

THE EMPTY TOMB

(Four Accounts – One Reality)

Gospel of John 20

1 Now on the first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet dark, unto the tomb, and seeth the stone taken away from the tomb.

2 She runneth therefore, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him.

3 Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb.

4 And they ran both together: and the other disciple outran Peter, and came first to the tomb;

5 and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen cloths lying; yet entered he not in.

6 Simon Peter therefore also cometh, following him, and entered into the tomb; and he beholdeth the linen cloths lying,

7 and the napkin, that was upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself.

8 Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, who came first to the tomb, and he saw, and believed.

9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

10 So the disciples went away again unto their own home.

11 But Mary was standing without at the tomb weeping: so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb;

12 and she beholdeth two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

14 When she had thus said, she turned herself back, and beholdeth Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turneth herself, and saith unto him in Hebrew, Rabboni; which is to say, Teacher.

17 Jesus saith to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father: but go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.

18 Mary Magdalene cometh and telleth the disciples, I have seen the Lord; and that he had said these things unto her.

Gospel of Mark 16

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint him.

2 And very early on the first day of the week, they come to the tomb when the sun was risen.

3 And they were saying among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb?

4 and looking up, they see that the stone is rolled back: for it was exceeding great.

5 And entering into the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, arrayed in a white robe; and they were amazed.

6 And he saith unto them, Be not amazed: ye seek Jesus, the Nazarene, who hath been crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold, the place where they laid him!

7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

8 And they went out, and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them: and they said nothing to any one; for they were afraid.

9 Now when he was risen early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.

10 She went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept.

11 And they, when they heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, disbelieved.

12 And after these things he was manifested in another form unto two of them, as they walked, on their way into the country.

Gospel of Matthew 28

1 Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.:

2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it.

3 His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4 and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men.

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who hath been crucified.

6 He is not here; for he is risen, even as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples, He is risen from the dead; and lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word.

9 And behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then saith Jesus unto them, Fear not: go tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Gospel of Luke 24

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came unto the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared.

2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.

3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 And it came to pass, while they were perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel:

5 and as they were affrighted and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,

7 saying that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

8 And they remembered his words,

9 and returned from the tomb, and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest.

10 Now they were Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James: and the other women with them told these things unto the apostles.

11 And these words appeared in their sight as idle talk; and they disbelieved them.

12 But Peter arose, and ran unto the tomb; and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen cloths by themselves; and he departed to his home, wondering at that which was come to pass.

The Lesson

It would seem that in reading each of these accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus, there are glaring contradictions. What do we, as Christians, say to those that conclude these “errors” prove that the Bible is not infallible? We can point to the one thing that all these gospels have in common. Jesus arose and left behind an empty tomb!

As we investigate and compare these passages of scripture, let’s keep in mind the following example:

Three people are asked the question, “Did you see Mary?”

Person #1 answers, “Yes, I saw her yesterday.”

Person #2 answers, “I saw her yesterday afternoon.”

Person #3 answers, “I saw her yesterday around 3:00 p.m.”

Which one of these answers is correct? What would you think if all three gave the same answer, “Yes, I saw Mary yesterday, wearing a red dress, at 3:05 p.m.”? _____

Therefore, keep in mind that we all can witness the same event, yet we process what we saw differently and report that event according to our experience of that event in our own words. This is no different from the biblical account of the resurrection; but, all came to the same conclusion – Jesus is Alive!

Let’s discuss some of the discrepancies.

1. When did the women go to the tomb and how many went? (Compare John 20:1 with Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-2, and Luke 24:1, 24:10)

2. How many angels were at the tomb? (Compare John 20:12 with Matthew 28:2-7, Mark 16:5-7, and Luke 24:4-7) Is there a problem with Mark and Luke calling the angels “men”? (Read Genesis 18:1-2 and Daniel 9:21)

3. The most complex alleged contradictions is the order of each person’s appearance at the tomb. The following may help to reconcile those discrepancies. (Discussion)

1. Mary Magdalene and the other women travel 2 miles from Bethany to the tomb.

2. Nearing Jesus' tomb, the women notice the stone rolled away. Mary Magdalene leaves to tell Peter and John that she believes his body has been stolen, while the other women continue to the open tomb.

3. After entering the tomb, the other women encounter the angel who tells them that the Lord has risen. These women go quickly from the tomb to go tell others. It is speculated that they may have stopped to tell Clophas and others; therefore, missing Mary Magdalene, Peter and John as they rush to the tomb.

4. Mary Magdalene, Peter and John arrive at the tomb. Peter and John inspect the tomb and see the grave wrappings. Both men left the tomb and went home. John 20:8, says that John saw and believed. Just what did John believe? What does their returning home reveal?

5. Mary Magdalene stays behind and Jesus appears to her outside of the tomb. Why didn't Jesus reveal himself to the men? Jesus also appears to the other women on their way to Bethany. (Matthew 28:9)

6. The women arrive in Bethany and report what they experienced. The eight disciples go the house where John and Peter are staying. (Thomas is not there.)

Digging Deeper

John 20 can be fully understood by comparing it with the accounts in Genesis 3 (the Fall of Man). Let's discuss the similarities.

1. *There were two gardens.* Man's fall occurred in the Garden of Eden. Man's redemption occurred in the garden tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. (See John 19:41)

2. *There were two women.* Sin entered the world through a woman who was deceived by a serpent – Eve. Mary Magdalene is the counterpart to Eve having been delivered from demons (John 20:14). What does Mary's life remind us of, especially on Resurrection Sunday?

3. *There were two gardeners.* Adam, who was in charge of the garden, hid from God. Jesus revealed himself after Mary Magdalene thought he was the gardener. Read I Corinthians 15:22. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."

4. *There were two sets of angels.* After Adam and Eve sinned, God posted an angel with a flaming sword at the entrance of the garden to keep mankind out. On Easter morning, the angel was posted in the garden, not to banish mankind from God's presence, but to invited us to behold the risen Savior.

NOTES
