

Harmonizing the accounts of the post-Resurrection appearances

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I will attempt to discuss the appearances in chronological sequence, although the evidence available does not always permit a clear decision. The first five occurred on Resurrection Day.

- 1) The first appearance is related in Mark 16:9 and John 20:14-17. Mark simply records the fact, stating clearly that it was to Mary Magdalene. John gives further detail about the encounter.
- 2) The second appearance is recorded only by Matthew, 28:9-10. This appearance was to Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna and 'the others'; the Text does not specify that it was the second, but the only other possible candidate would be Peter (Luke 24:34), and there simply was not enough elapsed time to fit him in here. According to verse 7, the disciples were to go to Galilee to see Jesus, verse 10 giving the same instruction to His 'brothers'. In Matthew 26:32 Jesus Himself had said to them, "After I am raised I will go before you into Galilee".
- 3) I arbitrarily give the third appearance to Peter, but it could have been to the Emmaus disciples—between them they are the third and fourth. The fact is mentioned in Luke 24:34 and 1 Corinthians 15:5; just the fact and no more.
- 4) The episode on the road to Emmaus is recorded in Mark 16:12, but related in Luke 24:13-32 (Luke's account is most interesting).
- 5) The fifth, and last, recorded appearance on Resurrection Day was to the Eleven (although only ten were present), as recorded in Mark 16:14-18, Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-23 (1 Corinthians 15:5). I assume that Mark's record refers to that first Sunday, although the 'later' that begins verse 14 could also apply to the second Sunday (the eleven at the table would presumably have to be one of the two Sundays). The content of Mark's record seems to me to fit better with the first Sunday. Luke makes clear (verse 33) that there were others besides the Eleven in that upper room. Verse 36 makes clear that this was the first Sunday. Strictly speaking, verses 44-49 could have been uttered at a later date, but if not, then verse 49 requires special handling. "You must stay in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on High." Since Jesus had instructed them to meet Him in Galilee, and did in fact meet with them there, then this amounts to a directive to return to Jerusalem after the meeting(s) in Galilee. John's account clearly refers to the first Sunday, and provides new information, as is his custom (from him we learn that Thomas was absent). The reference to 'the Twelve' in 1 Corinthians 15:5, probably refers to the first Sunday, but could have been the second, or even in Galilee. (I take it that both 'the Twelve' and 'the Eleven' were used as technical terms referring to the apostolic 'college'.)
- 6) The next recorded meeting is found in John 20:26-29, taking place on the following Sunday, in the same upper room, to the complete 'Eleven'.
- 7) The breakfast on the beach (John 21:1-23) must be the seventh, because verse 14 states: "This was already a third time that Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised from among the dead." This would presumably be the first appearance in Galilee, following the two in the upper room.

8) 1 Corinthians 15:6 states that “He was seen by over five hundred brothers at once”, and subsequently by James, and finally by all the apostles (verse 7). The ‘finally by all the apostles’ presumably refers to the Ascension. The 500 might have happened at Matthew 28:16-20, but the Text refers only to the Eleven, as well as stating that Jesus had indicated the place (and presumably also the time). The reference to doubters presumably means that there were others present, since the Eleven could scarcely still be in doubt. Jesus’ half-brothers (verse 10) were probably there, as well as others (recall that Luke 24:33 mentions others besides the apostles). I will assume that the ‘500’ happened later.

9) “Over five hundred brothers at once”.

10) James.

11) The Ascension is recorded in Mark 16:9, Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:6-11. Mark merely states the fact. Luke gives bare detail, but he offers more information in Acts, which he also wrote.

12) Acts 1:3 has “appearing to them during forty days”, and Acts 13:31 has “for many days He was seen”, but no specifics are given. However, we may reasonably conclude that those forty days were not empty, there having been further appearances that were not recorded—that is to say, before the Ascension, since we do indeed have some after that event.

13) Stephen—Acts 7:55-56.

14) Saul of Tarsus—Acts 26:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:8.

15) Ananias—Acts 9:10-15.

16) Paul, more than once—Acts 22:17-21, 23:11, etc.

17) John—Revelation 1:9-13, etc.

And Sovereign Jesus has continued appearing to people down through the ages to this very hour. As He said in Matthew 28:20, “Take note, I am with you every day, until the end of the age”. Since that ‘end’ is still down the road, His promise continues in effect.