

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

and of its greatest inhabitants—the Hebrews ; but these results are but firstfruits of the rich harvest which continued excavation should yield.

G. BUCHANAN GRAY.

*HOW THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVES
EXPLAIN ONE ANOTHER.*

It is proposed to bring together here some of the instances in which the Resurrection Narratives help to explain one another : and these are specially interesting as the various accounts (by the four Evangelists and St. Paul) are so obviously independent that not one of them can be considered the source of any of the others. And of course it is immaterial for this argument whether the closing verses of the Second Gospel were written by St. Mark or any one else. Mere agreements will not be included, or even undesigned coincidences as they are called, such as St. Paul and St. Luke both placing the appearance to St. Peter before that to the Apostles ; but only points in which what is said in one narrative explains some obscurity, omission, or improbability in another. Many of them are, no doubt, well known, and some I have quoted in my *Truth of Christianity*, but it has been thought better to repeat them here, so as to make the list as complete as possible.

(1) To begin with, St. John records Mary Magdalene as visiting the empty tomb, and finding the stone rolled away (though St. Matthew alone says who rolled it away), and then telling the disciples, *we know not where they have laid Him*. But to whom does the *we* refer, as she was apparently alone all the time ? St. John does not explain matters, but the other Evangelists do ; for they say that though Mary Magdalene was the leader of the party, and is always named first, yet as a matter of fact there were other women

with her ; and this of course accounts for the *we*. Later on, no doubt, she was alone ; but then she uses the words *I know not*.¹

(2) Again, St. Luke says that *Peter* was the disciple who ran to the tomb on hearing of the angel's message, without, however, giving any reason why he should have been the one to go. But St. Mark, though he does not mention the visit of Peter, records that the message had been specially addressed to him ; and St. John says that Mary Magdalene had specially informed him, and this of course explains his going.²

(3) St. Luke then says that when Peter arrived at the tomb, he saw the linen cloths *by themselves*, and went home *wondering*. This seems only a trifle, but what does it mean ? St. Luke does not explain matters, but St. John does, for he describes how the clothes were arranged. They were not all in a heap, or scattered about anyhow ; but were carefully placed. Those that had gone round the body were lying flat by themselves in one place, apparently as if the body had disappeared without disturbing them ; while the napkin that was about the head was rolled up by itself in another place. And this showed that the body could not have been hurriedly stolen. It seems to have convinced St. John that the disappearance was supernatural, and would quite account for St. Peter's wondering.³

(4) Again, St. Matthew narrates that when Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, He was at once recognized, held by the feet, and worshipped ; and they do not seem to have been at all surprised at meeting Him near the tomb, in spite of the angel's message that they should go to Galilee to see Him. Evidently something must have occurred between, making a break in the narrative after

¹ John xx. 2, 13. ² Luke xxiv. 12 ; Mark xvi. 7 ; John xx. 2.

³ Luke xxiv. 12 ; John xx. 6-8.

verse 8 (see R.V.). And this is quite possible, for the words *And behold* do not always imply a close connexion. Indeed, St. Matthew can scarcely mean that the women were sent by an angel to tell the disciples that Christ was alive, and that then, before they had any possibility of doing so, they were met by Christ Himself. And from the other Evangelists we learn what this was. For St. John describes an appearance to Mary Magdalene *alone*, when she was rebuked for wishing to touch Him, apparently in the old familiar way, as a mere human Rabbi, and without any act of reverence ; and St. Mark says this was the *first* appearance. If, then, a few minutes later, she, in company with the other Mary, saw Christ again, it would quite account for their absence of surprise at meeting Him, and also for their altered behaviour in prostrating themselves to the ground, and being in consequence permitted to hold Him by the *feet*, and worship Him.⁴

(5) Again, we read in St. Luke that Cleopas and his friend, after referring to the death of Christ, continued, *Yea, and beside all this, it is now the third day*, as if the Stranger would have known the importance of this, and that something or other might possibly happen then. And yet St. Luke, though he records Christ's prophecy on the subject, never hints that it was known to any one except His own followers. But St. Matthew explains matters, for he says that it was known to others as well, and that the chief priests had in consequence obtained a guard from Pilate ; so persons staying in Jerusalem would probably have heard of it.⁵

(6) We then read that Cleopas and his friend, after saying that the disciples (as well as the women) had found the tomb empty, added *but Him they saw not*. This seems to

⁴ Matthew xxviii. 9 ; John xx. 14 ; Mark xvi. 9. Compare Matthew ii. 1 ; xv. 22 ; xix. 16.

⁵ Luke xxiv. 21 ; Matthew xxvii. 63.

imply that they thought others had seen Him, and yet if so, how are we to account for their not mentioning it? St. Luke gives us no help in the matter, but St. Mark does; for he says that on a subsequent visit one of the women (Mary Magdalene) did see Christ, only when she told the Apostles, she was *disbelieved*. Obviously, then, if this appearance was generally disbelieved, Cleopas and his friends are not likely to have mentioned it to a stranger, though they no doubt kept thinking about it themselves, and it thus, almost unconsciously, influenced their language.⁶

(7) Once more, St. Luke says that when Christ appeared to the Apostles in the evening, He was mistaken for a *spirit*; but he gives no reason for this, and it was apparently the only occasion on which it occurred. St. John, however, though he does not mention the incident, fully explains it; for he says that *the doors were shut* for fear of the Jews; and obviously if Christ suddenly appeared within closed doors, it would account for their thinking that He must be a spirit.⁷

(8) On the other hand, St. John speaks of Christ's showing them His hands (and side), though without giving any reason for this; but St. Luke's statement that they at first took Him for a spirit, and that He did this to convince them of His identity, quite accounts for it; so each of the narratives helps to explain the other.⁸

(9) St. Luke then adds that as they still disbelieved, Christ asked if they had anything to eat (i.e., if they would give *Him* something to eat), and they at once offered Him a piece of a broiled fish. But he gives no hint as to why they happened to have any fish ready. St. Mark, however, though he does not mention either the request or its response, fully explains both, for he says they were *sitting at*

⁶ Luke xxiv. 24; Mark xvi. 11.

⁷ Luke xxiv. 37; John xx. 19.

⁸ John xx. 20; Luke xxiv. 37.

meat at the time, probably just concluding their evening meal.⁹

(10) And all this still further explains St. John's narrative; for we are told that Christ said to them *again*, the second time, *Peace be unto you*, which would be much more natural if something had occurred between, than if (as St. John implies) it followed only a few seconds after the first time.¹⁰

(11) Once more, St. Luke records a speech of St. Peter in which he says that he and the other Apostles ate and drank *with* Christ after His Resurrection. This certainly implies that they had a meal together, and is therefore scarcely suitable for the meeting just referred to, when Christ apparently only took a piece of fish by Himself, and drank nothing. And yet St. Luke gives us no other occasion for it, since St. Peter was not present at Emmaus. But St. John does; for he records the appearance in Galilee by the Lake, when it is distinctly implied that Christ, and most of His Apostles, including St. Peter, had a meal together.¹¹

(12) Again, St. Matthew speaks of the Eleven going to the mountain in Galilee *where Jesus had appointed them*. And yet he does not seem to allow any opportunity for making the appointment. It could scarcely have been done before the Crucifixion, and the messages to the women did not fix either the time or place. But St. John removes the difficulty, for he records the appearance by the Lake (just referred to), when, of course, Christ may have pointed out the mountain where He would appear, and have told His disciples when to collect the five hundred brethren, if (as is probable) they were then present.¹²

(13) Again, St. Mark records Christ as saying, after His

⁹ Luke xxiv. 41; Mark xvi. 14.

¹⁰ John xx. 21. ¹¹ Acts x. 41; John xxi. 13.

¹² Matthew xxviii. 16, 7, 10.

command to preach the Gospel to all the world, "He that believeth *and is baptized* shall be saved," though without any previous reference to baptism. But St. Matthew says the command was not only to make disciples of all nations, but to *baptize* them as well, and this of course explains the other passage, though, curiously enough, St. Matthew himself does not refer to it. Neither of these Evangelists, it may be added, in spite of the importance thus attached to baptism, says anything about the Apostles themselves being baptized, or how the omission would be made good. But St. Luke does, for he records Christ's promise that they should be *baptized with the Holy Ghost* in a few days.¹³

(14) And then as to the appearance to the five hundred brethren recorded by St. Paul. None of the Evangelists mention this, but it explains a good deal that they do mention. Thus St. John alludes to the Apostles being in *Galilee*, instead of (as we should have expected) staying in Jerusalem, but he gives no hint as to why they went there. Nor do St. Matthew and St. Mark, who say Christ told them to go there, give any hint as to why He told them; but this Appearance to the five hundred, who had to be collected in Galilee, explains everything.¹⁴

(15) It also accounts for another point. St. Luke, it will be remembered, omits Galilee among the places where the Apostles themselves had to preach the Resurrection; and yet one would think, considering the number of friends Christ had there, it would have been specially included. But of course the fact of there being five hundred witnesses there already made this unnecessary.¹⁵

(16) And it probably explains a curious remark in St. Matthew that when the Eleven saw Christ in Galilee *they*

¹³ Mark xvi. 16; Matthew xxviii. 19; Acts i. 5.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 6; John xxi. 1; Matthew xxviii. 10; Mark xvi. 7.

¹⁵ Acts i. 8.

worshipped Him, but some doubted. This *some* can scarcely mean some of the Eleven who had just worshipped, and yet St. Matthew says nothing about others being present. But if we assume that the five hundred were there too, it explains matters at once, as some of them may well have doubted at first whether it was really Christ, as He was some way off, and it was before He *came* to them.¹⁶

(17) Once more, St. Luke says that soon after the Resurrection, Christ's *brethren* were with the other disciples, and evidently believed on Him. And yet it is clear that they did not do so shortly before. Obviously something must have occurred between. And though neither St. Luke nor any of the Evangelists tell us what this was, St. Paul does, for he says that Christ appeared to one of them (St. James), and this would of course account for their changed belief.¹⁷

(18) Again, St. John relates that on Christ's first appearance He used the words, *I ascend unto my Father*, and on a previous occasion it was implied that this would be a visible ascent, and that the Apostles were to see it. And yet he never gives us a hint as to whether it ever took place. Two of the other Evangelists, however, though they do not mention either of these sayings, tell us that it did take place, and that the Apostles saw it. Probably in this particular case St. John had the other Gospels before him, and did not think it necessary to repeat what was well known.¹⁸

Now, of course, too much stress must not be laid on small details like these, but still the fact that such short and independent accounts should explain one another in so many ways is a distinct evidence of truthfulness. Legendary accounts of fictitious events would not be likely to do so.

¹⁶ Matthew xxviii. 17, 18.

¹⁷ Acts i. 14; John vii. 5; 1 Cor. xv. 7.

¹⁸ John xx. 17, vi. 62; Mark xvi. 19; Luke xxiv. 51.

THE PREVIOUS INSTANCES IN A TABULAR FORM.

O = a difficulty of some kind. X = by whom explained.

| | <i>Matt.</i> | <i>Mark.</i> | <i>Luke.</i> | <i>John.</i> | <i>Paul.</i> |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 We know not | X | X | X | O | — |
| 2 St. Peter went to the tomb | — | X | O | X | — |
| 3 The cloths by themselves | — | — | O | X | — |
| 4 Their absence of surprise | O | X | — | X | — |
| 5 It is now the third day . | X | — | O | — | — |
| 6 Him they saw not . . . | — | X | O | — | — |
| 7 Mistook Him for a spirit | — | — | O | X | — |
| 8 Showed them His hands and side | — | — | X | O | — |
| 9 The broiled fish | — | X | O | — | — |
| 10 Again, Peace be unto you | — | — | X | O | — |
| 11 They ate and drank with Christ | — | — | O | X | — |
| 12 The place appointed . . | O | — | — | X | — |
| 13 And is baptized | X | O | — | — | — |
| 14 The disciples being in Galilee | O | O | — | O | X |
| 15 No occasion to preach there | — | — | O | — | X |
| 16 But some doubted . . . | O | — | — | — | X |
| 17 His brethren believed on Him | — | — | O | — | X |
| 18 I ascend unto My Father | — | X | X | O | — |

LT.-COL. W. H. TURTON.