

## **Responding to the atheists and skeptics-8: Did disciples believe the two men? Events of Resurrection.**

### **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/incoherency are in red; my responses are in 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>. The "problems:"

### Did the disciples believe the two men?

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- **Mark: No (16:13).** Both Mark and Luke record the same event of the two travelers of Emmaus reporting to the other disciples that they had seen the Lord (#17, around 5:00 p.m. Sunday evening). Mark 16:13 reads: "And they went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either."
- **Luke: Yes (24:34--it is the group speaking here, not the two).** Luke 24:34 reads: "The Lord has really risen, and has appeared to Simon."

On the surface, there does seem to be a contradiction. Mark says they did not believe the two men from Emmaus whereas Luke provides testimony that they did believe with the added testimony of the Peter (which was a result of private meeting between Jesus and Peter, the restored denier (event #15). This is the second charge of discrepancy that actually has some validity albeit on a superficial level (the other one was in charge #10 below).

So what is going on here? Why does Mark report quite frankly that the disciples did not believe the testimony of the two travelers of Emmaus whereas Luke records them saying that the Lord "has really risen, and has appeared to Simon"? It appears that Mark and Luke are at odds.

Instead of looking at the passage in a naïve or superficial manner, let's consider it more thoroughly from two governing canons of historiography (sameness and differences). While it may be stating the obvious, it is worth pointing out that historians naturally select which details to include and which to ignore when describing any series of events. This will usually depend upon their purposes in writing. It is also common that eye-witnesses will describe an event differently from each other, as different points will stand out more strongly for different eye-witnesses. Professional historians claim that any accounts which failed to show any differences of selection or perspective are almost certainly the result of copying or collusion. (We can rule this out with Mark and Luke.) On the other hand, if the event described by two or more eye-witnesses is genuine, it should be possible to resolve any apparent contradictions between their accounts.

Reconciling Luke's indication that they believed with Mark's clear statement that they did believe is not that difficult. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was truly an amazing event. One minute they did not believe, but the next minute they did believe as more evidence—as precisely indicated in Luke with the added statement or testimony from Peter. This back and forth faith and disbelief on the part of the disciples fits perfectly with Luke. For while it says in Luke 24:34 that they believed, a few verses later (41) it says "they could still not believe." Ergo, even in Luke they were back and forth in believing and disbelieving that the physical body of Jesus Christ was indeed raised from the dead. If Luke consistently said they believed, perhaps it would be tougher to reconcile.

No doubt discussion swayed to and fro among the disciples, and both Mark and Luke record the various comments that were doubtless made. Then, as the tide may well have been turning towards general skepticism, Jesus himself appeared to them. Even then, some were not

convinced, and thought they were seeing a ghost! They wanted more tangible proof, which Jesus offered to them.

**What happened at the appearance?** All of the appearances listed below took place at different times and so it is only natural to expect different happenings:

- **Matthew: Disciples worshipped, some doubted, "Go preach." (28:17-20).** Event #21, 3 weeks after the resurrection.
- **Mark: Jesus reprimanded them, said "Go preach" (16:14-19).** Event #19, 8 days after the resurrection.
- **Luke: Christ incognito, vanishing act, materialized out of thin air, reprimand, supper (24:13-51).** Event #16, resurrection Sunday between 10 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
- **John: Passed through solid door, disciples happy, Jesus blesses them, no reprimand (21:19-23).** I think Barker has made an error in his citation of passages. John 21:19-23, is event #20, which occurred 2 weeks after the resurrection and consisted of Jesus with the disciples on the shore of Galilee. Jesus passing through the door took place in John 20.

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

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| 1. It is impossible to provide a reasonable and non-contradictory narrative of the resurrection narratives that includes every single passage. | <b>FALSE:</b> 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.   | <b>FALSE:</b> 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  | <b>FALSE:</b> Skeptics make the <i>error</i> 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.   | <b>FALSE:</b> 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.
6. There is discrepancy regarding the tomb being opened
7. There is a discrepancy on the number of angels they saw
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.”

**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

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

**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.’”

**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.

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.

12. There is a discrepancy between Mary M. first seeing Jesus *before* she returned to the disciples and *after* she returned to to the disciples.

**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.

16. There are discrepancies between the disciples believing and disbelieving the resurrection accounts.

**FALSE:** What is faithfully recorded is the back and forth nature of the belief and unbelief.

17. There are discrepancies on what happened at the “appearance.”

**FALSE:** There were many appearances comprised of many *happenings*.

In closing, I wish to provide a reminder of just how important it is to live in fellowship with God, where the unhindered ministry of the Holy Spirit brings in us a deep conviction of the spiritual realities of Bible doctrine. While there is a place for providing rational argument and evidence, it is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit that gives us immediate and veridical assurance of the truth of our Christian faith! Apart from living under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it does not matter how much evidence and rational explanation a person can muster, he will fall short of absolute conviction of Christianity and its doctrines.

I love studying all of the wonderful Bible doctrines, God's Word in the original languages, philosophical realism that enables me to enter depths of Truth, and simply learning more about God and His marvelous matchless grace. However, apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit in my life, all of these studies would mean absolutely nothing and not move me one inch to absolute assurance. The Holy Spirit is vital to our spiritual lives and inner conviction of Truth.

Unlike all of the philosophical and evidential arguments for the reality of God, the witness of the Holy Spirit is self-authenticating, and by that notion I mean (1) that the experience of the Holy Spirit is veridical and unmistakable (though not necessarily irresistible or indubitable) for the one who has it and attends to it (does not regularly grieve or quench the Holy Spirit); (2) that such a person knows with absolute confidence His Lord as he walks with Him; and (3) there are many truths that only the Holy Spirit can confirm and make real to us, such as "Christ in us, the hope of glory," Col. 1:27. That reality only comes by living in and by the Holy Spirit. That Truth only resonates with the believer who lives by the Holy Spirit. I have learned many fantastic doctrines from R.B. Thieme, most notably how to remain in fellowship with God. I have learned how to read God's Word in the original languages from Dr. Glenn Carnagey. These men have provided me with so many spiritual truths for living, thriving, and growing my spiritual life. However, it is the Holy Spirit alone who provides the inner power to draw me to Truth and illuminate it for me, and *give me absolute inner conviction*, a conviction for which there is no defeater. The same Holy Spirit resides in every church age believer ready and willing to draw him to Truth and give him a direct, inner, and unmediated conviction. Wow! What a deal!

Blessed,

*Pastor Don*