

Harmonizing the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

A Twenty-Two Point Harmony of the Four Gospels

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Christians believe Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead. Jesus was crucified by Roman soldiers on a cross between two thieves. After he died, Roman soldiers thrust a spear into his side to ensure he was dead. The upward spear thrust penetrated his heart. Jesus was taken down from the cross, wrapped in burial clothes, and placed in an empty tomb. A heavy stone was rolled in place to close the entrance. The tomb was then sealed and Roman soldiers were assigned to prevent it from being disturbed. Three days later Jesus arose from the dead, left the tomb, and was seen by many people in subsequent weeks. Christians celebrate Easter in memory of Christ’s resurrection.

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If Jesus did not resurrect, then he was simply a man. As many other famous men in history, he overcame his humble beginnings through natural talent, ambition, and hard work. He achieved prominence as a leader, attracted a following of dedicated supporters, and then died the same as any other man. Although a significant prophet, a healer, a miracle worker, a great teacher, a compassionate person, a defender of the downtrodden, a moral individual, and one unjustly crucified; nevertheless, he died, was buried, remained in the grave, and his body decomposed. He was unable to escape death and decay.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ represents the cornerstone of the Christian faith and puts the final stamp of approval on Jesus’ life and ministry as being born of a virgin, a fulfiller of messianic prophecy, a sinless individual, a perfect sacrifice, and the son of God. The resurrection authenticates His claims that “I

and my father are one” (John 10:30) and “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). Jesus’ resurrection validates the Apostle John’s statement, “These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). Eyewitness testimony of events on the day Jesus resurrected, recorded in the four Gospels, clearly shows the historical fact of this miracle; however, a perceived lack of harmony raises some problems. As Christian's we must address those problems and defend the resurrection against those who deny it.

Resurrection Critics

According to skeptics and critics, the four Gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ contain contradictions and errors. They lack harmony and cannot be reconciled. One skeptic says, “The Gospel accounts of the risen Jesus are discordant and contradictory,”¹ while another states, “When we examine the resurrection narratives, it is obvious that they cannot be reconciled.”² Michael L. Martin, philosophy professor and atheist says, “In sum, the accounts of what happened at the tomb are either inconsistent or

can only be made consistent with the aid of implausible interpretations.”³ Thomas Sheehan, professor of religious studies and a disbeliever in the resurrection says, “The differing narratives of Easter in the later Gospels cannot be harmonized to produce a consistent story, without doing violence to the accounts both individually and as an ensemble. The various Easter narratives contradict one another egregiously.”⁴ Dan Barker, preacher turned atheist and co-president of Freedom from Religion says, “The story of the resurrection of Jesus, told by at least five different writers, is hopelessly irreconcilable.”⁵ Barker challenges believers to provide a simple non-contradictory chronological narrative of the resurrection and ascension without omitting a single biblical detail.⁶

In responding to critics of Jesus' resurrection, we should realize that a satisfactory answer is most likely unachievable. When the Gospels harmonize perfectly, critics accuse the writers of conspiring and simply copying one another. When the Gospels differ, critics say they are contradictory and false. Regardless of what scripture says, critics appear incapable of being satisfied.

Harmonization Difficulties

However, some criticism of Jesus' resurrection is justified since popular Christian writers have not fully harmonized the four Gospel accounts. Several issues make harmonization difficult. This does not mean the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection are in error, but only that they are difficult to harmonize. Essentially all attempts at harmonization ignore specific verses, fail to give a coherent timeline of events, add events not in scripture, or rely on significant speculation.

A careful analysis of popular books about the life of Jesus and his resurrection subtly illustrate the problem of harmonization. Josh McDowell in his two books *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* and *More Than a Carpenter* presents a convincing apologetic in support of the resurrection, but does not give a harmony of events in a coherent timeline using all relevant verses. Lee Strobel in *The Case for Christ* defends the resurrection, but does not give a harmony of all pertinent verses in a chronological order. Both A. T. Robertson in *A Harmony of the Gospels* and Craig Blomberg in *Jesus and the Gospels* fall short of harmonizing the resurrection of Jesus found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.^{7, 8} Gary Habermas and Michael Licona in *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* acknowledge the harmony problem, but offer no solution.⁹ John Wenham in *Easter Enigma* gives a brief harmony of the resurrection, but leaves several issues unresolved. Likewise, articles found on several apologetic Internet sites^{10, 11, 12, 13} fail to harmonize all verses applicable to the resurrection in a simple timeline.

Incomplete Testimony

The writers of the four Gospels relied on their personal account of events, in addition to the testimony of other eyewitnesses. Matthew and John were apostles (among the chosen twelve) while Mark was probably a young disciple. All three were intimately familiar with Jesus' betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection. John is specifically mentioned as being at Christ's crucifixion. Matthew, Mark, and John undoubtedly saw Jesus after his resurrection. All four writers of the Gospels, to one extent or another, rely on eyewitness testimony of the resurrection given by Peter, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna, at least one Roman soldier, and Cleopas. Additional possible sources include the other apostles, Mary the sister of Lazarus, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary the mother of Jesus.

Incomplete accounts of eyewitness testimony cause some difficulty in harmonizing the resurrection. Witnesses of Jesus' resurrection told what they remembered or felt was significant from their perspective. For example, the account found in John 20:1–18 is clearly from the viewpoint of Mary Magdalene. Mary told John her personal account of events.

Witnesses often left out details they considered unimportant. Leaving out information in a historical account is not wrong; however, it can contribute to the perception that harmony is unachievable. For example, when identifying the women who went to the tomb John mentions Mary Magdalene, Matthew mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, while Mark lists Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. None of the three accounts are wrong; however, none give a complete list of all the women who went to the tomb.

Mary Magdalene

The Bible says that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection; however, harmony of this statement within the Gospels is somewhat difficult to achieve. An explanation developed by Harvard Law Professor Simon Greenleaf in *The Testimony of the Evangelists Examined by the Rules of Evidence Administrated in Courts of Justice* published in 1874 illustrates the problem. Greenleaf's harmony has the resurrected Jesus appearing first to the women who went to the tomb (Matthew 28:8–10) before appearing to Mary Magdalene. However, Mark 16:9 clearly states that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. For Jesus to appear first to Mary Magdalene, she must be separated from the other women at the tomb. This permits Mary Magdalene to see Jesus first, followed by the other women.

Peter's Visit to the Tomb

The Gospels of John and Luke describe when Peter visits the empty tomb, and a harmony of the two accounts is easily achieved with careful analysis. Greenleaf has Peter making one visit to the tomb; however, the most plausible explanation is that Peter made two visits. In the first visit (John 20:2–5), Peter and John go to the tomb when summoned by Mary Magdalene. In the second visit (Luke 24:10–12), Peter goes to the tomb alone when Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women return from the tomb and tell the eleven apostles (which includes Peter) about seeing the resurrected Jesus. The second visit gives a plausible time for Jesus to reveal himself to Simon Peter, apart from the other apostles, as mentioned in Luke 24:34 and 1 Corinthians 15:5. A second visit by Peter easily harmonizes the timeline of events in Luke and John.

Timeline Discontinuities

Breaks in the timeline of events are a difficult problem to resolve when harmonizing events in the four Gospel accounts of the resurrection. Sometimes action occurs, time progresses, or the scene changes without being clarified in the narrative, an issue common throughout the four Gospels, but of critical importance in the resurrection story. For example, Matthew 28:4–5 represents a major timeline break where significant action occurs between the two verses. Matthew does not mention John's account of Mary Magdalene running to get Peter and John, their race to the tomb, its subsequent examination, and their departure. Nor does he mention Mary looking into the tomb, seeing two angels, leaving the tomb entrance, and her subsequent encounter with the resurrected Jesus in the garden. Mark 16:4–5 and Luke 24:3–4 are timeline discontinuities for the same information.

Harmonization Fundamentals

All four Gospels combined give the most complete story about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The following twenty-two point harmony of the resurrection flows in a coherent timeline based upon: (1) All events within each Gospel account occur in a chronological order. (2) Information from one Gospel can be used to fill in omissions in another. (3) Each Gospel account is accurate in regard to the details mentioned.

In the following harmonization, *all verses are accounted for* in Matthew 28:1–15, Mark 16:1–13, Luke 24:1–43, and John 20:1–25 that describe events on the day Jesus resurrected. Conjecture and added events not specifically mentioned in scripture are eliminated or kept to an absolute minimum. The language of the New King James Version is used.

A Twenty-Two Point Harmony of the Resurrection of Jesus

1. The resurrection of Jesus took place on the first day of the week following the Sabbath. The day of Christ's resurrection is described in the four Gospels as:

- Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn. (Matthew 28:1)
- Now when the Sabbath was past . . . on the first day of the week. (Mark 16:1-2)

- Now on the first day of the week. (Luke 24:1)
- Now the first day of the week. (John 20:1)

2. The time of day when the women went to the tomb is described as:

- Early, while it was still dark. (John 20:1)
- Very early in the morning. (Luke 24:1)
- Very early in the morning . . . when the sun had risen. (Mark 16:2)
- As the first day of the week began to dawn. (Matthew 28:1)

Harmony among the four Gospels is relatively easy to achieve in regard to the time of day the women went to the tomb. The women left their homes while it was dark; however, by the time they walked to the appointed meeting place, waited for everyone to assemble, traveled the remaining distance, and arrived at the tomb the sun had begun to show above the horizon. The time from dark to sunrise is around forty minutes depending on cloud cover and the phase of the moon. Some of the women may have walked the two mile distance from Bethany, which would have taken at least thirty minutes.¹⁴ We should keep in mind that any meeting time selected by the women was only approximate since accurate time was not kept in the typical household. Waiting for the group to assemble, including the inevitable straggler, could have easily consumed twenty minutes or more. The total time for the entire process probably exceeded one hour.

The Greek word *erchomai* is typically translated “come, came or went” in the four Gospel accounts to describe the women “coming” to the tomb. *Erchomai* means “to come” or “to come from one place to another.”¹⁵ Coming to the tomb involved leaving home, walking a distance, meeting at a specific location and approximate time, walking another distance, and arriving at the tomb. The entire “coming” process began when it was dark and ended after sunrise.

3. Harmony of the four Gospel accounts about the identity of the women who went to the tomb can easily be achieved. A group of women walk to the tomb where Jesus is buried, having plans to anoint His body with spices. Individuals in the group are Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome, Joanna, and other women (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10, John 20:1). We can conclude the group was comprised of at least six women and probably more.

Matthew 27:55-56 and Luke 23:49 mention that a group of women followed Christ from Galilee and were witnesses of His crucifixion. Matthew 27:61 and Luke 23:55-56 point out that the same group of women followed Jesus’ funeral procession and observed where He was buried. Some sat by His tomb. These women then prepared spices and fragrant oils to anoint His body as soon as the mandatory Sabbath rest was past. Six names associated with this group of Galilean women are mentioned in Matthew 27:56, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10, and John 19:25. They include Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Mary the wife of Cleopas, Joanna, and Salome (wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John). Mary the sister of Lazarus may have also been in the group.

4. Sometime prior to the women arriving at the tomb, an earthquake occurs. An angel of the Lord descends from heaven and rolls away the large stone from the door. The angel sits on the stone to prevent it from being rolled back in place, dominating any course of action the soldiers might consider. The angel has a countenance like lightning and is clothed with raiment as white as snow. The angel’s appearance is so frightful that the guards shake and become unconscious (Matthew 28:2-4).

5. As the women approach the tomb, they discuss among themselves who will roll the stone away from the tomb entrance (Mark 16:3).

6. When the women arrive at the tomb, the stone has been rolled away (Mark 16:4, Luke 24:2, John 20:1). The angel sitting on the stone has disappeared, the guards have regained consciousness and left, and the tomb site is deserted.

7. The women enter the tomb and see that Jesus’ body is missing (Luke 24:3). A harmony of events is relatively easy up to this point in the resurrection narrative.

8. Mary Magdalene leaves the other women at the tomb and runs to get Peter and John (the disciple whom Jesus loved). She tells them that Jesus’ body has been taken from the tomb (John 20:2).

When John 20:2 and 20:18 are accepted as two separate events, harmony is easily achieved. John 20:2 records the first event when Mary Magdalene summons Peter and John. All three return to the tomb. John 20:18, Mark 16:10, and Luke 24:9-10 record the second event when all the women return from the tomb and tell the eleven apostles of their experiences. In Luke 24:12 Peter alone returns to the tomb.

9. Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene return to the tomb. John outruns Peter to reach the sepulcher first but remains outside. Peter arrives and immediately enters. They both verify that Jesus' body is missing and see the linen clothes with the head covering lying by itself (John 20:3-9). The visit to the tomb by Peter and John mentioned in John 20:3-9 is a completely separate event from the second solo visit by Peter mentioned in Luke 24:12.

10. The disciples, Peter and John, leave the tomb and return to their homes (John 20:10). As typical men, they have completed their investigation, reached a conclusion, and see no need to linger. All the women remain behind at the tomb. Originally, the women had planned to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, a task requiring some time. Having no body to anoint, the grieving women stand outside the tomb and discuss the disappearance of Jesus' body, being perplexed by its absence.

11. A weeping Mary Magdalene walks to the tomb entrance, stoops down, and looks inside. She sees two angels dressed in white, one at the head and one at the foot where Jesus' body had lain. The angel asks "Woman, why are you weeping?" Mary replies, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:11-13). The angels appear as men. At this point, Mary believes someone has stolen the body of Jesus.

12. To achieve a harmony of the Gospels, Mary Magdalene must be separated from the other women. Mary Magdalene turns and walks away from the tomb. In the distance, she sees a male figure walking in the garden. Desperate to find where Jesus' body has been taken, she walks toward the unknown man, believing him to be the gardener, and perhaps responsible for the missing corpse. She separates herself from the other women, leaving them at the tomb. Jesus sees Mary in the distance coming in His direction, perhaps looking behind bushes for the missing body. He loudly calls out, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Still not close enough to recognize Jesus, Mary calls in reply, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him." After this short exchange, Mary resumes her search of the garden. As she draws closer, Jesus speaks her name in a normal tone of voice. At that point Mary recognizes Christ, turns directly toward Him and calls out, "Rabboni" (John 20:14-17). Mary Magdalene was the first person to see Jesus following His resurrection (Mark 16:9). Three arguments support this explanation.

- If Mary had been in close proximity to Jesus as she turned and walked away from the tomb, she would have been able to identify Him. This suggests He was some distance away.
- The tomb was located in a garden (John 19:41). Mary made a logical error when she mistook Jesus for the gardener.
- A person calling out in a loud voice is often not identifiable even when one is familiar with their normal speaking voice. Mary was not able to identify Jesus when He called loudly from a distance.

English translations do not do justice to the language used to describe Mary's actions at the tomb in John 20:14. The NKJV says, "She turned around," while the KJV is rendered, "She turned herself back." We typically interpret this passage to mean that she turned her head around and saw Jesus. A literal translation from the Greek says, "She turned to the back." The two Greek words *eis* and *opiso* used in this verse provide a key to its understanding. *Eis* and *opiso* are used together in Matthew 13:16, Luke 9:62, Luke 17:31, John 6:66, and John 18:6 to denote significant action in reversing one's course, either spiritually or physically. Based on the language, we can say that Mary "turned back" or "turned and walked away" from the tomb.

According to John 1:41, Jesus was buried near where He was crucified (Golgotha) in a tomb located within a garden. The Garden Tomb (also known as Gordon's Calvary) is one site proposed as the burial place of Jesus. In 1883, General Charles G. Gordon found a rocky escarpment which from several angles resembled the face of a skull. Gordon concluded that the rocky escarpment was probably Golgotha where Jesus was crucified. Nearby were located a number of tombs, one of which was surrounded by a garden. This tomb, which has become known as the Garden Tomb, contains an ancient wine press and a large

cistern where gardeners stored and drew water for their plants. While the Garden Tomb is probably not the burial place of Christ (the site of Church of the Holy Sepulcher is the most authentic location), it supports scripture by serving as a historical example of a tomb located within a garden.

When considering the surrounding garden, Mary's logic in leaving the tomb to look for the body of Jesus is readily apparent. We can surmise that herbs, grapes, figs, and olives were grown in the garden. All of these provided cover where the corpse could have been hidden. Mary thought Jesus' body had been stolen, and left the tomb to search among the surrounding vines, bushes, and trees.

13. After Mary Magdalene leaves the tomb to search the garden, two angels appear to the remaining women standing outside the tomb entrance. The women are frightened and bow their faces to the earth. The angels tell the women not to fear and announce that Jesus is risen (Matthew 28:5-7, Luke 24:4-8).

14. The women enter Jesus' tomb and find a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side. He shows them where the body had lain and again announces that Jesus is resurrected (Mark 16:5-6). As pointed out by Matthew, the women enter the tomb at the angel's invitation (Matthew 28:6). The young man is one of the two angels previously observed by Mary (John 20:12). According to the women's testimony, the angels outside the tomb had a powerful angelic appearance while those inside appeared as normal men clothed in white.

15. Angels command the women to tell the disciples that Jesus is resurrected. The women exit the tomb in fear and great joy, and run to tell the disciples. (Matthew 28:7-8, Mark 16:7-8).

16. As the women leave the tomb they are hailed by Jesus, who has been talking with Mary Magdalene in the garden. The women bow down, hold His feet, and worship Him. Jesus instructs the women to tell His brethren they will see Him again (Matthew 28:9-10).

17. Concurrent with the women's visit to the tomb and subsequent events, some of the guards assigned to secure the tomb enter the city (Matthew 28:11-15). Since Pilate approved placing the guards at the tomb, they were no doubt Roman soldiers rather than Jewish temple police (Matthew 27:62-65). Reporting back to Pilate raised several difficulties. To admit incompetence by losing Jesus' body, combined with an unbelievable story of a shining angel who rolled away the stone covering the tomb, was not a viable option. As Dr. Peter May says, "It could well have cost them their lives."¹⁶ Seeking a more sympathetic ear, the soldiers go to the chief priests and tell of their terrifying experience. The chief priests consult with the elders and determine a course of action. They give the soldiers a large sum of money and promise to intervene with the governor if necessary to protect them. In turn the soldiers are instructed to say that Jesus' body was stolen by His disciples at night while they slept.

18. Harmony is easily achieved between Mark, Luke, and John about the women's return from the tomb. Being afraid, the women do not speak to anyone on their return journey (Mark 16:8). Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna, and other women in their group go straight to the apostles and tell of seeing angels and the risen Jesus (Mark 16:10, Luke 24:9-10, John 20:18). This is separate from the event described in John 20:2, which involves Mary Magdalene alone.

19. The women's words are as idle tales and not believed (Mark 16:11, Luke 24:11). After all, Peter and John had earlier witnessed the empty tomb—not angels and the risen Lord. Rejection of the women's testimony is plausible in view of the fact that in first century Jewish culture women were considered inferior witnesses, not as dependable as men.

20. A second visit to the tomb by Peter is the easiest and most logical way to achieve harmony among the Gospel accounts. Peter, one of the apostles present, hears the women's story. Characteristically an action driven person, he runs back to the tomb for a second look by himself. He reexamines the empty tomb and sees the linen clothes lying as originally observed (Luke 24:12). As Simon Peter leaves the tomb he encounters the risen Christ in the garden (Luke 24:34). In 1 Corinthians 15:5, the Apostle Paul says that Cephas (Peter) saw Jesus before the twelve. We can logically conclude that Peter saw the resurrected Jesus during his solo trip to the tomb.

21. Later in the day, Jesus appears to Cleopas and another disciple as they walk to Emmaus, located about seven miles from Jerusalem (Mark 16:12-13, Luke 24:13-32). The two disciples discuss the women's report of an empty tomb, their encounter with angels, and verification of the empty tomb by Peter and

John (Luke 24:23-24). However, the two disciples have no knowledge of Peter's second trip to the tomb. The two return to Jerusalem and report to the eleven. They discover that Simon Peter has seen the resurrected Jesus, presumably during his second trip to the tomb (Luke 24:33-35).

22. The eleven apostles and other disciples (Luke 24:33) gather together in a locked room on the resurrection night in fear of the Jews. As Cleopas and the other disciple tell their story, Jesus appears and shows them His hands and feet and side. Jesus then asks for food and eats to verify that He is flesh and bones (Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-25). Thomas is absent when Jesus appears, perhaps having temporarily stepped out (John 20:24).

Ending the Resurrection Narratives

Deciding when events on the resurrection day end, and subsequent action begins, illustrates the issue of timeline discontinuities related to a harmony of resurrection events. The resurrection account is one of many instances in the four Gospels when action occurs, time progresses, or the scene changes without being clarified in the narrative. Events on the resurrection day can be ended as follows:

Matthew's narrative of events on the resurrection day can be stopped at Matthew 28:15. As described in Matthew 28:16-17, the disciples later travel to a mountain in Galilee where they meet the resurrected Jesus, an event geographically related to Christ's appearance at the Sea of Galilee described in John 21:1-19. The Sea of Galilee appearance probably took place near Capernaum, the home of Peter, a straight-line distance of approximately 80 miles from Jerusalem.

Mark's account of the resurrection day can be terminated at Mark 16:13. Christ's appearance to the eleven in Mark 16:14 easily corresponds to John 20:26-29, eight days after His resurrection.

Luke's description of the resurrection day can be halted at Luke 24:43. Verses that follow can be ascribed to events immediately prior to Christ's ascension described in Acts 1:2-12, forty days after His resurrection.

The Apostle John clearly defines an end to the resurrection day events in John 20:25. After the first appearance, Jesus appears a second time eight days later in the same room, this time with Thomas present.

Post Resurrection Appearances

Jesus made a number of appearances after His resurrection. According to Acts 1:3, Jesus remained on earth for forty days following His resurrection before he ascended into heaven. The following scriptures describe at least nine separate occurrences where Jesus appeared following his resurrection. Some of the scriptures describe the same events, such as Paul's mention of Jesus appearing to Cephas (Peter) and the twelve in 1 Corinthians 15:5.

1. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna, and other women near the tomb (Mark 16:1-2, Luke 24:10).
2. Jesus appears to Simon Peter, probably during his second visit to the tomb (Luke 24:34).
3. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus walks with Cleopas and a companion on the afternoon of the resurrection day (Mark 16:12-13, Luke 24:13-32).
4. Jesus appears to the ten disciples gathered together at night on the resurrection day. Thomas is absent (Luke 24:33-43, John 20:19-25).
5. Jesus appears to the eleven disciples eight days after His resurrection. Thomas is present (Mark 16:14, John 20:26-29).
6. At the Sea of Galilee, Jesus talks and eats with seven of the disciples which included James and John (the sons of Zebedee), Simon Peter, Thomas, and Nathanael (John 21:1-19).
7. Jesus meets with the eleven disciples at a mountain location in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-17).
8. Paul records that Jesus appeared to Cephas (Peter) before appearing to the other apostles (1 Corinthians 15:5). This probably refers to when Peter met Jesus during his second visit to the tomb in Luke 24:34.

9. Paul states that Jesus appeared to the twelve (1 Corinthians 15:5). This could be in reference to Jesus' appearance eight days after his resurrection mentioned in John 20:26-29. At that time Thomas was present, in addition to Matthias to make twelve even though he was not yet formally selected to replace the fallen Judas (Acts 1:21-26).
10. Paul said that Jesus appeared to a large crowd of over 500 brethren at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6).
11. Paul affirms that Jesus appeared to James and then to all the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:7). James could have been the companion of Cleopas mentioned in Luke 24:13-32.
12. Jesus speaks to the disciples before His ascension at the Mount of Olives near Bethany outside of Jerusalem (Luke 24:50-51, Acts 1:4-12).

Conclusion

One prevalent theme in the Gospel narratives is the initial skepticism of the witnesses about Jesus' resurrection. On the first day of the week, the women are perplexed when they find the stone rolled away and an empty tomb. There is no rush to conclude that Jesus is resurrected (Luke 24:4). When Peter and John see the empty tomb they do not connect it with Jesus' teaching about His resurrection (John 20:8-9). Rather than being resurrected, Mary Magdalene is convinced that someone has stolen the body of Jesus (John 20:13-15). The apostles do not believe the women's testimony about seeing the risen Jesus (Luke 24:11 and Mark 16:11). The two disciples traveling to Emmaus are sad because Jesus has been crucified, His body is missing, and their hope in Him as the redeemer of Israel is lost (Luke 24:17-24). When the two Emmaus disciples tell of seeing the resurrected Jesus, they are not believed (Mark 16:12-13). When Jesus appears to the apostles on the resurrection night, they think He is a spirit rather than a flesh and bone physical body (Luke 24:37-43). Being absent at the time, Thomas rejects the testimony of the ten apostles and others present (John 20:24-25).

The clear testimony we have in the Gospels is that the witnesses were not gullible followers wanting to believe their teacher had come back to life. They were not zealots, bent on creating a resurrection myth. Most, if not all, of Jesus' disciples initially dismissed any thought of His resurrection and rejected claims to that effect; however, they were later convinced through personal contact He was alive. The apostles became changed men. Rather than being deniers and deserters as they were before the crucifixion, they now proclaimed Jesus as Messiah. Because of the resurrection, the apostles were so convinced of His message that most died for their beliefs. Their changed behavior is additional testimony to the truth of the resurrection.

The four Gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus can be logically harmonized with very little conjecture. Within each Gospel, all resurrection events occur in a simple, coherent timeline. The integration of four different accounts, based on multiple eyewitnesses, by four different writers, without collusion or coaching, adds enormous credibility to the resurrection story. The combined Gospels are an accurate historical record of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A Twenty-Two Point Harmony of Jesus' Resurrection

(The following timeline uses every single verse in the four Gospels. Within each Gospel, all action occurs in chronological order. Each references number corresponds to the same number in the previous discussion. All quotes are from the New King James Version of the Bible)

Ref	Matthew 28:1-20	Mark 16:1-20	Luke 24:1-53	John 20:1-31
1.	1. Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.	1. Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices;	1. Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing	1. Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had

		<p>that they might come and anoint Him.</p> <p>2. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.</p>	<p>the spices which they had prepared.</p>	<p>been taken away from the tomb.</p>
2.	<p>1. Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.</p>	<p>2. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.</p>	<p>1. Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.</p>	<p>1. Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.</p>
3.	<p>1. Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.</p>	<p>1. Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.</p>	<p>1. Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.</p> <p>10. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles.</p>	<p>1. Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.</p>
4.	<p>2. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.</p> <p>3. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.</p> <p>4. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.</p>			
5.		<p>3. And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?"</p>		
6.		<p>4. But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large.</p>	<p>2. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.</p>	<p>1. Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.</p>

7.			3. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.	
8.				2. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."
9.				3. Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. 4. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. 5. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. 6. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, 7. and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. 8. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. 9. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.
10.				10. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.
11.				11. But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. 12. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at

				<p>the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.</p> <p>13. Then they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”</p> <p>She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.”</p>
12.		<p>9. Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.</p>		<p>14. Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.</p> <p>15. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”</p> <p>She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”</p> <p>16. Jesus said to her, “Mary!”</p> <p>She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).</p> <p>17. Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’”</p>
13.	<p>5. But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.</p> <p>6. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.</p>		<p>4. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments.</p> <p>5. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?</p> <p>6. He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He</p>	

			spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, 7. saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’” 8. And they remembered His words.	
14.		5. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 6. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.		
15.	7. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.” 8. So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.	7. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.” 8. So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.		
16.	9. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. 10. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.”			
17.	11. Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened.			

	<p>12. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers,</p> <p>13. saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.'</p> <p>14. And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure."</p> <p>15. So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.</p>			
18.		<p>8. So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.</p> <p>10. She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept.</p>	<p>9. Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.</p> <p>10. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles.</p>	<p>18. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.</p>
19.		<p>11. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.</p>	<p>11. And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.</p>	
20.			<p>12. But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.</p>	
21.		<p>12. After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country.</p> <p>13. And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either.</p>	<p>13. Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem.</p> <p>14. And they talked together of all these things which had happened.</p> <p>15. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned,</p>	

			<p>that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them.</p> <p>16. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.</p> <p>17. And He said to them, “What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?”</p> <p>18. Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, “Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?”</p> <p>19. And He said to them, “What things?”</p> <p>So they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,</p> <p>20. and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.</p> <p>21. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.</p> <p>22 Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us.</p> <p>23. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive.</p> <p>24. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.”</p> <p>25. Then He said to them,</p>	
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			<p>“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!</p> <p>26. Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?”</p> <p>27. And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.</p> <p>28. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther.</p> <p>29. But they constrained Him, saying, “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And He went in to stay with them.</p> <p>30. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.</p> <p>31. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.</p> <p>32. And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”</p> <p>33. So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together,</p> <p>34. saying, “The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”</p> <p>35. And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and</p>	
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			how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.	
22.			<p>36. Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you."</p> <p>37. But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.</p> <p>38. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?"</p> <p>39. Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."</p> <p>40. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.</p> <p>41. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?"</p> <p>42. So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb.</p> <p>43. And He took it and ate in their presence.</p>	<p>19. Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."</p> <p>20. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.</p> <p>21. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."</p> <p>22. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.</p> <p>23. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."</p> <p>24. Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.</p> <p>25. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."</p>

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