

Owlcation

Comparing the Gospel Accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

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Are There Differences in the Gospel Accounts of the Resurrection?

At first glance there appear to be clear differences between each of the four gospel accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we were to create a table for each story and bring them parallel to each other it would be impossible not to see how many differences there appear to be on the surface. I've provided a table below to show some of the main ideas of the accounts and how they vary on the surface.

When the individual stories from each gospel are dissected however, we will see that the apparent differences come down to simply a different viewpoint of the same event. A difference in writing style perhaps, and the individual author's perspective of the circumstances surrounding the Resurrection, rather than an actual difference in the events that happened.

I will be referencing verses from a women's devotional NIV bible, so your bible might have slightly different wording, but remember the message is still the same! Below you will find the passages for each gospels account of the Resurrection in order to make the comparisons easier to see.

Bolded words or phrases within the scripture passages have been done to show what similarities are in all four of the gospels.

Matthew 28: 1-10

¹After the Sabbath, at dawn **on the first day of the week**, **Mary Magdalene** and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down and from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightening, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵The angel said to the women, "Do not be

afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." ⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Mark 16: 1-8

¹When the Sabbath was over, **Mary Magdalene**, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early **on the first day of the week**, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you'." ⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Luke 24: 1-10

¹**On the first day of the week**, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightening stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of the sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again'." ⁸Then they remembered his words. ⁹When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was **Mary Magdalene**, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

John 20: 1-18

¹Early **on the first day of the week**, while it was still dark, **Mary Magdalene** went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ²So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" ³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had

reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰Then the disciples went back to their homes, ¹¹but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³They 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." ¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not recognize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵"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." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father, to my God and your God." ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Comparing the Resurrection Stories

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Time of day	At dawn on the first day of the week	Very early on the first day of the week (just after sunrise)	Very early on the first day of the week	Early on the first day of the week (still dark)
Who went to the tomb	Mary Magdalene & the other Mary	Mary Magdalene, Mary (James' mother), & Salome	The women	Mary Magdalene
Events that occurred	Violent earthquake; Angel speaks to them; Women meet Jesus	Women bought spices; Angel speaks to them; Women fled tomb, but said nothing	Women take spices to tomb; 2 angles appear; Angel speaks to them; Told the disciples what they found	Mary Magdalene ran to get Simon Peter; Simon Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb; disciples left and Jesus appears to Mary
The angels	One Angel came down from heaven, whose appearance was like lightning; clothes were white as snow	Young man dressed in white robes sitting on the right side	2 men appeared in clothes that gleamed like lightning; stood beside them	2 angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been (one at the head other at the foot)
Jesus' words	"Greetings"; "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to			"Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"; "Mary"; "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
	Galilee; there they will see me"			the Father. I am returning to my Father, and your Father, to my God and your God."

Do These Differences Discount the Resurrection?

No they do not. In fact, it is because of the variations that we can fully believe in the events that took place during the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus. The variations that can be found in each of the four gospels will be further explored and we will see exactly why these differences do not discount what happened.

The differences between the stories have caused many people to believe that the Resurrection was a fabrication or a parable, rather than a factual happening. However, I believe it is because of these differences, that the Resurrection can be confirmed as truth. If all the accounts were exactly the same it would be harder to believe that the Resurrection actually took place. It would appear that one author wrote a story and the other three simply copied it word for word and added it to their gospel without a second thought. However, with each story being different, we can see that it is more likely than not that it actually happened and happened like the four gospels say it did. The accounts after all, are not that different when we look closer at what is meant by the written content.

Think of it like this. If there are four people watching the same event, be it sports, fireworks, crime, ect.; there are going to be four separate and slightly different eye witness accounts of this exact same event. We see this all the time when police question eyewitnesses of a crime or accident for example. The same thing happens when people watch other events unfold, such as, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is these differences that actually help show the truth of what transpired during that day. All four gospels agree on the focal points of what happened and the time when these events occurred. The reason it seems like we have such different stories, is because no one gospel tells the whole story. We get different pieces from each of the authors for one reason or another. Each gospel account is also written by a different author, which means there is going to be a difference in writing style as well as interpretation of the events that happened. No two people are going to interpret something in the exact same way.

Let's break down the main points of the Resurrection further and truly compare what is being said by each author.

What Time did the Women go to the Tomb?

It is clear that the Resurrection happened on the first day of the week, as each author agrees on this point and mentions it specifically in each of their accounts of what happened. What time they started their journey or arrived at the tomb is unclear, but Mark, Luke, and John all agree it is very early in the morning. Matthew simply uses the word dawn, but we know that dawn is also an occurrence that happens very early in the morning. For this reason we can conclude that the women's journey happened at some point during the morning.

It is known that Mary and the other women were likely staying in Bethany or Jerusalem like they did earlier in the week, and their walk would have taken them several miles. This means there was plenty of time for the sun to rise before they

reached the tomb where Jesus was buried if they left when it was still dark. The long walk helps us to know that the four authors are likely talking about different places in their journey to the tomb. John describes it being dark out, because he is starting his gospel at the start of Mary's journey as they are leaving the place where they are staying. On the other hand, Mark's description of just after sunrise would describe when they arrived at the grave.

Therefore, none of these descriptions would be wrong. The voyage would have been long and enough time would have passed for the women to experience complete darkness, dawn, and arrive at the grave as the sun was starting to rise into the sky.

Who Went to the Tomb on That First Day?

Each author is in agreement that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. Each one mentions her specifically by name at some point during their account of events. It is also clear that all of them, including John know that other women went with Mary. It is unclear how many actually go to the tomb with Mary, but we can be sure that it was more than those that are mentioned by name (James' mother Mary, Joanna & Salome).

In John 20:2 ("They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and **we** don't know where they have put him!") we know that Mary mentions other women being at the grave sight even if they are not mentioned by name anywhere in John's gospel. The use of "we" can only mean other women, and we can use deductive reasoning and comparing this verse with several others from the other three gospels to know that the word "we" in this verse does in fact mean other women.

In Luke he starts out by saying "the women", however a few verses later he takes the time to name a few. Luke 24:10 ("It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles") he acknowledges that there were several women at the tomb, including others he does not mention by name.

With Luke and John's account we know that Matthew and Mark's accounts of who went to the tomb can be correct. Neither Matthew or Mark say that only the Mary's made the journey that day, and therefore the apparent difference of who went to the tomb is in actuality a similarity. They all agree that several women likely lead by Mary Magdalene went to see Jesus' body that early morning, on the first day of the week.

How Many Angels Were in Jesus' Tomb?

Luke and John both say that there were two angels present in the tomb. Matthew and Mark say that one angel spoke. This does not mean they did not see two angels.

In fact, it is very possible that there were two angels. Luke and John both say that only one angel spoke, which is actually in agreement with what Matthew and Mark both wrote.

It is likely that one angel was designated to speak to the group of women, despite there being two present at the time. This could easily explain why Matthew and Mark also never say there was only one angel in the tomb. They may have known there were two, but it was unnecessary to talk about the second, as the second angel never spoke to the women. They simply say one spoke, which does not discount the fact that there could very well be two angels in the tomb.

Why is John's Gospel so Different Than the Synoptic's?

John's entire gospel is written in a reflective style. For this reason, his gospel is very different than the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

The vast majority of John's gospel is different from the others by content, the order of events, and the literary style that he uses. Most of his gospel is written with the idea that there are seven signs that point to Jesus being the Son of God. He uses this idea and his reflections of what he witnessed of Jesus' life to write his entire gospel. It is because of his writing style that nothing in his gospel is similar to that of Mark or Luke, and the events of the Resurrection are truly no different.

This does not mean that something is wrong, untrue, or contradictory. He is simply coming from a distinct place while writing his accounts of Jesus' life. His style and perspective are unique to him, and cannot be found anywhere else within the gospels.

Similarities Between the Four Resurrection Stories

The four gospels agree on all the fundamental events of the Resurrection, starting from the very beginning. The verbiage may vary slightly, however the order of events and how they happened are exactly the same.

- Jesus died and was buried
- Several women left for the tomb very early in the morning (including Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James)
- They found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty of Jesus' body
- An angel spoke to them
- The women fled from the tomb
- The disciples were not prepared for his death and were confused about his Resurrection, what it meant, and the words Mary spoke to them

It is safe to say that the four accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ agree on all the main and important points. It is because of this, that we can trust in the truth of the Resurrection, for there are no contradictions on the fundamental truths of this occurrence.

The variations can be explained away simply by the authors impression of what was witnessed that day. There are far more similarities between the four accounts than first appear on the surface and for this we can be truly grateful. It is because of these similarities that we can find and know the truth of what happened to Jesus Christ during that time.