



HARMONIZATION OF THE GOSPELS – RESURRECTION TO ASCENSION



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ABSTRACT
HARMONIZATION OF THE GOSPELS,
RESURRECTION TO ASCENSION

Ronald E. McDaniel

The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have accounts of the resurrection and many of the appearances of Jesus to His disciples and others which occurred between His resurrection and the time he ascended to the Father. When these are studied in detail as standalone accounts, there are potentially many disagreements. Some may contend that there are outright contradictions. Most attempts at providing an harmony of the Gospels, when they get to this area of the writings simply layout the pieces and make little mention of any of the disagreements or contradictions. This approach leaves us with a patchwork quilt of facts and rarely, if ever, do they make any attempt to resolve the differences factually or in the mind of the reader.

This lack of harmony exhibited by this standalone approach can be addressed by taking an “event driven” approach. In this method, each event along the timeline under observation is considered with all four gospel accounts having equal weight. In this approach they become a collection of remembrances and facts, each having merit. This produces a timeline that is accurate and blissfully in order. The seeming disagreements and contradictions are resolved moving from disharmony to harmony of the writings in question.

An additional benefit to this approach is that it provides some clues regarding how the apostles were transformed from the from the group of men who deserted their Lord in the Garden to the men who changed the world. At the end of the 40 day period, these same men have been transformed from cowardly to courageous, from argumentative to articulate, and from selfish to selfless. At that end point they are seen waiting with great anticipation and much prayer for the coming of the promised Holy Spirt.

Introduction

Before we begin any in-depth study or harmonization of any part of the four Gospels, we must consider a few facts regarding their general content – a few things they *are* and a few things they *are not*. Beginning with Luke, we have a very clear statement of the purpose of the Gospels as a whole. In Luke 1:4 he writes to Theophilus: “so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.” To expand on this slightly, the Gospels are a narrative of the truth of the gospel message as lived and taught by our Lord. There are other things that speak to what the set of writings of the Gospels and the New Testament are. These are:

- The inspired Word of God
- Writings we can trust.
- Writings that show us how God wants us to live – a way of life.
- Writings that show us how much God loves us.
- Writings that show us what He has done for us because of that love.
- They provide the definition of the promises of God to us including salvation through His Son if we believe and trust in Him.
- They are a call for us to return His love and live as He desires.

In contrast however, there are several things that the Gospels are not. Truthfully, these *are not* can be applied to the entire set of Biblical Writings – Old and New Testament alike. They are not:

- Not a list of “dos and don’ts” (a checklist)
- Not a detailed set of instructions (a manual)
- Not a bunch of general suggestions (take ‘em or leave ‘em)
- ☆Not a history book
- ☆Not a book of mysteries and discrepancies to argue or dispute

For our purposes, there are a two of these (☆) which can be considered critical. First, looking at scriptures not being history and turning to our old friend Webster, we find a very succinct definition of the word history as applied to writings:

A chronological record of significant events (such as those affecting a nation or institution) often including an explanation of their causes.¹

A key to this definition for our purposes is the phrase “chronological record”. A friend and I had a discussion some time back in which I think we came to agree that if we were to pick up two history books on the same subject, events, period, and location, we would expect them to agree. Why? Because they are intended to relay a chronological record of events, persons, places, and even things. That is the purpose of history. Do we learn other things from history? Absolutely! And that is right and proper – but – the other things are not history’s primary purpose. As my friend so astutely and accurately pointed out, if histories do not agree, then, given their purpose, one of them must be wrong. I think we can all agree with that statement.

¹ “History.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/history>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2023.

So, if the Bible (especially the Gospels and the Acts) are not history, we should perhaps ask ourselves why not? First, these writings absolutely do not meet the definition that we, along with Webster, just put forth. They are not chronological records. Beyond that we must also consider that, if our God had wanted his servants to write a chronological record then that is what they would have written. Yes, we can look at the Gospels and Acts and even the letters and, by using actual histories that were written about those times we can come to some agreement on the dates and people that may have been involved in many of events recorded there. However, the fact is, simply looking at these writings, we can see that history was not God's purpose.

Given this knowledge, what must we define our New Testament as? Obviously, we can use the scriptures themselves to come to at least one answer – the good news or the gospel, but, does that really define what it is? Perhaps, but, perhaps not. What is contained therein is absolutely good news, of that there can be no dispute. However, that really does not replace the word history as a broader definition of these writings. Returning to Webster once more we can perhaps find something a bit more suitable to define the type of writings these truly are.

Looking a little further down the page of the web version of Webster's there is, what is called the Kids Definition of history:

1. a story of real or imaginary events
- 2.a. a written record of important events and their causes
- b. a branch of knowledge that records and explains past events
- c. events that form the topics of a history²

Better, right? This is a little more forgiving in its explanation and fails to mention the dreaded chronological requirement. Also, we will all agree we must not include imaginary in our final understanding. But is this really defining what the Gospels and Acts are? Perhaps, we might find a better word. Ah ha! Going a few more pages in Webster's dictionary we find a different word that is truly better – *narrative*. Here we find a set of definitions that may indeed fit what this is all about:

- 1.a. something that is narrated : STORY, ACCOUNT
- b. a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values³

I think this definition, especially in b, really gets us closer to what God was trying to accomplish. God wants us to have an understanding of His values, purposes, and point of view – not the historical aspects of this narrative. His point of view is to show us several major things – who He is, what He has done for us, how He loves us, and how we should live because of the first three items.

That being said, the definition of narrative also allows for the obvious difference in the Gospel accounts. It does so without calling differences that may exist mistakes, untruths, or

² "History." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/history>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2023.

³ "Narrative." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/narrative>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2023.

dishonest. We must remember that some of the major differences in the synoptic Gospels are a result being intended for different audiences and as such actually have a different points of view.

If one is presenting a story or an account of events with the express purpose of allowing your audience to have an understanding of that story or series of events then it is not necessary that you present every detail. What you present should definitely be accurate. However, as long as the facts you present accomplish the purpose set forth – telling the story, presenting the values, and getting the point of view correct then the objective is met. In truth, this difference in perspective may be the reason we have four Gospels instead of one. As stated earlier, God’s purpose is to show us who he is, what he has done for us, and what he expects of us. It stands to reason then that purpose was better served by presenting unique perspectives – i.e. Matthew’s Gospel having a Jewish perspective and Mark’s having a Roman or Gentile perspective. Regardless of the differences from one gospel to another, we can absolutely count on God’s inspiration having given us what we need. We may also trust that He has preserved it through the centuries and will continue to do so until Christ returns – just food for thought.

The second point of major importance to us is that the Gospels are not books of mysteries, arguments, or controversy. If you have read through the Gospels even one time, you most likely have observed that there are differences between them. Some minor word differences in perhaps a speech of Jesus during a particular event. Perhaps you have even found the participants were not the same in an event that must be the same event depicted in both places. If we look at the facts we would all admit readily that most likely in these cases they do not match.

The first question we must ask is; are any of the differences matters of faith or salvation? In my experience, the answer is a resounding no! The other question we should ask (if we ask any question at all) is; does it affect the narrative? In other words, is the idea or the lesson being taught by the event really being affected by the difference we have found. I could be proven wrong in this regard because I can honestly say that I have not tried to ask that question of every difference I can find. However, I have great confidence that the differences we do find will not affect the lesson or message being taught by the event. These differences only become significant when we allow them to become point of contention.

God wants us to use His word for the purposes He sets forth which all lead to a life of service to Him. That purpose is not accomplished by spending our lives in picking apart the very word that we are supposed to be using for God’s purpose.

God’s purpose is also not served by spending our time attempting to explain these differences. God’s word is not a book of mysteries or puzzles that must be solved. We must read and study the word to let God speak into our lives, to help us understand Him and His will so that we may, in all ways and at all times, serve Him to our utmost ability. Determining why John remembered Jesus saying $a = b$ and Matthew remembered him saying $b = a$ makes no difference to the equality of a and b .

2 Timothy 2:14–15 (NASB 2020)

¹⁴Remind *them* of these things, and solemnly exhort *them* in the presence of God not to dispute about words, which is useless *and leads* to the ruin of the listeners. ¹⁵Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately

handling the word of truth.

Now, having said that, solving (or attempting to solve) some of the mysteries may be fun. In some cases even rewarding. That is truly a good thing because it keeps us involved in the word. In some cases, we may even come to a deeper understanding of what God wants and the wonders of what He has done for us. Indeed, this is the very purpose of this writing. We will be looking at one of those areas of the Gospels with many differences. In doing so, perhaps, if we do not solve all of them, we will at least have a greater appreciation for the events that took place beginning on that Sunday morning when our Lord was raised from the dead and all that He did in the days following.

Preliminary Things – Gaining Perspective

Beyond what we have discussed generally in the introduction, we need to look at a few details and specifics concerning this particular area of the four Gospels. We will be using accounts from all four Gospels, the first part of Acts, and 1 Corinthians. Acts and 1 Corinthians only come into the mix toward the end of our adventure and there really aren't any peculiarities that we need to deal with here regarding either of them.

There are, however, several things that we need to touch on regarding the Gospel narratives. First, it is obvious if you have read the accounts of the resurrection to the ascension in all four Gospels that the entire set of events from early Sunday morning until the ascension becomes somewhat of a patchwork quilt of facts. The references for these narratives are as follows:

- Matthew 28:1-20
- Mark 16:1-8 [9-20] An explanation of the [] will be addressed shortly.
- Luke 24:1-53
- John 20-21
- Acts 1:1-8
- 1 Corinthians 15:6-8

If one reads the Gospel accounts separately and tries to treat each one as a factual historical account they will appear to disagree in many ways. So, how do we deal with this? There are several things that can happen at this point. First, as is the case many times the person doing the reading simply chooses to ignore the differences with perhaps a shoulder shrug and moves on with life – not a bad thing to do but perhaps not the best either.

If we are really curious we can get ourselves in a real predicament very quickly by trying reconcile them standing alone in that historical light. We must remember our discussion in the introduction regarding the biblical writings as history. If we forget that, we can wind up in an – “Oh my! This is wrong! God must have made a mistake in His inspiration of these four different writers” position. Or, an “Oh my! We just can't believe any of it because it does not agree” position.

So what do we do? Trust God? Great idea!

One question that goes along with the standalone approach is: How come they are so disjointed? The answer to that is possibly as simple as how time effects memory. These two things that are not really friends. We must also consider, as mentioned before, that the purpose of the particular narrative may be best served in God's opinion by the way each writer was inspired – His call, right?

The answer to all this may lie simply in taking the stance of trusting God and, in so doing give each writer (and God) the latitude to say things in a certain way with a certain recall. That being said and on that premise a case can and will be made that, though they do differ, when looked at properly, they do fit together and form a timeline that is perfectly right and blissfully in order.

Mark's Gospel – the Ending(s)

We would be remiss if we did not at least mention the Markan problem (the [] in the reference above). The problem is that there are multiple endings that have arisen for Mark's Gospel through the centuries.

The History

There are truly two alternative endings, the Long Ending (verses 9–20 hereinafter referred to as LE) and the Short Ending which terminates at verse 8. There are up to four other endings which most scholars do not truly consider valid. Due to the abrupt ending at verse 8, some call the short ending the lost ending, considering that the original ending may have been in some way lost from Mark's original writing. As you can well imagine, there is much scholarly debate regarding the correct ending and how we should get there.

The short ending appears in six Greek manuscripts, and in dozens of Ethiopic copies. Modern versions of the New Testament generally include the LE, but place it in brackets or otherwise format it to show that it is not considered part of the original text. One important note we should consider is the major Textual Witnesses we have available today and how they treat the ending. Here is a list of them, their dates, and the endings they contain.

- Codex Vaticanus (325-350 CE; extant verses 1-8)
- Codex Sinaiticus (330-360 CE; extant verses 1-8)
- Codex Bezae (~400 CE; complete: 1-20)
- Codex Alexandrinus (400-440 CE; complete: 1-20)
- Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (~450 CE; complete: 1-20)

How We Are Going to Treat it.

Simply put, we are going to use the LE. As mentioned above, most modern translations contain these verses and place them in brackets []. If not in brackets, they are at least normally footnoted regarding this topic. One of the main reasons we will be using the LE is that, even though it does not truly add anything unique to the timeline, it does confirm some parts of it. One other comment that may be appropriate here was made by Darrell Bock in his conclusion to the book "Perspectives on the Ending of Mark".

“One final point needs to be made. Whatever view one has on this issue, there is no central teaching of the Christian faith at stake in which view is chosen. Obviously, if the Long Ending is taken as original, then everything presented there is taught.”⁴

Further Reading

We will not spend an exhaustive amount of time listing many references that one can find on this topic. If you truly want to spend some time researching it, Amazon has several good choices available. The text mentioned above, "Perspectives on the Ending of Mark", is really quite thorough on the subject. It is the product of a series of papers that originated from a conference

⁴ Robinson, Maurice; Bock, Darrell L.; Elliott, Keith; Wallace, Daniel. Perspectives on the Ending of Mark (Kindle Locations 3361-3369). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

entitled “The Last Twelve Verses of Mark: Original or Not”. The conference was held in April of 2007, at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. The contributors are:

- David Alan Black – Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- Darrell L. Bock – Research Professor of New Testament Studies and Professor of Spiritual Development and Culture at Dallas Theological Seminary.
- J. Keith Elliott – Professor of New Testament Textual Criticism at the University of Leeds.
- Maurice A. Robinson – Senior Professor of New Testament at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- Daniel B. Wallace – Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

These men definitely explore in depth the various opinions regarding the ending(s) and each has a distinct view. Again, if your interest goes in that direction, this is an excellent publication.

[The Structure of What Comes Next](#)

The structure which follows is laid out as a series of events and sub-events – sixteen in all. We begin by looking at the events that occur on the day of resurrection. We look first in Matthew chapter 28 for details of Event 1.

There are a couple of other requests before we proceed. First, don’t be too critical of the speculations found here. The objective is to approach a harmonization of these events. To show how, despite the seeming conflicts and differences there is a set of facts that tell us what actually happened. Further, the objective is, by discussing and connecting the facts, to show how Jesus interacted with His disciples and others before He ascended to the Father. I hope you will find the speculations to be reasonable and, that they do not affect the truth of the narrative.

The second request is simply to try to allow your imagination to help. Try to imagine the scenes as they are described and unfold – even beyond my feeble attempts if you can. At the end of the adventure, you may feel more enlightened. At a minimum, you will have had some fun along the way.

[Events and Layout](#)

As mentioned above, this document is structured based on events and sub-events. The events and sub-events are group by chapters. By the nature of some of the events, obviously, some will be short, some longer. Under each event is a commentary on the event, any speculations which have been made, and how things fit together. Also within each event the scripture from each Gospel that addresses any part of the event is quoted. They are placed in position and order so that reading them as you come to them will aid in understanding and imagining the scene being described. All quotes are from the New American Standard Updated version 2020.

Below, you will find a Timeline Chart. This chart is simple a map graphically showing the events as they are laid out. Due to the complexity of each event, the choice was made here to simply give the event number and a short description. With that, let us begin ...

The Forty Days

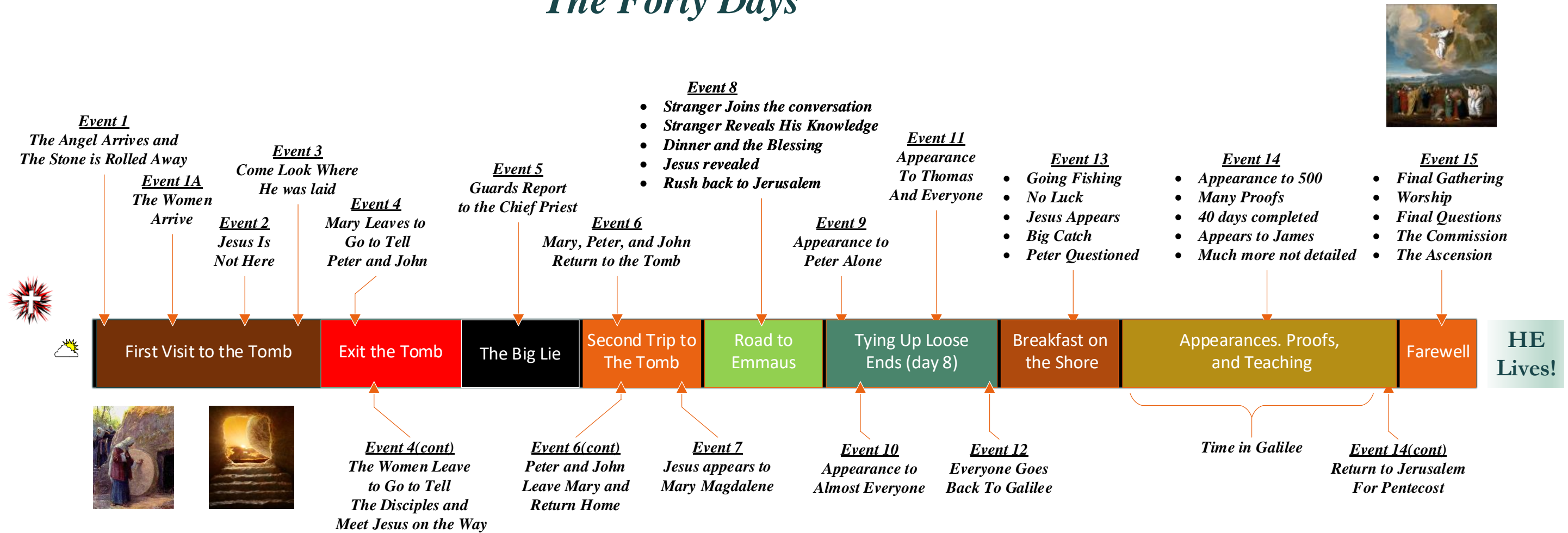


Figure 1 - 40 Day Event Timeline

First Visit to the Tomb

Event 1 – The Stone Is Rolled Away Part 1

Matthew 28:2–4 (NASB 2020)

² And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. ³ And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. ⁴ The guards shook from fear of him and became like dead men.

Jesus has been in the tomb since late Friday afternoon. There has likely been several changing of the guards at the tomb to assure that no one came to steal His body. The last change of guard was likely uneventful and the new guards were simply waiting and watching in the early morning hours.

It is still dark when suddenly an earthquake occurs. Jerusalem is in a fairly seismically active area and minor earthquakes and tremors occur frequently. According to scripture, this was not a tremor – it was severe earthquake. The guards on duty definitely take note of it but are probably not overly concerned. But, then, accompanying the earthquake were a couple of events that definitely were out of the ordinary.

After the earthquake had passed, and things had settled a bit, there appeared a super bright light. The light was the radiance of an angel sent by God. He immediately rolled the stone away from the mouth of the tomb. The bright light continues because the angel is the light source, still bright as a flash of lightning and his cloths are brilliantly white. Now, he is sitting on the stone in plain view. These guards, tough military men, were so frightened by this appearance and the actions of the angel that they passed out. Matthew says they became like dead men.

O.k. how's your imagination doing? Do you have this amazing scene firmly in your vision?

Event 1A – The Stone Is Rolled Away Part 2

We will call this next event 1A because from what we read, the two things, the stone being rolled away and the group of women and Mary going to the tomb, were happening at about the same time – right around dawn. To begin we will take a comment from Mark's account. The women were concerned about the stone being rolled away. Since they had been to the tomb or had at least seen where Jesus was buried, they probably knew the size of the stone and knew they could not move it alone. Secondly, Though it is not stated directly, these women would also be concerned about the guards – would they allow them to enter the tomb for fear of them stealing the body? Would they chase them off just because they felt they should not be there? As we will see, neither of these concerns were to be realized.

To continue we will be looking at the appropriate portions of all four of the Gospel accounts.

Matthew 28:1 (NASB 2020)

1 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb.

Mark 16:1–3 (NASB 2020)

¹ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might come and anoint Him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. ³ They were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb for us?”

Luke 23:55-24:1 (NASB 2020)

55 Now the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 And then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

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

John 20:1 (NASB 2020)

1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already removed from the tomb.

To begin, we must address our first obvious difference in the accounts. As one can easily see, the group that was headed for the tomb early that Sunday morning is declared somewhat differently in these four accounts. Matthew reports “Mary and the other Mary”. Mark tells us a real group of women, “Mary Magdalene, Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome”. Luke opens the possibility of even more of the women going to the tomb, assuming the pronoun “they” in the rest of set of verses refers to “women who had come with Him from Galilee followed”. Lastly, John only refers to Mary Magdalene. Though Matthew and John both omit most of the other women from their accounts, I think we can make a reasonable speculation that the Lukan and Markan lists declare the detail the other two omitted. Without doubt, there were definitely a number of women in the entourage that came to the tomb that morning.

As we proceed we have several distinct things happening here in Events 1 and 1a. From Mark’s account we see that the women were going to complete the preparation of Jesus’ body with spices. At this this point we have quite a crowd at the tomb. First, we have the Roman guards who were passed out and like dead men. We have the angel, still shining brightly, setting on the stone that he had rolled away. Then we have the group of women definitely including but not limited to the two Mary’s – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (all from Mark’s account). Additionally, we have Joanna and other women from Luke’s account. In addition to the angel sitting on the stone rolled away from the tomb, we will see shortly that we have one angel in the tomb where Jesus was laid. Luke also reports two who will speak to the women outside tomb (Luke 24:4–6).

Now, since we have the crowd gathered, let’s see how things unfold ...

Event 2 – Jesus Is Not Here

On their arrival at the tomb, the women were shocked! First, the stone that they were concerned about rolling away was already moved. The guards that they may have been concerned about were lying on the ground and, as far as they could tell, they were dead. Oh yes, and then there is the angel sitting on the stone emitting a bright light. Picking up in Matthew’s account again, we see the next happenings begin to unfold.

Matthew 28:5–6 (NASB 2020)

5 And the angel (the one setting on the stone) said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. 6 He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.

The women are standing amazed at this scene and the first thing that occurs is the angel sitting on the stone which has been rolled away tells them not to be frightened for Jesus has risen. He reminds them that this is what the Lord himself had told them would happen. Knowing that they would likely be skeptical, he asks them to go and look into the tomb where they knew he was placed days before.

Matthew does not report the women looking into the tomb. Instead, he completes the angel’s statement to them:

Matthew 28:7 (NASB 2020)

“7 ... go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”

To get the full picture and fill in what is not said by Matthew, we must turn to Mark and Luke.

Event 3 – Come Look Where He Was Laid

If we consider the state of mind of this group of women, they would not have been able to resist the invitation of the angel. They would at least bend down and look inside the tomb. This is born out by Mark and Luke’s accounts of the next events.

Mark 16:5–6 (NASB 2020)

5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. 6 But he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; see, here is the place where they laid Him.

As we see, in Mark’s account they actually enter the tomb. On doing so, they find a second angel sitting on the right. He tries to reassure the women by also telling them that their Lord has risen. He even points to the place where he is sitting and indicates that that is where Jesus was laid to rest.

When we look at Luke’s account, he tells us of two other angels – maybe in the tomb, most likely however, standing outside.

Luke 24:4–6 (NASB 2020)

4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in gleaming clothing; 5 and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why are you seeking the living One among the dead? 6 He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee,

Well, perhaps the third time is the charm. These two angels also tell the women that Jesus has risen. He is not among the dead! They also remind them again that this is exactly what the Lord had promised.

As an aside and to help your imaginations some, based on all the readings to this point, there appears to be a total of four angels at the tomb that morning at the women’s visit.

- One sitting on the stone
- One sitting in the tomb where Jesus was laid but to the right.
- Finally, two others perhaps at the entrance of the tomb who speak to the women last.

As is obvious at this point, there is a difference in the accounts covering the entry into the tomb and the conversation with the other angels. Neither Matthew nor John detail any of the events covered here in Mark and Luke. John skips from Mary seeing the stone rolled away to the point where she takes off running to Peter and John to tell them what she has seen. Matthew also skips most of these details and only relates the rest of the conversation with the angel setting on the rolled away stone. He then documents them (Mary Magdalene and the other women) leaving to go tell the disciples. Given these facts, it is a perfectly reasonable assumption that the Markan and Lukan accounts simply fill in the missing pieces.

At this point, the women are convinced that, if nothing else, Jesus is not in the tomb and that they have been privy to something extraordinary in all that has taken place since they arrived. To quickly recap, here is what the Gospels report that the women have been told (all quite consistent):

By Matthew’s account, the angel setting on the stone told them:

- He is not here.
- He is risen.
- Come see where he was laying.

By Mark’s account, as they looked into the tomb, the angel setting on right told them:

- Do not be amazed
- He has risen
- He is not here
- Here is the place where they laid Him.

Then by Luke’s account, two men standing near them in gleaming clothing told them

- Why are you seeking the living One among the dead?
- He is not here
- He has risen

- Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee,

In John's account, Mary simply leaves and no one spoke to her.

However, we must add to this that two of the angels also spoke to them regarding what they should do next. Angel sitting on the stone – Matthew 28:7 “go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”” Angel sitting where Jesus laid – Mark 16:7 “But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.’ ”

At this point, the women are ready to leave the tomb and go report what they have witnessed to Peter and John, the disciples, and other followers of Jesus.

The Trip from the Tomb, “We Have to Tell Someone ...”

Event 4 – Go Tell! ... (with an INTERRUPTION!)

We begin our look at this event with Matthew’s account of the trip back to tell the disciples. At first read, it seems rather straight forward – the women leave the tomb and at some point along the way, they are met by Jesus which obviously interrupts their trip abruptly.

Matthew 28:8–10 (NASB 2020)

8 And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to report to His disciples.
9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Rejoice!” And they came up and took hold of His feet, and worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go, bring word to My brothers to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

Jesus had a message for these women making this an interruption with a purpose. Once again, the women are told, this time by the Master himself, to tell the disciples to go to Galilee. We can safely assume that there was more of a conversation than just that at this point. Perhaps it lasted a few minutes but it is unlikely that it was just this one comment by Jesus and he simply disappears.

Next, we look at Mark’s account of the women leaving the tomb. –

Mark 16:7–8 (NASB 2020)

8 And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

We must make another assumption here. When Mark says “they said nothing to anyone”, and as we will see when looking at Matthew’s and Luke’s account the assumption we must make is that Mark meant that they said nothing to anyone as they left the tomb. Obviously from the other two accounts, we know they did speak – with Jesus when He appears to them along the way and they will be speaking to the disciples when they arrive back at the place where they are staying.

Luke is even a little more terse in his account –

Luke 24:8–12 (NASB 2020)

8 And they remembered His words, 9 and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest. 10 Now these women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. 11 But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe the women. 12 Nevertheless, Peter got up and ran to the tomb; and when he stooped and looked in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.

As mentioned, we really do not know any of the details of the conversation which they must have had with Jesus other than His telling them to tell the disciples. However, Luke clearly tells us that the women shared their experiences with the eleven and all the rest. The experiences being what happened at the tomb and what Jesus had said to them when He appeared to them on the way back.

This was probably a chaotic conversation or group of conversations regarding all that had gone on that morning thus far. We are told the rest did not believe – “But these words appeared to

them as nonsense.” Here we are actually saying that none of them believed the women had seen Jesus and probably some did not even believe that the tomb was empty. Perhaps they thought it was just a result of someone moving the body – not the resurrection that Jesus had promised.

The LE of Mark’s Gospel also indicates the disciples did not believe what they were told.

Mark 16:9–11 (NASB 2020)

9 [[Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. 10 She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. 11 And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it.

Finally, we must look at John’s account of the exodus from the tomb. As we recall, in John’s gospel, Mary Magdalene is the only one reported to have gone to the tomb that morning.

John 20:2 (NASB 2020)

2 So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have put Him.”

When we look at the situation as it stands at this moment, there are several questions that come to mind.

1. John’s account tells us that Mary only reported of the empty tomb - “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have put Him.” The obvious question this raises is, if she was part of the party of women to whom Jesus had appeared, why would she not have told him (John) and Simon Peter of that meeting? One would have to conclude that that information would have far outweighed the mere fact that she had found the tomb empty.
2. The next question we must ask is, if the women all returned together why did Mary speak to John and Peter alone with a definitely different story?

Here we must begin another speculation. Even if all the women left at the same time, Mary Magdalene could have run ahead or possibly have taken a different return path to the place where the disciples were. The other possibility is that she simply left ahead of the rest of the women. Either of the possible situations may have existed because she wanted to get to Peter and John as quickly as possible since the angel had specifically mentioned Peter to her by name.

Either of these alternatives to the trip back to the disciples could definitely explain why she may not have been present when Jesus met the other women on their way back to the disciples. We can add to that that the rest of women would have been delayed even further by spending even a small amount of time with Jesus.

This possible combination of events would also explain why Mary would have only told Peter and John of the empty tomb. If she was not with the rest of the women she would not have seen Jesus and would therefore not be able to attest to his resurrection. This is born out by Mary’s reaction to Jesus when He appears to her alone at the end of the second trip to the tomb. We will be discussing that trip shortly, but first, we have to take an important side journey and look at a “Big Lie” in Event 5.

An Offstage Event – “We Still Can’t Let this Happen”

Event 5 – The Big Lie

While all the women are returning to the disciples and telling them about the events, another rather important event takes place off-stage, so to speak. Matthew tells us that some of those who were guarding the tomb came into the city to report what had happened. We of course, do not know if these were the men who had passed out from fear or others that were there or showed up later. It is interesting to point out that even though these men were soldiers, they appear to go to the chief priest and not to Pilot. What we are told is how this brings about what we will call “the Big Lie”.

Matthew 28:11–15 (NASB 2020)

11 Now while they were on their way, some of the men from the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. 12 And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 and said, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him while we were asleep.’ 14 And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and keep you out of trouble.” 15 And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews and is to this day.

Though the Jewish leaders were all fully aware of Lazarus’ resurrection and probably other miracle raisings that Jesus had performed, they can not allow the truth that He Himself has been raised from the dead get out. If they were willing to give Judas 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus, now that it was all over, they were not going to let anything (so they think) bring this ne’er-do-well back to life and ruin what they had accomplished by killing Him.

Not only were they willing to pay to keep the guards quite, they were more than willing to lie to the governor on guards behalf to assure they did not get in trouble. More than likely, their willingness to lie on their behalf was more to assure their continued perpetuation of the lie they had just paid for.

The truth is, we do not know the impact this lie had on the overall situation. We do know that regardless of what they have convinced these guards to say, the disciples in a very short time will be shouting from the roof tops the very truth that they are attempting to cover up – that is that Christ has risen! And, as is obvious from their success as seen in Acts, they are doing so very convincingly.

Moving on to Event 6, we must turn to Luke and John

A Second Trip to the Tomb

Event 6 – Off to the Tomb in a Mad Rush!

Matthew ends his account of tomb activities at the point of Jesus' appearance to the women. He discusses the guard's report and finally the Great Commission but no other events of Jesus appearing before that. Mark's gospel account of the events of the day do not pick up again until Event 8 when Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

So, let's continue with the accounts of the day as told by Luke and John.

Luke 24:11–12 (NASB 2020)

11 But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe the women.
12 Nevertheless, Peter got up and ran to the tomb; and when he stooped and looked in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.

John 20:2–10 (NASB 2020)

2 So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have put Him." 3 So Peter and the other disciple left, and they were going to the tomb. 4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead, faster than Peter, and came to the tomb first; 5 and he stooped to look in, and saw the linen wrappings lying there; however he did not go in. 6 So Simon Peter also came, following him, and he entered the tomb; and he looked at the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings but folded up in a place by itself. 8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb also entered then, and he saw and believed. 9 For they did not yet understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead. 10 So the disciples went away again to their own homes.

Luke provides only a very short rendition and only includes Peter. According to Luke, Peter's reaction is that of marveling at what had been reported and what he saw in the empty tomb. It was obvious to him that this was not a case of someone robbing the grave or just stealing Jesus' body – the burial linens were too neatly folded and placed for something like that to have happened. One can truly understand Peter's dismay.

Strangely, Luke also reports that "he went away to his home". This is an indication that Peter is returning to Galilee. Peter's home was in Capernaum which was about 80 miles from Jerusalem. A rough guess would be about an eight or nine day journey. Considering that, one must think that Peter actually returned to where he was staying in Jerusalem first.

Looking at John's account, as one might expect, it is a somewhat more complete narrative if for no other reason than the fact that John actually accompanied Peter on the return to the tomb. However, as we will see when we finish reading John's narrative, we will find he did leave out one important fact – Mary Magdalene also accompanied he and Peter on that return trip. More on that in a moment.

John makes two very telling statements here. First he says that when he entered the tomb, he believed. One important question we must ask when looking at this event is – what did John believe? For that matter, what did Peter believe at this point? The second statement that bears on

this is “For they did not yet understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead.” Considering all that has transpired and all the times that Jesus had told them what was going to happen, this is an amazing admission on John’s part.

So, did they believe that Jesus was resurrected or just that he was missing? Based on verses 9 and 10, we must conclude that they believed Mary Magdalene and the women were correct – the body was missing. But, they still did not understand that he had risen from the dead. If they did, they did not know what that resurrection looked like. One might wonder if perhaps they were expecting a different manifestation of the resurrection. When Jesus raised Lazarus, Lazarus walked out of the tomb and the burial garments were removed and, we assume, he went on with life. Were Peter and John expecting Jesus to raise from the dead, and come immediately to them to continue from where he had left off? Burce Barton sums this up nicely in the Life Application Commentary:

“Perplexed, John and Peter left and went back home. They “believed” in something miraculous; that is, they did not fear that Jesus’ body had been stolen, as Mary had, but they did not know for sure what they believed or what they should do next. So they just went home.”⁵

Event 7 – Jesus’ Next Appearance to Mary Magdalene.

As we indicated, Matthew ends his account of tomb activities at the point where Jesus appears to the women on their way back to the disciples. However, as we continue to read in John’s account, we see Jesus’ next appearance. It is important to note that this is the next verse after Peter and John depart from the tomb for home, obviously leaving Mary weeping outside the empty tomb.

John 20:11–13 (NASB 2020)

11 But Mary was standing outside the tomb, weeping; so as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 And they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they put Him.”

Standing there alone, Mary looks into the tomb again and sees two more angels sitting where Jesus’ body would have lain. As an aside, this brings the total number of angels appearing on this day to six. They ask her why she is weeping and she explains – then, she turns ...

John 20:14–18 (NASB 2020)

14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and yet she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Thinking that He was the gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you put Him, and I will take Him away.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your

⁵ Bruce B. Barton, [John](#), Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 389–390.

Father, and My God and your God.’ ” 18 Mary Magdalene came and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and that He had said these things to her.

From inference, we can see that Mary, once she recognizes Jesus not only addresses Him as Rabboni but she, in some way grabs hold of Him. Either a hug or perhaps, even bowing and grasping at His feet. One way or the other, Jesus tells her that He has a mission for her – she is to go to the disciples and tell them that He is going to ascend to the Father. It is interesting in this statement that Jesus becomes so explicit regarding the Father – His Father, their Father, His God, and their God.

This is the final event that takes place at the tomb. We are given no further information about what the Romans did regarding the resealing the empty tomb or if anyone returned to see the place again and possibly retrieve the burial garments. What we do know and will see as we proceed is that Jesus is not done with His appearances. His objective now is to unify and reclaim the disciples and the group of followers who had abandoned Him only a few days before.

As we proceed, we find that Mary is not the only one who sees the Lord and is not able to immediately recognize Him.

A Surprising Travel Companion

Event 8 – The Road to Emmaus

On that same day, Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. We have two accounts of this event. The first is a very short account in the LE of Mark.

Mark 16:12–13 (NASB 2020)

12 Now after that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. 13 And they went away and reported it to the rest, but they did not believe them, either.

In this account, there is a reference to their destination as “the country”. According to several commentaries, this would be a way of referring to what was happening without giving an actual destination; a generic way of referring to a place without giving a proper name.

The second account in Luke’s Gospel is a more detailed. Let’s take a little deeper dive into this event.

Luke 24:13–24 (NASB 2020)

13 And behold, on that very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty stadia from Jerusalem. 14 And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. 16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. 17 And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?” And they came to a stop, looking sad. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You possibly the only one living near Jerusalem who does not know about the things that happened here in these days?” 19 And He said to them, “What sort of things?” And they said to Him, “Those about Jesus the Nazarene, who proved to be a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people,²⁰ and how the chief priests and our rulers handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and crucified Him. 21 But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. 22 But also some women among us left us bewildered. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. 24 And so some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.”

We begin with these two disciples walking to Emmaus. We are told the name of one Cleopas, but not of the other. Jesus, whom they do not recognize, comes alongside them and enters into the middle of their conversation. Playing the part of one who does not know, Jesus elicits from them what we can see is the basic understanding they have of the events of the past few days and their situation in particular.

From their response, we can see where they themselves were and, in all likelihood, the rest of the disciples as well. There was their understanding of who Jesus was – mighty prophet, in deed and word before them and God. They understood that part of the picture but missed the resurrected Messiah portion. They were bewildered by the very fact that their hopes and expectations could have ended in such a manner.

As to the current situation, it appears to still be somewhat of a mystery to them. We can clearly tell from their response that they were with the rest of the disciples when the women returned from the tomb. From what they say, we get a little bit of extra information, Peter and John did at least stop by where the rest of the disciples were to let them know that they had confirmed what the women had seen (the empty tomb) but, they did not see the Lord. They knew He was supposed to have risen but did he? The reports of the empty tomb were verified but there they could not, or did not, accept the fact that anyone had actually seen Jesus.

For a stranger entering casually into a conversation, Jesus really lays some heavy words on them to start. If they stopped out of surprise to tell the stranger what had happened, if they had moved on after that they would surely have stopped again when the stranger showed an immediate and true grasp of where they were mentally and in their hearts, and more importantly, where they should have been.

Luke 24:25–35 (NASB 2020)

25 And then He said to them, “You foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to come into His glory?” 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the Prophets, He explained to them the things written about Himself in all the Scriptures.

28 And they approached the village where they were going, and He gave the impression that He was going farther. 29 And so they strongly urged Him, saying, “Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over.” So He went in to stay with them. 30 And it came about, when He had reclined at the table with them, that He took the bread and blessed it, and He broke it and began giving it to them. 31 And then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 They said to one another, “Were our hearts not burning within us when He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?” 33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, 34 saying, “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon!” 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road, and how He was recognized by them at the breaking of the bread.

It is hard to imagine how wonderful it must have been and yet how saddening as well to hear Jesus interpret all the Scriptures about himself. Wonderful in that He would have been able to present the scripture as none other could. Saddened in that they were still thinking he was gone forever and perhaps feeling some guilt in not believing as they should have.

And then *the big reveal!* Jesus, we must assume, changes forms right in front of their eyes in whatever way was necessary and they recognized him. And then – gone – vanished from their sight in an instant. They must have been totally stunned and even more bewildered than they were before. The one thing they are convinced of is they must tell the others of what just happened. So, immediately they make their way back to Jerusalem and the rest of disciples to report what they had seen. It would have been interesting to hear their conversation as they hurried back to Jerusalem. When they arrive, they have a surprise for the disciples but, the disciples also have a surprise for them – they are not the only ones that have now seen the risen Lord! Peter has seen the risen Lord alone and has reported to the group.

Tying Up Loose Ends

Event 9 – Appearance to Simon Peter Alone

Looking at the end of Luke’s Emmaus road account, there is one thing that is mentioned which is subtle but is also an event that must be accounted for in our timeline. Jesus has appeared to Simon Peter at some point. Peter has obviously told the rest of the disciples because, when Cleopas and the other disciple arrive to tell of their experience, the rest of the disciples are already saying that Christ has risen. According to the report of the disciples Jesus appeared to Simon Peter.

Luke 24:33–35 (NASB 2020)

33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, 34 saying, “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon!” 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road, and how He was recognized by them at the breaking of the bread.

To be perfectly candid, if we look back at the account from the LE for Mark, we see a contradiction here. In Mark’s account verse 13 says: “and they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.” Again, though the Long Ending is accepted, it is also assumed by most that it was added after Mark had concluded his initial writing – either by Mark himself or some well intentioned scribe. Mark, according to early tradition, collaborated with Peter in Rome for the writing of his Gospel. If it was Mark that added the LE, it must have been without the collaboration with Peter since, it would have been totally unlikely that Peter would have omitted his encounter with Lord and telling the others.

We do, however, see this event (Peter seeing the risen Lord) mentioned and attested to by Paul as well as here in Luke’s account. In first Corinthians Paul indicates that Jesus appeared to Peter before he appeared to the twelve.

1 Corinthians 15:3–5 (NASB 2020)

3 For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

I think at least one important takeaway here is, according to Luke, the disciples believed that Christ had risen. This is a significant step toward what we will see these men become. We might add here that from Luke’s wording, it appears there is also an excitement starting to build. Maybe, just maybe, all that Jesus had told them was going to happen. However, as we will see, as we continue, they still don’t have the whole picture. Even though they do believe Peter they become shocked when they see Christ for themselves.

Event 10 – Almost Everyone Gets to see Jesus

We are still in the first day of the week and Jesus appears to the disciples one last time on the day of the resurrection. Apparently, from what we read in Luke and John’s continuation of the story, He appears to the group, most likely, including the two disciples returning from Emmaus

but, perhaps without Peter and John if they have already departed for Galilee. Here are the two accounts, first from Luke followed by John's account.

Luke 24:36–49 (NASB 2020)

36 Now while they were telling these things, Jesus Himself suddenly stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." 37 But they were startled and frightened, and thought that they were looking at a spirit. 38 And He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why are doubts arising in your hearts? 39 See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you plainly see that I have." 40 And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. 41 While they still could not believe it because of their joy and astonishment, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They served Him a piece of broiled fish; 43 and He took it and ate it in front of them.

44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things that are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "So it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

John 20:19–23 (NASB 2020)

19 Now when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were together due to fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, "Peace be to you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be to you; just as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."

Let's discuss the Lukan passage first. We must look carefully at a few important things that we see here. First, Jesus is standing there telling them and showing them that he is a real flesh and blood resurrected Christ. He even eats in front of them as further proof that he is not a spirit. Jesus is definitely flesh, blood, and bone, of that there is not doubt, however, not as we are. He can change His appearance and obviously move through walls.

When we look at verse 34 as the group tells the disciples returning from Emmaus,

34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon!"

We really have a difficult time dealing with verses 41 and 42.

Luke 24:41-42 (NASB 2020)

41 While they still could not believe it because of their joy and astonishment, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They served Him a piece of broiled fish; 43 and He took it and ate it in front of them.

Again, the Life Application Bible Commentary really catches the true idea in their comment:

“This was too good to be true—and they experienced the conflicting emotions of disbelief, doubt, joy, and wonder that any person would have when a most desired, but seemingly most impossible, wish actually comes true. Jesus stood there among them, alive, even eating a piece of broiled fish to show that he was not a ghost. He was real; he came back to life just as he had told them he would.”⁶

Jesus then begins a very short and concise statement and concludes with some instructions about what they must do and what is now expected of them. First, he reminds them once again that all of this, His death, burial, and resurrection – even the state in which they now see Him is exactly as He had told them and was prophesied in the Law of Moses, Prophets, and Psalms. But then, comes one of the more significant statements of this resurrection story - Luke in the middle of Jesus’ quote injects the comment:

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures

This was the beginning of what really takes place over the next 39 days, the transformation of these men and women into what was planned for them from the beginning and what they need to be in the future.

Christ then tells them for the first time clearly what their roll will be from this point forward – they were witnesses to all that He has done and they would proclaim the salvation from sin and repentance throughout the world as they knew it. And, they would not be alone – the promised Holy Spirit would be theirs as He had promised. What an awesome moment this must have been for them all.

Returning to John’s account of the meeting with the disciples we see a somewhat different narrative yet we find no major discrepancies. We do, however, see a very interesting (and, somewhat puzzling) statement in verse 22.

John 20:22 (NASB 2020)

22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

We know the believers will receive the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost and be empowered for ministry. The sending of God's Spirit is not just a one time operation. So, to say this conflicts with the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost is not correct. God's (and Christ's) sending of the Holy Spirit is a continuous thing, being done constantly in all generations, and to benefit each new recipient of salvation. The IVP Background Commentary and others also make mention of perhaps John’s intent to call to mind Gen 2:7, when God breathed into Adam the breath of life. It could also be related to Ezek 37, when God's Spirit or wind revives the dead.

If, we look at this as two different narratives from two different points of view, we could also say this receiving of the Holy Spirit was the same thing Luke refers to as the opening of their minds. Regardless, whether we see it as Luke did – opening their minds – or as John did – breathing

⁶ Bruce B. Barton et al., [Luke](#), Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997), 567–568.

the Holy Spirit upon them, it is really a matter of semantics. As we indicated a moment ago, this was the beginning of what really takes place over the next 39 days.

Event 11 – The Last Holdout – Thomas is Convinced

Continuing now with John’s account of the meeting with the disciples, we see ...

John 20:24–29 (NASB 2020)

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

26 Eight days later His disciples were again inside, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be to you.”

27 Then He said to Thomas, “Place your finger here, and see My hands; and take your hand and put it into My side; and do not continue in disbelief, but be a believer.” 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you now believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”

From John’s account, Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to others and he would not believe without personal proof. Even though he knew these men well – he had traveled with them and Jesus for three years – he simply would not accept their word that Christ was risen.

Thomas stood in an area of disbelief. His demanding of proof was a show of true lack of faith. This was a disappointment to his fellow disciples. It was not only a lack of faith in what the Lord had taught him but a true lack of trust in these men whom he had worked alongside of for so long.

A week and a day later, the disciples are gathered again and the Lord appears to them again as He had before. From what we see in this exchange, the disciples were not the only ones who were dismayed by Thomas’ disbelief. When Jesus appears, He speaks to Thomas in the imperative – commands – not just suggestions – Put ... ! place ... ! see and behold ...! A very emphatic set commands concluded by a simple statement – “do not continue in disbelief, but be a believer”. To perhaps put it in the vernacular of today – “Thomas, get over it!” Obviously, he does since from what we are told, without actually doing what the Lord had told him to do so emphatically he simply bursts forth with his confession – “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus concludes this encounter with a statement that has brought comfort to many believers over the two thousand plus years that have intervened “Because you have seen Me, have you now believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.” This statement says that all of us who have never laid eyes on Jesus and yet we believe in a risen Lord, all that He said and did, and in the salvation he brings are truly blessed because of that faith if for no other reason.

To conclude Event 11, we must note that, Luke’s Gospel reports no more of Jesus’ activities during the forty days until the ascension. As we continue to round out the events of the forty days we will be looking at rest of John’s account, Luke’s reported activity in Acts, and Paul’s references in the first Corinthian letter.

Event 12 – Going back to Galilee

Here we have an event that is not directly recorded in the Gospels – that is the return of the disciples to Galilee. We see reference to Peter and John going home which, if taken literally, would indicate that they went back to Capernaum which, is of course, is in Galilee. We do know that Jesus' instruction to the women on the way back from the tomb were:

Matthew 28:10 (NASB 2020)

“Do not be afraid; go, bring word to My brothers to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

We also know that the angel sitting on the stone told the women that Jesus would meet them in Galilee.

Matthew 28:7 (NASB 2020)

“7 ... go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”

Finally, we know that even though the women did deliver these instructions, because of the apostles disbelief or for other reasons not stated, they did not leave immediately. At least some of them were still together eight days later when Jesus appears to them again to very pointedly convince Thomas of His resurrection. They must have left sometime after that because, the very next event we see is Jesus meeting seven of them including Thomas for breakfast by the Sea of Galilee.

Peter Restored

Event 13 – Breakfast with the Seven

John takes the entirety of chapter 21 to relay this very important appearance of Jesus. In this account He appears to Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two other disciples. The narrative begins when Peter decides to go fishing and the other six decide to join him. The appearance begins the next morning after they had fished all night and caught nothing. Let's begin by looking at verses 1 to 14.

John 21:1–14 (NASB 2020)

1 After these things Jesus revealed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He revealed Himself in this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas who was called Didymus, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are also coming with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish to eat, do you?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you will find the fish." So they cast it, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great quantity of fish. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about two hundred cubits away, dragging the net full of fish.

9 So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already made and fish placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." 11 So Simon Peter went up and hauled the net to land, full of large fish, 153; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

Jesus Provides

12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to inquire of Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus revealed Himself to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

Without doubt, we know where they are – the Sea of Tiberias is another name for the Sea of Galilee. Again, not surprising:

10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go, bring word to My brothers to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."

And yet, we know that they did not leave immediately. At least some of them stayed in Jerusalem for at least eight days after the resurrection because we know that was when the Lord appeared to the all of them and settled Thomas' disbelief issue. Obviously, it is sometime after that that they leave and return to Galilee.

The second thing to consider is that they were anticipating the Lord's appearance. John clearly states that this was the third time Jesus had appeared to the disciples so we know with

certainty that He had not appeared to them before this. One might speculate that these men were possibly slipping back in to a state of doubt. How long before the Lord joins them here in Galilee as He had indicated He would? One wonders if perhaps, this frustration at the wait is what caused Peter to decide to go fishing – “let’s at least do something!”

As the sun comes up, Jesus appears on the beach. Being this early in the morning, the disciples would not be able to see clearly who was speaking to them. They were also a little over 100 yards offshore during the first part of the conversation. However, once Jesus gives the suggestion to cast their nets on the other side of the boat and they make this super large catch, John sees it for the miracle it is and exclaims “It is the Lord”!

At John’s recognition impetuous Peter jumps in to the sea to attempt to get to Jesus faster. The rest follow as quickly as possible in the boat hauling the catch along with them. On reaching the shore, they find that Jesus has already made a fire and has everything but the fish ready for breakfast. The stage is set for Jesus to bring a focus to where they are spiritually and where they need to be. As we will see, this is especially true for Peter.

One interesting note regarding this section of the passage. John makes an off hand comment regarding Jesus’ identity:

None of the disciples ventured to inquire of Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. It is as though John is saying they knew who He was but they did not physically recognize Him. Gives one pause to consider if this is, at least at the beginning, another “road to Emmaus experience” where Jesus’ form was different in some way.

Continuing ...

John 21:15–19 (NASB 2020)

15 Now when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” 16 He said to him again, a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was hurt because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.

Our Times Are in His Hand

18 “Truly, truly I tell you, when you were younger, you used to put on your belt and walk wherever you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will put your belt on you, and bring you where you do not want to go.” 19 Now He said this, indicating by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had said this, He said to him, “Follow Me!”

By this time, any doubt regarding who Jesus was must have faded away. He begins with a series of questions to Peter. When we look at the Greek for these questions, we find that the first question can be translated multiple ways. Because the pronoun “these” is in a case which can be either masculine, feminine, or neuter the group it refers to can not be determined by gender. In that case we are left with three possibilities:

Do you love me more than these men love me?
Do you love me more than these men?
Do you love me more than these things?

We can however arrive at the correct answer from context. When we consider Peter's words and the truth of the situation in the garden and shortly thereafter it is the first translation that truly fits. "Do you love me more than these men love me?" one could almost envision Christ motioning toward the others as He asked the question.

Of course, this takes Peter's mind back to the painful facts of his denials. He told Jesus emphatically that he would never deny him even if the others did – yet – he knows that he did. The others sitting around that fire also remembered that they had whole heartedly agreed with Peter – they would die with Him! One cannot escape the significance of Jesus' asking Peter three times if he loves Him, of course, corresponding to Peter's three denials.

There is an old expression dating back to the mid 1800's or before – "like rubbing salt in the wound". Though used as medicinal remedy for wounds (sometimes from flogging), it came to mean in essence, making an unpleasant situation even worse by reminding one of their failures and faults. We can surely see where Peter may have felt that way in this situation but we must realize that this was not the Lord's intent.

Perhaps, this can be seen as a restoration of sorts for Peter. For sure, it is a call for him to understand what the Lord is expecting of him as he proceeds with this life. Jesus is not asking Peter to be the "leader". What he is asking is for Peter to care for all those who believe. To care for the Lord's lambs and sheep. Bruce Barton comments on what Christ is asking in this way:

"Peter was charged to care for this flock by feeding and shepherding them. Jesus used action words to describe Peter's role as a disciple. Jesus did not ask Peter to be the leader, but to take specific action: "Feed and take care of my sheep"⁷

Jesus concludes this series of questions by telling Peter basically that he would die as an old man. There is probably some significance in that it gives Peter knowledge that indeed he will have time to do what the Lord is asking of him. In verse 19, Jesus' last statement is "Follow me". From what we read next, it appears He meant it literally. We really don't know the reason Peter and Jesus walked off together but from what John says, they did.

John 21:15–19 (NASB 2020)

20 Peter turned around and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them—the one who also had leaned back on His chest at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who is betraying You?" 21 So Peter, upon seeing him, said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" 23 Therefore this account went out among the brothers, that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"

⁷ Bruce B. Barton, [John](#), Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 408.

24 This is the disciple who is testifying about these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

25 But there are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written in detail, I expect that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

Rumors and misinterpretation of things are nothing new. Here we have recorded one of the classics – that John would not die until Jesus returned. It is somewhat ironic that Peter points to John and asks if he was going to also live to be an old man. The irony is in the fact that from what we do know from early church writers and tradition, John did live far beyond Peter. There is also, an ironic twist in the fact that even though John did not live until the Lord returned, he did in essence see His return through his inspired visions which he recorded in the Revelation. Having said all that, we must not miss the overarching point that the Lord is making to Peter. It is not his concern how long others are able to serve. His concern must be about serving the Lord as he has just committed to do. We, like Peter, must also have living committed to the Lord as our only true concern.

John concludes by identifying himself again as the writer of the Gospel and declares what he is saying to be true. Then with a bold statement regarding the things which Jesus had done throughout his life and the number, John ends his Gospel account.

The Rest of the Reported Appearances

Event 14 – More Appearances Before the Ascension

At this point, we must consider the remaining time before the ascension. We only have two references to this time - one in Acts 1:3 and the other given by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:6–8. We will consider the Acts verse first.

Acts 1:3 (ESV)

3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

One thing we must emphasize again is where these appearances took place. They take place in Galilee. Now, as to exact locations we have no indication. They likely take place in many different locations.

We obviously have no details regarding the number of times Jesus appeared or what the “many proofs” were. One item we must address here is Luke’s comment about Jesus “speaking about the kingdom of God”. As we discussed in the introduction – this is the ultimate purpose of the book of Acts. Being about the “kingdom of God” is what these men will do over the next 60 plus years and, what continues to be done through us today. The result being the establishment of God’s earthly kingdom. As Micah’s sermon title back sometime ago indicated – the Kingdom is UNLEASHED!

What Jesus taught beyond “speaking about the kingdom of God”, we can only speculate. We must however, know that the “many proofs” that Luke speaks of, along with what Jesus teaches in this time, is what truly becomes the foundation these men need to turn them into the powerful believing servants and apostles we will see throughout the book of Acts.

We do have a series of other appearances that we can document through Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:6–8 (NASB 2020)

6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

One very interesting observation we may make here is regarding the “500”. Paul’s statement about most remaining and some having fallen asleep indicates that he likely knew of them personally – at least by name. A further speculation might be that these were believers, either through Jesus’ appearance to them or through the preaching of the apostles later on.

Another important note in Paul’s statement is Jesus’ appearance to James. The assumption is that this is Jesus’ brother. When we consider what his role becomes in the church at Jerusalem, it is without doubt that the Lord’s appearance to him made a difference in his life that reached epic proportions in the years to come.

We truly do not know what others were changed by His appearances and teachings during this period. What we can know is that those men and women also became part of that same foundation as the disciples.

Jesus Final Personal Farewell

Event 15 – Final Event of the forty days

When we look at the Gospels and analyze the final event of the forty days since the resurrection – the return to the Father we really see only two of them that detail the event – Luke and the LE of Mark. Matthew does detail the great commission but truly does not say anything about Christ’s return to heaven by any means.

Matthew 28:16–20 (NASB 2020)

16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated to them. 17 And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Mark 16:19–20 (NASB 2020)

19 So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. Luke details the ascension as taking place at Bethany which, of course, is only a short distance from Jerusalem.

Luke 24:50–53 (NASB 2020)

50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising God.

Luke’s gospel gives a thumbnail sketch of what he will later report in Acts. As we mentioned earlier, John’s account ends with the encounter at breakfast at the Sea of Galilee. So, appropriately, the most detailed account of the ascension is in Acts 1:4-11. Here, Luke begins the narrative.

Acts 1:4–5 (NASB 2020)

4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

This scripture shows us that there has been a change of location for the disciples from Galilee back to Jerusalem. This is not surprising. Pentecost or the “Feast of Weeks” is celebrated 50 days after the Passover. In Jesus’ time, all Jewish men were required to observe both holy days in the temple at Jerusalem so it stands to reason that the disciples would have returned at this point.

In this, Jesus is giving the apostles their final detailed instructions before his ascension. He knows that he is going to leave them now and wants to make sure they stay put in Jerusalem and wait on, and prayerfully prepare for, the next big thing – Pentecost and the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

Luke again seems to be the one supplying the details of the ascension. He covers it in Acts 1:6-9.

Acts 1:6–11 (NASB 2020)

6 So, when they had come together, they began asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” 7 But He said to them, “It is not for you to know periods of time or appointed times which the Father has set by His own authority; 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth.”

The Ascension

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were watching, and a cloud took Him up, out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, then behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them, 11 and they said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

It is important to note that the “So” of verse 6 is considered a developmental marker. It is the Greek word οὐν and is unique in that it is considered to have a constraint of close continuity. In other words, it can be considered here as equivalent to “and” which means that the discourse which began in verse 4 is continued here, it is not to be considered a separate meeting.

It is interesting that the disciples are still concerned about the timing of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. In response, Jesus again tells them that they need not be concerned about such things – the Father alone sets the times by His own authority. And immediately, He tells them again of the power of the Holy Spirit which they will receive. In other words, “Gentlemen, there is a job to do before any of that takes place!”

And with that, Jesus is “lifted up” while they are watching and a cloud took Him out of their sight. We can be sure, that they probably were not through with questions but, Jesus was just as sure He was finished answering them. Then, to conclude the scene, two angels appear and ended their gazing into the sky – it is time to move on - back to Jerusalem to begin the work that is ahead.

He lives!