

The Resurrection Appearances Chronologically Arranged

This blog post is a follow-up from yesterday's blog. You can read yesterday's post by clicking [HERE](#)

When we encounter the resurrection accounts in the New Testament we face a challenge in putting all the pieces together in a way that the sequence of the events flow in logical order. This is due to the fact that no one Gospel presents all, or even most of the data. Some of the data also seems to conflict. I tried to show in yesterday's blog that these apparent conflicts are not, usually,



true conflicts. Another problem with putting all the facts together in a coherent and reasonably complete manner is that the time line of the events is often unclear in some of the accounts. Luke and John are the clearest as to the time frame of the events they describe but Matthew and Luke give us very few parameters. Both Acts and Paul also supply data wherein the time frame is not always clear.

Nevertheless I want to propose to you a possible, dare I claim, even likely, sequence of the Resurrection events. The work is my own and I make no claim that this scenario is certain or backed up by recognized ancient authority. St Augustine has done quite a lot of work in this matter and you can read that by clicking [HERE](#). My attempts here are simply the fruit of 20+ years of praying over and pondering the events of those forty days between the Lord's resurrection and ascension. My reflections are based as solidly as possible on the actual biblical data with a sprinkling of speculation. I realize that the attempt to do this will irritate some modern biblical scholars who, for reasons unclear to me, seem to insist it is wrong to attempt any synthesis of the texts.

Nevertheless, I boldly press on figuring that the average believer will benefit from it and find such a synthesis interesting. Take it for what it is, the work of an obscure pastor who has prayed and carefully sought to follow the sequence of the forty days. You may wish to offer correction or alternative interpretation and are encouraged to do so in the comments. I have posted a PDF of this Document that is easier to read here: [Resurrection Chronological Sequence](#).

In this year's version I have included the hyperlinks to the biblical texts so that you can simply click on them to read the text and press back to return here.

- **I. The Morning of Day One**

- **A.** Very early in the morning a group of several women, including Mary Magdalene, approach the tomb to complete burial customs on behalf of Jesus ([Matt 28:1](#); [Mk 16:1](#); [Jn 20:1](#)).
- **B.** They behold the tomb opened and are alarmed.
- **C.** Mary Magdalene runs to Peter and John with distressing news of likely grave robbers ([Jn 20:2](#))
- **D.** The women who remain encounter an angel who declared to them that Jesus had risen and that they should tell this to the brethren ([Mk 16:5](#) [Lk 24:4](#); [Mt 28:5](#)).
- **E.** They are filled with fear at first and depart from the tomb afraid to speak ([Mk 16:8](#))
- **F.** Recovering their courage they decide to go to the Apostles. ([Lk 24:9](#); [Mt 28:8](#))
- **G.** Meanwhile Peter and John have gone out to the tomb to investigate Mary's claim. Mary Magdalene followed them back out to the tomb arriving before they left. Peter and John discover

the tomb empty though they encounter no angel. John believes in the resurrection. Peter's conclusion is not recorded.

- **H.** The other women have reported what the angels say to the Apostles. Peter and John have not yet returned and these remaining apostles are dismissive of the women's story at first ([Lk 24:9-11](#)).
- **I.** Mary, lingering at the tomb weeps and is fearful. Peering into the tomb she sees this time two angels who wonder why she weeps. Jesus then approaches her from behind. Not looking directly at Jesus, she supposes him to be the gardener. Then he calls her by name, and Mary, recognizing his voice, turns and sees him. Filled with joy she clings to him. (**APPEARANCE 1**) ([Jn 20:16](#))
- **J.** Jesus sends her back to the apostles with the news to prepare them for his appearance later that day. ([Jn 20:17](#))
- **K.** The other women have departed the apostles and are on their way possibly back home. Jesus then appears to them ([Mt 28:9](#)) after he had dispatched Mary. He also sends them back to the apostles with the news that he had risen and that he would see them. (**APPEARANCE 2**)
- **II. The Afternoon and evening of day one.**
 - **A.** Later that Day, two disciples on their way to Emmaus are pondering what they have heard about rumors of his resurrection. Jesus comes up behind them but they are prevented from recognizing him. First Jesus breaks open the word for them, then sits at table with them and celebrates the Eucharist whereupon their eyes are opened and they recognize him in the breaking of the bread. (**APPEARANCE 3**) ([Lk 24:13-30](#))
 - **B.** The two disciples returned that evening to Jerusalem and went to the Eleven. At first the eleven disbelieved them just as they had the women ([Mk 16:13](#)). Nevertheless they continue to relate what they had experienced. At some point Peter drew apart from the others (perhaps for a walk?) And the Lord appeared to Peter (**APPEARANCE 4**)([Lk 24:34](#); [1 Cor 15:5](#)) who informed the other ten who then believed. Thus the disciples from Emmaus (still lingering with the apostles) were now told (perhaps by way of apology) that it was in indeed true that Jesus had risen ([Lk 24:34](#)).
 - **C.** Almost at the same moment Jesus appears to the small gathering of apostles and the two disciples from Emmaus. (**APPEARANCE 5**) Thomas was absent (although the Lucan text describes the appearance as to "the eleven" this is probably just a euphemism for "the apostles" as a group) They are startled but Jesus reassures them and opens the scriptures to them ([Lk 24:36ff](#)).
 - **D.** There is some debate as to whether he appeared to them a second time that night. The Johannine account has significantly different data about the appearance on the first Sunday evening from the Lucan account. Is it merely different data about the same account or is it a wholly separate appearance? It is not possible to say. Nevertheless since the data is so different we can call it (**APPEARANCE 6**) ([Jn 20:19ff](#)) though it is likely synonymous with appearance 5.
- **III. Interlude -**
 - **A.** There is no biblical data that Jesus appeared to them during the week that followed. The next account of the resurrection says, "Eight days later" namely the following Sunday.
 - **B.** We do know that the apostles surely exclaimed to Thomas that they had seen the Lord but he refused to believe it. ([Jn 20:24](#))
 - **C.** Were the apostles nervous that Jesus had not appeared again each day? Again we do not know, the data is simply silent as to what happened during this interlude.
- **IV. One week later, Sunday two.**
 - **A.** Jesus appears once again (**APPEARANCE 7**) to the apostles gathered. This time Thomas is with them. He calls Thomas to faith who now confesses Jesus to be Lord and God. ([Jn 20:24-29](#))
- **V. Interlude 2**
 - **A.** The apostles received some instructions to return to Galilee ([Mt 28:10](#); [Mk 16:7](#)) where they would see Jesus. Thus they spent some of the week journeying 60 miles to the north. This would have taken some time. We can imagine them making the trek north during the intervening days.
- **VI. Some time later -**
 - **A.** The time frame of the next appearance is somewhat vague. John merely says "After this." Likely it is a matter of days or a week at best. The scene is at the Sea of Galilee. Not all the Twelve are present. They have gone fishing, and Jesus summons them from the lakeside. They

come to shore and see him (**APPEARANCE 8**) . Peter has a poignant discussion with Jesus in this appearance and is commissioned to tend the flock of Christ ([Jn 21](#)).

- **B.** The Appearance to the 500. Of all the appearances you might think that this one would have been recorded in some detail since it was the most widely experienced appearance. Many accounts, it seems, would have existed and at least one would have made its way into the scriptures. Yet there is no account of it, other than it did in fact happen. Paul records the fact of this appearance: [1 Cor 15:6](#) Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. (**APPEARANCE 9**) Where did this take place. What was it like. What was the reaction? We simply do not know. Proof once again that the Bible is not a history book in the conventional sense. Rather it is a highly selective telling of what took place, not a complete account. The Bible makes no pretenses to be something it is not. It is quite clear that it is a selective book: ([Jn 20:30](#)).
- **C.** The Appearance to James. Here again we do not have a description of this appearance only a remark by Paul that it did in fact happen: [1 Cor 15:7](#) Then he appeared to James. (**APPEARANCE 10**) The time frame is not clear. Only that it happened after the appearance to the five hundred and before the final appearance to the apostles.
- **VII. The rest of the forty days.**
 - **A.** Jesus certainly had other on-going appearances with the disciples. Luke attests to this in Acts when he writes: [Acts 1:3](#) To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God.
 - **B.** During this time there is perhaps the one appearance we can attribute to this time period as recorded by Matthew ([Mt 28:16ff](#)) and Mark ([Mk 16:14ff](#)). It takes place on “a mountaintop in Galilee.” Mark adds that they were reclining at table. For these notes this appearance (time frame uncertain) is referred to as (**APPEARANCE 11**) It is here that he give the great commission. Although Mark’s text may seem to imply that Jesus was taken up from this mountain, such a conclusion is rash since Mark only indicates that Jesus ascended only “after he had spoken to them” ([Mk 16:19](#)).
 - Evidently Jesus had also summoned them back to Jerusalem at least toward the end of the period of the forty days. There they would be present for the feast of Pentecost. We can imagine frequent appearances with on-going instruction for Luke records that Jesus “stayed with them.” Most of these appearances and discourses are not recorded. Luke writes in Acts: And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” ([Acts 1:4](#))
- **VIII. The final appearance and ascension:**
 - **A.** After forty days of appearances and instructions we have a final account of the last appearance (**APPEARANCE 12**) wherein he led them out to a place near Bethany, gave them final instructions to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit was sent. And then he was taken up to heaven in their very sight. ([Lk 24:50-53](#); [Acts 1:1-11](#)).

So here is a possible and, if I do say so myself, likely chronological sequence of the resurrection appearances. It is a kind of synthesis that attempts to collect all the data and present it in a logical order. There are limits to what we can expect of the Scriptural account, and fitting perfectly into a time frame and logical sequence is not what the texts primarily propose to do. Yet such a chronological sequence can prove helpful and it is in that spirit that I present this.