction. How one views the narratives comes down to presuppositions that guide one’s thinking. If one does not want to believe, then they will automatically and sub-consciously see two events that have differing details and believe that they are contradictory accounts of the same events, instead of seeing them as complimentary. Instead of seeing the narratives in terms of multiplication of events, the critics see contradictions and make arbitrary subtractions (New Testament critical scholars arbitrary decide which one occurred and which one did not). Obviously there was a lot of activity for several hours around the tomb of Jesus Christ. Think about it: Several hours of activity and yet one can read all of the accounts (about 165 verses) in just a few minutes. In light of all of this activity, it is only natural to expect more detail and more events recorded by the different Gospel writers.

Now a few things for believers who have a measure of skepticism in them. The problem is not with the external evidence; it is with the bent of your will and heart (which forms your presuppositions). Do not be deceived into thinking you are neutral. There is no neutrality. You are either looking at the events from your Christian worldview and your relationship with Christ

or from a naturalistic worldview. If you are looking at these through a naturalistic viewpoint, you have already rejected the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life in some measure. While I never bring in the witness of the Holy Spirit when I engage unbelievers (because that area is too subjective for them to handle), believers must understand the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Apart from the Holy Spirit, neither Scripture nor God nor the Plan of God will really resonate with you. The believer who habitually stays out of fellowship—which means he is grieving or quenching the Spirit—will have no deep and abiding conviction of Christ or Christianity, let alone Bible doctrine. I do not claim that my synchronization of the accounts are infallible, but you should have a powerful conviction that the events can be reconciled. You should be absolutely convinced that these events are true.

There are inward and outward apologetics: knowing Christianity to be true and showing Christianity to be true. Through outward apologetics we can *prove* that there is a God: e.g., the Bible says that we can see God through creation (Romans 1:18-20). Outward apologetics deals with outward information that can be accessed by believer and non-believer. Inward apologetics is reserved for the believer on a personal level—for the believer who lives under the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I have heard a lot of talk from atheists who say that we are only Christians because we were raised that way. First, this is not true. I was not raised as a Christian. Second, this can be reversed on them in that many of them have problems believing because of their naturalistic (fragmented view of reality) upbringing. This has been acknowledged by prominent atheists (e.g. Robert Jastrow) and seen in the Soviet Union where kids were breast fed on atheism. A child that is only taught *only* mechanistic science as it deals with only physical things may very well have noetic pathologies that keep him from developing Total Truth perspective. All we can do is give evidences of Christianity, it is up to the Holy Spirit to convict them and dissolve their sinful prejudices, autonomies, and open their minds to the Truth.

The role of the Holy Spirit is to show *us* inwardly that Christianity is true. Apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, even believers will resist the Truth, even adopting extreme and outlandish skepticism rather than yielding to the truth of Christian theism. The role of the Holy Spirit is existential: He moves in the soul of believers to dissolve prejudices and open their minds to God's wonderful truths for honest consideration.

The single greatest thing I have been taught by my former pastor, R.B. Thieme, is the need to live in fellowship with God which guarantees filling of the Holy Spirit. Through the veridical existential ministry of the Holy Spirit, I live in confidence of the truths of Scripture which by knowing I am able to show others through various arguments.

Life in the Spirit is both intellectually and experientially satisfying. Wow! What a plan!

Romans 8:16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

**Blessed,**

*Pastor Don*