

Contradictions?

In Dan Barker's article in which he poses the Easter Challenge, he also lists some supposed contradictions. I have answered them below.

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What time did the women visit the tomb?

- Matthew: "as it began to dawn" (28:1)
- Mark: "very early in the morning . . . at the rising of the sun" (16:2, KJV); "when the sun had risen" (NRSV); "just after sunrise" (NIV)
- Luke: "very early in the morning" (24:1, KJV) "at early dawn" (NRSV)
- John: "when it was yet dark" (20:1)

Answer: Notice that John, the only one to mention a departure before dawn, is also the only one who mentions no women apart from Mary Magdalene. So Mary Magdalene left her home before dawn, as stated by John. She met up with the other women, (which is where the other three gospels take up the narrative), and the group went to the tomb just after dawn.

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Who were the women?

- Matthew: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (28:1)
- Mark: Mary Magdalene, the mother of James, and Salome (16:1)
- Luke: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women (24:10)
- John: Mary Magdalene (20:1)

Answer: All of the above. The writers were not obliged to mention every person present.

However, if we speculate that not all women made the second trip to the tomb (when they saw Jesus), we can give plausible reasons for the different lists:

- John only mentions Mary Magdalene, because she was the key person (perhaps because of her prominence, either during or after Jesus' earthly ministry).
- Matthew, along with John, is the only one to mention an appearance of Jesus to the women. John indicates that that this appearance occurred on their second visit to the tomb. So Matthew only mentions the two women who also made this second visit, and hence saw Jesus that morning.
- Mark and Luke, who mention only the first visit by the women, give a larger group of women, since there were more women present on the first trip.

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What was their purpose?

- Matthew: to see the tomb (28:1)
- Mark: had already seen the tomb (15:47), brought spices (16:1)
- Luke: had already seen the tomb (23:55), brought spices (24:1)
- John: the body had already been spiced before they arrived (19:39,40)

Answer: Actually in Matthew they had already seen the tomb (27:61). So the purpose was to look at the tomb and bring spices. They may not have been aware of the spicing done by Joseph of Arimathea, or they may simply have wished to do a further "anointing" (Mark 16:1).

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Was the tomb open when they arrived?

- Matthew: No (28:2)
- Mark: Yes (16:4)
- Luke: Yes (24:2)
- John: Yes (20:1)

Answer: Yes. While Matthew describes the opening of the tomb, he does not say that the women witnessed it.

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Who was at the tomb when they arrived?

- Matthew: One angel (28:2-7)
- Mark: One young man (16:5)
- Luke: Two men (24:4)

- John: Two angels (20:12)

Answer: Two angels. Two were present, but Matthew and Mark only mention the speaker. It is clear that the "men" in Mark and Luke were intended to be understood as angels, because they were dressed in a brilliant white and (more significantly) they had a message from God for the women.

Where were these messengers situated?

- Matthew: Angel sitting on the stone (28:2)
- Mark: Young man sitting inside, on the right (16:5)
- Luke: Two men standing inside (24:4)
- John: Two angels sitting on each end of the bed (20:12)

Answer: John is describing the second visit to the tomb (see John 20:2), while Matthew describes what happened before the women arrive. So only Mark and Luke describe the women's first sight of the angels.

There are at least two possible resolutions of Mark and Luke: either the angels were initially seated and the women were not startled until they stood up; or some women saw them seated, while others did not notice them until they stood up.

What did the messenger(s) say?

- Matthew: "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead: and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you." (28:5-7)
- Mark: "Be not afrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." (16:6-7)
- Luke: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." (24:5-7)

- John: "Woman, why weepest thou?" (20:13)

Answer: All of what is reported in Matthew, Mark and Luke.
(John 20:13 is describing the women's second visit to the tomb).

Did the women tell what happened?

- Matthew: Yes (28:8)
- Mark: No. "Neither said they any thing to any man." (16:8)
- Luke: Yes. "And they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest." (24:9, 22-24)
- John: Yes (20:18)

Answer: Yes. Mark 16:8 only tells what happened initially. The original ending of Mark is lost (with the existing version ending with the women not telling anyone), so it is possible that Mark wrote of the women later telling the disciples.

When Mary returned from the tomb, did she know Jesus had been resurrected?

- Matthew: Yes (28:7-8)
- Mark: Yes (16:10,11)
- Luke: Yes (24:6-9,23)
- John: No (20:2)

Answer: Unclear. Ignore Mark 16:10-11 because Mark 16:9-20 is not part of the original gospel by Mark. But Matthew and Luke still have the women reporting the angels' message (that Jesus had risen). But, as Mark 16:8 says, the women were bewildered and did not initially tell anyone. And as Luke 24:11 says, their sounded like nonsense. So what probably happened was that the women were both bewildered and excited, and perhaps all talking at once.

So I see at least two possibilities:

- 1.Mary did know, but in the confusion John only heard part of the report, so that is all he mentions;
- 2.John only mentions Mary's report, while Matthew and Luke include the reports of the other women. Mary did not understand that Jesus had risen, while the others did. Since John only mentions Mary's report, he does not mention the

resurrection. Matthew and Luke include the reports of all women, and so include the report of the resurrection.

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When did Mary first see Jesus?

- Matthew: Before she returned to the disciples (28:9)
- Mark: Before she returned to the disciples (16:9,10)
- John: After she returned to the disciples (20:2,14)

Answer: After. Mark 16:9-10 is not in the original gospel by Mark, and there is a gap between verses 8 and 9 of Matthew 28. During that gap, Mary returned to the disciples (as reported in John 20:2). Matthew 28:9 occurred after the women gave the report then returned to the tomb, and so describes the same appearance as John 20:11-17.

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Could Jesus be touched after the resurrection?

- Matthew: Yes (28:9)
- John: No (20:17), Yes (20:27)

Answer: Yes. John 20:17 is literally "stop touching me", so obviously he could be touched.

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After the women, to whom did Jesus first appear?

- Matthew: Eleven disciples (28:16)
- Mark: Two disciples in the country, later to eleven (16:12,14)
- Luke: Two disciples in Emmaus, later to eleven (24:13,36)
- John: Ten disciples (Judas and Thomas were absent) (20:19, 24)
- Paul: First to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve. (Twelve? Judas was dead). (I Corinthians 15:5)

Answer: Peter, as stated by Paul and Luke. (Luke 24:34 indicates that this was before the two disciples walking to Emmaus). Matthew and John (and Mark) omit this appearance.

(Oh and Paul does mean twelve: Judas was dead but his replacement Matthias was a witness to the resurrection, as stated in Acts 1:22).

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Where did Jesus first appear to the disciples?

- Matthew: On a mountain in Galilee (60-100 miles away) (28:16-17)
- Mark: To two in the country, to eleven "as they sat at meat" (16:12,14)
- Luke: In Emmaus (about seven miles away) at evening, to the rest in a room in Jerusalem later that night. (24:31, 36)
- John: In a room, at evening (20:19)

Answer: In a room at Jerusalem, as reported by Luke and John (and Mark). Matthew 28:16-20 is a later appearance.

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Did the disciples believe the two men?

- Mark: No (16:13)
- Luke: Yes (24:34--it is the group speaking here, not the two)

Answer: Yes. Mark 16:13 is not in the original gospel by Mark.

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What happened at the appearance?

- Matthew: Disciples worshipped, some doubted, "Go preach." (28:17-20)
- Mark: Jesus reprimanded them, said "Go preach" (16:14-19)
- Luke: Christ incognito, vanishing act, materialized out of thin air, reprimand, supper (24:13-51)
- John: Passed through solid door, disciples happy, Jesus blesses them, no reprimand (21:19-23)

Answer: Both of what happened in Luke and John. Matthew describes a later appearance. Mark 16:14-19 is not in the original gospel by Mark,

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Did Jesus stay on earth for a while?

- Mark: No (16:19) Compare 16:14 with John 20:19 to show that this was all done on Sunday

- Luke: No (24:50-52) It all happened on Sunday
- John: Yes, at least eight days (20:26, 21:1-22)
- Acts: Yes, at least forty days (1:3)

Answer: Yes. Acts 1:3 (which was also written by Luke) makes clear there was a time gap between the resurrection and the ascension. Nowhere in Luke 24 does it say it all happened on one day. Mark 16:19 is not in the original gospel by Mark.

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Where did the ascension take place?

- Matthew: No ascension. Book ends on mountain in Galilee
- Mark: In or near Jerusalem, after supper (16:19)
- Luke: In Bethany, very close to Jerusalem, after supper (24:50-51)
- John: No ascension
- Paul: No ascension
- Acts: Ascended from Mount of Olives (1:9-12)

Answer: The Mount of Olives, which is near Bethany. Bethany was on the east side of the Mount of Olives, and both Mark 11:1 and Luke 19:29 indicate that the two were close together. Luke 24:50 can reasonably be translated "in the vicinity of Bethany" (as in the NIV) so that's no contradiction with Acts 1:12.

Mark 16:19 does not mention a location but in any case it is not in the original gospel by Mark. Matthew and John do not mention the ascension but surely some sort of disappearance by Jesus is implied. Paul in fact does mention the ascension in Eph 4:8-10 and implies it in 1 Thess 1:10.