

Resurrection Harmony

Arranged and commented on by Rev. David H. Petersen

This is speculative. It is one way that the accounts can all work together. It is not the only way. While it can't be proven to be accurate, it does prove that the accounts are not contradictory.

1. The women travel to the tomb (Mt 28:1 Mk 16:1-2 Lk 24:1 (cf Lk 24:10) Jn 20:1a)

When the Sabbath was over, that is, on Saturday night after sunset, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna and the others with them bought and prepared spices, so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. On Sunday morning, just before sunrise, the women left for the tomb. The sun rose while they were on the way.

John 20:1 says Mary "went to the tomb" "while it was still dark." Mark 16:2 says the women were on the way "very early... just after sunrise." The best resolution seems to be that John meant that it was dark for much of the journey, and that John does not preclude sunrise occurring during the journey.

2. An Earthquake before the women arrive (Mt 28:2-4)

While the women were on their way to the tomb, there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning. His clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. But before the women arrived, the angel went inside the tomb. Thus he was not visible to the women initially.

3. The women see that the stone had been rolled away (Mk 16:3-4 Lk 24:2 Jn 20:1b)

While they were on their way to the tomb, the women asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" But when they arrived, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb.

4. The women see the tomb is empty, and notice the angels (Mk 16:5 Lk 24:3-5a)

As they entered the tomb, they saw two angels, who looked like men, dressed in white robes, sitting down on the right side. But the women could not find Jesus' body.

It is clear that the "men" in Mark and Luke were intended to be understood as angels, because they were dressed in a brilliant white and, more significantly, they had a message from God for the women.

The women were frightened and confused, due to both the absence of the body and the presence of the angels. Luke does not mention the women's fright until the angels stand beside them but

that doesn't preclude them being frightened from the start. Nor does Luke mention that the women immediately saw the angels. That is because he is, in the first instance, focusing on their confusion; so he does not mention the angels or the women's fright until the angels stand and speak.

While they were wondering about this, suddenly the two angels stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground.

5. One angel speaks (Mt 28:5-7 Mk 16:6-7 Lk 24:5b-8)

The angel who had moved the stone spoke: "Don't be alarmed for I know that you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen!"

Mark has the two sentences above in reverse order. This is an acceptable, non-verbatim, reporting of speech. It is common for people to repeat themselves in spoken communication for emphasis in way that might seem odd in written communication.

The angel continues: "He has risen just as he said. See the place where they laid him. Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.

The angel continued, "But go quickly, and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' Now I have told you."

6. The women go back and tell the disciples (Mt 28:8 Mk 16:8 Lk 24:9-11 Jn 20:2)

Trembling and bewildered, afraid yet filled with joy, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They initially said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Some scholars think the original manuscript of Mark's Gospel ended here.

But then they ran to tell all these things to the Eleven and all the disciples. Mary Magdalene spoke, saying, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" Others gave the angels' report that Jesus was risen and the disciples were to meet him in Galilee. In the confusion which may have resulted from the excitement and may have had everyone speaking at once, the disciples did not believe the women. Their words seemed to them like nonsense.

7. The Guards' Report (Mt 28:11-15)

This may belong later, but it could have happened here.

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. This story had been widely circulated among the Jews until at least the time Matthew wrote his gospel.

8. Peter and John investigate, and report back to the others. (Lk 24:12, Lk 24:24, Jn 20:3-10)

Peter and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and possibly some others (as implied by the “some” in Lk 24:24) got up and ran to the tomb. Both were running, but John outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but he did not go in. Then Peter, who ran slower, arrived. He went into the tomb first. He saw the strips of linen lying there and the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Then John entered the tomb. He saw and believed even though they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then they told the others what they’d found and went back to their homes, wondering what had happened.

9. Two of the women visit the tomb a second time, and see Jesus (Mt 28:9-10 Jn 20:11-18)

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James had followed the Peter and John back to the tomb.

The other women mentioned by Mark and Luke may also have gone back, but if they didn’t then this would explain why Mark and Luke have longer lists of women. They have longer lists because they are only telling of the first visit by a larger group of women, when they saw the angel. They are not telling the second visit by just the two Marys, when they saw the risen Jesus.

After Peter and John left, Mary Magdalene stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. “Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said, “Greetings” The two women came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Jesus said to them, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Do not be afraid. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father

and your Father, to my God and your God.’ Also tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And they told them that he had said these things to them.

10. Jesus appears to Cleopas and Peter on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-32, Lk 24:33b-34 1Co 15:5a)

That evening Cleopas and Peter were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. Cleopas asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

If Peter isn’t the other disciple, then the 1 Corinthian passage refers to some appearance that isn’t recorded anywhere else.

11. Jesus appears to ten apostles plus some others (Lk 24:33-43, Jn 20:19-25)

Cleopas and Peter got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. By that time it was the evening of that first day of the week. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has

appeared to Simon.”

Who is speaking? Cleopas and Peter. They are telling the eleven what happened on the way, and how they recognized Jesus when he broke the bread.

Whether the disciple with Cleopas is Peter or not, Thomas was absent even though Luke uses the term “the Eleven.” That term is a generalization, a name of the group. It is not a count of bodies present because at most there are ten there. In a similar way, John 20:19 implies all disciples were present, yet John 20:24 makes it clear Thomas was absent. So Luke can use the term the “eleven” for the group even if Peter isn’t among them. It is not necessary, but it is possible.

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands, feet and side, and the disciples were overjoyed. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

12. The Eleven report to Thomas (Jn 20:24-25)

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

13. Jesus appears to all of the twelve including Thomas and Matthias (Jn 20:26-29, 1 Co 15:5b)

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. The group included (but was not limited to) all remaining 11 apostles, plus the soon-to-be appointed Matthias .

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have

not seen and yet have believed.”

14. Jesus appears by the Sea of Tiberias (i.e. the Sea of Galilee) (John 21:1-24)

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered. He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

This is the third time he appeared to the apostles as a group, not including individual appearances, or appearances to the women. This is John’s explicit intention for he reports the appearance to Mary but does not count it here.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?” Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” This is the disciple who

testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

15. Jesus appears on a mountain in Galilee, to more than 500 (Mt 28:16-20, 1 Cor 15:6)

Then the eleven disciples plus many other disciples, to a total of over 500, most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When the Eleven saw him, they worshiped him; but some others doubted.

Then Jesus came to them, the eleven, and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

16. Jesus appears to James (1 Cor 15:7a)

Some time later, Jesus appeared to James.

17. Jesus tells them to stay in Jerusalem Acts 1:2-5

In these various appearances (and possibly others, not mentioned), which were all over a period of 40 days, Jesus gave many convincing proofs that he was alive, and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

19. Jesus appears to all the apostles, leads them out to the Mount of Olives, and ascends to heaven. (Luke 24:44-53, Acts 1:6-12, 1 Cor 15:7b)

So when all the apostles met together, Jesus said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Then Jesus led them to the Mount of Olives, which is in the vicinity of Bethany (and is a Sabbath day’s walk from the city of Jerusalem). They asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Then he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

20. The Ascended Lord appears to Paul in Arabia (1 Cor 15:8, Gal 1:17)

After His conversion, Paul does not go up to Jerusalem or consult with anyone, but goes to Arabia. This, it seems, is probably where the Lord appears to him as recorded in 1 Cor 15.

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The bulk of this came from <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~pballard/easter.html> which is no longer available. I've cleaned it up some and also modified it slightly, most significantly with the idea of Peter being the disciple with Cleopas. That idea I first picked up from John Lightfoot.