

## **Responding to the atheists and skeptics-9: The last two charges of discrepancies; conclusion of series.**

### **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 now come to the conclusion of this study as I respond to the last two charges of discrepancy/incoherency, see Dan Barker's website, [http:// www.ffrf.org/ legacy /books /lifif/?t=stone](http://www.ffrf.org/legacy/books/lifif/?t=stone). The charges of discrepancy/incoherency are in red; my responses are in black.

**Did Jesus stay on earth for a while?** All historians (and most people), both ancient and modern, recognize that the writing of history is selective. One of the methods of selection used by historians is the literary device called telescoping or time compression where extended periods of time and multiple events are compressed in just a few sentences or verses.

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- **Mark: No (16:19) Compare 16:14 with John 20:19 to show that this was all done on Sunday.** As previously noted, Mark 16:14 occurred eight days after the resurrection (event #19), and John 20:19 contains the appearance of Jesus on resurrection Sunday to the group when Thomas was not there (event #18). Throughout the Gospel of Mark we have a great deal of time compression. In the last chapter, Mark simply leaves out the forty days of Jesus's post-resurrection ministry. Mark 16:19 does not tell us that Jesus ascended on resurrection Sunday. In verses 9-14 we have Mark's selection of appearances, namely to Mary Magdalene, to the two Emmaus travelers, and then to Eleven in the Upper Room. There is an unfortunate translation in Mark 16:19 in the word "then." The Greek word is *oun* (οὖν) and it means "therefore." Mark is closing out his book and concludes with "therefore, after Jesus had spoken these things to them, he was received into heaven." Mark simply did not cover the appearances to the disciples on the shore of the Galilean Sea (event #20) or when He appeared to the eleven disciples on the mountain (event #21). Mark is simply wrapping things up and notes that after Jesus spoke to His disciples, He ascended into heaven.
- **Luke: No (24:50-52) It all happened on Sunday.** Luke does not specifically say that everything happened on Sunday. Biblical scholars, even liberal ones who do not believe the Bible is the Word of God, recognize the nature of historical telescoping. For purposes of economy, Luke compresses time in a few verses. He was certainly aware that Jesus appeared over a longer period of time: in Acts 1:3 Luke reports that the risen Jesus appeared to His disciples *over a period of 40 days*. Indictments of the Gospels for compressing time reveals lack of time carefully considering these texts in the context of their ancient (and modern) literary conventions, namely telescoping/compressing.
- **John: Yes, at least eight days (20:26, 21:1-22).** Event #19.
- **Acts: Yes, at least forty days (1:3).** This passage substantiates what I have been noting regarding telescoping. Luke is accepted by almost everyone as the author of both Luke and Acts. In the Gospel of Luke he does not cover the forty days between the resurrection and ascension. However, in Acts 1:3 he writes, "*To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them **over a period of forty days**, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*" Of course Luke knew that the Lord appeared to many over forty days. Just because he does not mention it in Luke does not warrant the charge of contradiction. We telescope events all of the time. E.g., if I tell someone that I went to Tulsa Seminary of Biblical Languages after I got

married, it would not mean that right after we exchanged vows that I enrolled in seminary. I am just compressing time to show a sequence. This is what we find in the Gospels.

**Where did the ascension take place?** Once again, the Gospel writers are selective in what they record. Omission or the addition of material between Gospels does not a contradiction make.

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- **Matthew: No ascension. Book ends on mountain in Galilee.** Does anyone seriously think that Matthew does not believe that Jesus ever ascended into heaven just because he does not mention it?
- **Mark: In or near Jerusalem, after supper (16:19).** This text does not say where or when.
- **Luke: In Bethany, very close to Jerusalem, after supper (24:50-51).** This text does not say they were in Bethany. The preposition is *pros* (πρὸς) and it means “facing/toward.” Bethany was on the other side of the Mt. of Olives. They were on the Mt. of Olives facing Bethany. NIV’s translation “to the vicinity of Bethany” captures the idea.
- **John: No ascension.** Does anyone think that John was not aware of the ascension?
- **Paul: No ascension.** I am not sure of the relevance of Paul here. Jesus did not appear to Paul until 3-6 years after the resurrection from the Mount of Olives.
- **Acts: Ascended from Mount of Olives (1:9-12).** The same Luke who records Jesus’s ascension in the vicinity of Bethany, gives us the exact location in Acts. Bethany is in the vicinity of the Mt. of Olives where Jesus ascended as noted by Luke. Again, no discrepancies.

### **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.
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*.

18. There are discrepancies regarding Jesus staying on earth after resurrection

**FALSE:** In the use of telescoping or time compression, some of the Gospel writers simply did not mention the events that took place during the 40 days after the resurrection. This is best illustrated by Luke who in his Gospel does not mention the forty days (he compresses), but in Acts he explicitly says Jesus appeared for forty days.

19. There are discrepancies regarding where Jesus ascended.

**FALSE:** Neither Matthew, Mark, John, nor Paul even cover the location of the ascension. Luke tells us that it occurred on the Mt. of Olives (Acts 1:9-12) which is in the vicinity of Bethany (Lk 24:50-21).

This concludes this study. (I will begin a new series with the next DDR on the attacks of the God of the Old Testament as being vicious and bloodthirsty.) In concluding this series, I wish to make a couple of points. First, I have demonstrated that there are no contradictions in the accounts. There are omissions and additions of details among the Gospel writers due to telescoping and different emphases, but no direct and flat-out contradictions. Most of the alleged difficulties are due to bad translations (confer Matthew 28:1 which took place on Saturday evening) and presuppositions on the part of the critics that result in conflating different events. There was a great deal of activity that took place between the death of Jesus Christ and the ascension; each Gospel writer selected different slices of history for different purposes. Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the King of the Jews, Mark focuses on Jesus as the Servant, Luke zeroes in on Jesus as the Son of Man, and John the Son of God.

Now to the bottom line on the resurrection narratives: the historicity of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Regardless of whether one accepts the chronology I have presented, regardless whether one is satisfied with my explanations of the difficulties, the bottom line here is whether the death of Jesus and His resurrection is historical. In other words, the real issue is not if one accepts my model. The real issue is the historicity. Regardless of some of the details, was Jesus crucified and resurrected? Surely, this is far more important than bickering over *some* of the details.

One of the harshest critics of the Gospels, especially the resurrection narratives is Bart Ehrman. He regularly debates Christians regarding “inconsistencies” in the resurrection accounts. However, when it comes to the historicity of Jesus’s death and resurrection consider what he *still* says: “One of the most certain facts of history is that Jesus was crucified on orders of the Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate.” Regarding the resurrection appearances to

Jesus's disciples, he writes, "We can say with complete certainty that some of his disciples at some later time insisted that ... [Jesus] soon appeared to them, convincing them that he had been raised from the dead."

So, for all of the bluster and blather about discrepancies of the various events, one of the most celebrated critical scholars of our time says that there can be no doubt that Jesus was crucified and that the disciples insisted that they had seen Him: "most certain facts of history . . . complete certainty." How one can aver this and yet attack the narratives as being unreliable is beyond me. Isn't the point of it all whether this happened? Talk about "blind guides" straining out the gnat and swallowing the camel (Matt. 23:24). Someone can always find some detail to hang their negative volition on. This is not only true of unbelievers, believers do it all the time. Finding a reason not to make God and Bible doctrine the top priority in life every day is the easiest thing to do, e.g., "I do not have time" (all the while the person has plenty of time for other details like Facebook, TV, and work). Let us never forget that the easiest person to deceive is yourself. What a frightening thought! God help us!

Blessed,

*Pastor Don*