

## Responding to the atheists and skeptics-7: “First” appearances and places

### 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. **The charges of discrepancy are in red; my responses are in bold black.** A good representation of the attacks on the resurrection accounts of Jesus Christ is on Dan Barker's website, <http://www.ffrf.org/legacy/books/lfif/?t=stone>.

**1. After the women, to whom did Jesus first appear? In none of the texts below is there any mention of appearing "first." This is required for any charge of discrepancy to be valid. Out of the many events, the different Gospel writers were moved by God to record those events to highlight certain qualities of Jesus Christ and themes of the gospel. The Gospel writers stress different appearances to men (after the women had seen the Lord) by selection of appearances in accordance with their themes not with chronology. When a Gospel writer wanted to convey a chronological "first," he writes "first." An example of this is found in Mark 16:9 where "first" is used in reference Jesus "first" appearance to Mary Magdalene, which is recorded in John 20. A natural reading of the Gospels reveals that certain events are selected for emphases—not for chronology. Furthermore, this fits the style of writing of the first century and would have been understood by any first-century reader. Again, there are no discrepancies.**

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- **Matthew: Eleven disciples (28:16). Event #21: this occurred three weeks after the resurrection. Matthew simply does not deal with the other appearances to the men.**
- **Mark: Two disciples in the country, later to eleven (16:12,14). Event #16 (midday on Resurrection Sunday) and #19 (8 days after resurrection)**
- **Luke: Two disciples in Emmaus, later to eleven (24:13,36). Events #16 and #18.**
- **John: Ten disciples (Judas and Thomas were absent) (20:19, 24). Event #18.**
- **Paul: First to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve. (Twelve? Judas was dead). (I Corinthians 15:5). Events #15 and #19. The Lord appeared to Peter "first" before the "Twelve." Again, Paul is selective. As far as the Twelve, it is recognized by both conservative and liberal scholars that "The Twelve" is a designation of the apostles as a group and is not to be pressed numerically.**

**2. Where did Jesus first appear to the disciples? There is that word "first" again. None of the passages say or even imply that any of these appearances listed below were "first." The first mention of an appearance by one of the Gospels was never intended to convey that this was the first appearance in absolute chronological terms. Virtually all scholars recognize the thematic nature of the Gospels. Again, no discrepancies.**

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- **Matthew: On a mountain in Galilee (60-100 miles away) (28:16-17). Event #21 (3 weeks after the resurrection)**
- **Mark: To two in the country, to eleven "as they sat at meat" (16:12,14). Events #16 and 19.**
- **Luke: In Emmaus (about seven miles away) at evening, to the rest in a room in Jerusalem later that night. (24:31, 36). Events #16 and #18.**
- **John: In a room, at evening (20:19). Event #20.**

## 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
9. There is a discrepancy between the messages of the angels.
10. There is a discrepancy on the women “telling others.” This is the only charge that could truly be labeled a “discrepancy.”
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.
12. There is a discrepancy between Mary M. first seeing Jesus *before* she returned to the disciples and *after* she returned to the disciples.

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

**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.

**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.

**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.

**FALSE:** It was *after* Mary M. saw the empty tomb—NOT JESUS, that told the disciples (John 20:2), then Jesus appeared to her after which she told them as recorded in Matthew, Mark, and John 20:18.

13. There are discrepancies regarding people touching Jesus

**FALSE:** Mary Magdalene was told to stop clinging to Him. Hours later women saw Him and touched Him as they worshipped Him. Eight days later Doubting Thomas was invited to put his hand in the side of Jesus.

14. There are discrepancies as to who Jesus “first” appeared to after the women.

**FALSE:** None of the Gospel writers say anything about “first” appearances after the women.

15. There are discrepancies as to where Jesus “first” appeared.

**FALSE:** None of the Gospel writers say anything about “first” places where Jesus appeared.

I realize that on many of these charges the direct charge of discrepancy is not made by Barker, it is more or less implied. If someone wants to soften the charges by saying something like, ‘I just can’t figure what happened,’ then I invite him to look at my chronology. If there is no charge of discrepancy, then there is no problem. Again, there are no discrepancies and all passages are accounted for in a very plausible manner. So what is the problem?

The problem goes back to man’s rebellion and suppression of God and His Truth (Rom. 1:18ff). This suppression takes many forms and is found in different degrees. One need not jump up and down and scream at God to rebel and suppress Him. One can be very passive in suppression. However, all suppression comes down to a desire for human autonomy, man’s desire to be god and run his own life the way he wants. This is as old as the Garden.

Consider the milder forms of suppression that we all do from time to time in considering our own death. Consider how easy it is to suppress this fact. All we have to do is *to not think about it* and pretend that we are going to live forever. All we have to do is pretend that this temporal life that we are involved in will just keep on going indefinitely. After we die, what kind of life would we have lived? If you died today, could it be said of you by other believers “wow, what a great believer?” Are you living the kind of life that fellow believers would recognize as truly great—a real positive believer? All true greatness is measured by the spiritual life not by how many toys one can accumulate in this world. It really is all about the instantiation of God’s Word throughout our lives. All the rest is just fluff. It is all about Christ and Bible doctrine made possible through the grace empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We all fail from time to time. God has even given us great examples in the Word of God of failures who became great men and women of God. One of the greatest examples is Mary of Bethany who is also the Sinner of Luke 7 and Mary Magdalene at the Cross and the Tomb. She went from the degradation of prostitution to being lover of Jesus (Luke 7) to betraying Him by not trusting Him (John 11) back to self-abnegation and restoration (John 12) to being raised up in honor by being the first to witness the Resurrected Jesus Christ (John 20). Wow! Now that is a life worth living and dying for! In grace there is no limit to what God can do. Again, “wow”!

Blessed,

*Paster Don*