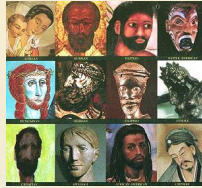


Which Jesus?

Examining Differences in
the Gospel Narratives



Jeremy T. Beahan

Are The Gospel Accounts Reliable?

Some Christian apologists claim...

- Four independent eyewitness accounts of Jesus life and ministry
- Written by his closest disciples
- They agree on every important detail
- There are some *minor* differences but we should expect some variation from eyewitness accounts.

Who Wrote the Gospels?

- The Gospels (except Luke) were written anonymously. It is unlikely that the authors were eye-witnesses to these events.
 - Several narratives mention events that had no eye-witnesses (private events of Jesus like the temptation in the wilderness or his moment alone with Pilate (Jn 18.28-19.16))
 - Luke is the only gospel that explains his research methods. He does not claim to have been an eyewitness (though he does claim to have interviewed eye-witnesses)
 - The gospels extensively quote other *written* sources word for word, a strange thing to do if one was an eyewitness to the event.

The Synoptic Gospels

- 93% of Mark is repeated verbatim in Matthew and Luke.
- Matthew, Mark, Luke are called the **Synoptic** Gospels (literally “seen together”) because they tell many of the same stories often with the exact same words
- The easiest way to account for their similarities is that the Gospel writers were copying from a common source.

The Synoptic Gospels

- But the gospels also contain many discrepancies. They differ in...
 - Details of events
 - the order of events
 - Specifics of what was said
 - the emphasis given to, and the interpretation of, events

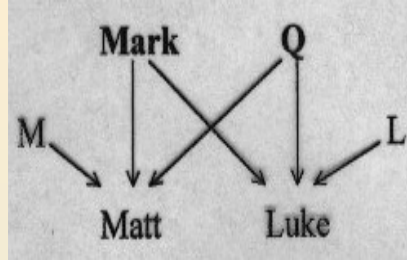
The Synoptic Problem

- The similarities greatly outweigh the differences, but at least a few of the discrepancies can have a major impact on how Jesus' life and ministry are interpreted. This has been called **the synoptic problem**.
- There is consensus among biblical scholars that the similarities and discrepancies in the gospels can be explained by the use of multiple sources that have been edited together by the gospel writers to complete their narratives. The most popular version is called the **four-source hypothesis**.

The Four Source Theory

The FST posits the existence of at least two/possibly four independent sources that were used by both Matt and Luke:

1. **Q** (quelle, German for source) was a collection of the sayings/teachings of Jesus that is now lost to history (also found in the Gnostic gospels as well)
2. The Book of Mark (in its first century form).
3. **(M)** Material found only in Matt (now lost)
4. **(L)** Material found only in Luke (now Lost).



Q, L, M are all hypothetical sources—we have no manuscripts or fragments or any historical mention of them. Though much can be inferred about Q—we can only guess about L or M. They could be written or oral, they could be single sources or several sources. They may have never existed meaning they were simply fabricated by Matt and Luke—but few scholars take that option seriously.

The logic of biblical criticism

- Christian tradition holds that Matthew was written first, and Mark is a “readers digest” version of Matthew.
- The Four Source theory depends on **Markian Priority** of the Gospel, the view that Mark is the earliest gospel and serves as the primary source material for Luke and Matthew.

Patterns of Agreement Between Gospels

Pattern	Inference
1. All tell an identical story	Later borrowed from earlier without change
2. All Differ	Borrowed from earlier but both changed (Both occur frequently)
3. Matt and Mark identical but Luke differs.	One borrowed but Luke changed (occurs frequently)
4. Luke and Mark identical but Matt differs.	One borrowed but Matt changed (occurs frequently)
5. Luke and Matt identical but Mark differs	One borrowed but Mark changed (only a few instances)
6. Luke and Matt identical but story is not in Mark	Both borrowed from a source Mark did not (occurs less frequently)

What best explains the pattern?

- If Mark was first, we would predict #5 shouldn't happen too often because it would require Matthew and Luke to alter their sources in identical ways merely by accident.
 - But if Matthew or Luke were the primary source this should happen just as often.
- More Evidence For M.P.**
- Mark's Greek is sloppy. These are often corrected in Matthew or Luke (if he borrowed he'd have to muddy things up. why?).
 - Mark is the shortest (if he borrowed he would have had to delete large portions why?).
 - Matthew and Luke agree on the order of events almost only when those events are also in Mark. They almost always disagree when they share stories not in Mark.

The Logic of Biblical Criticism

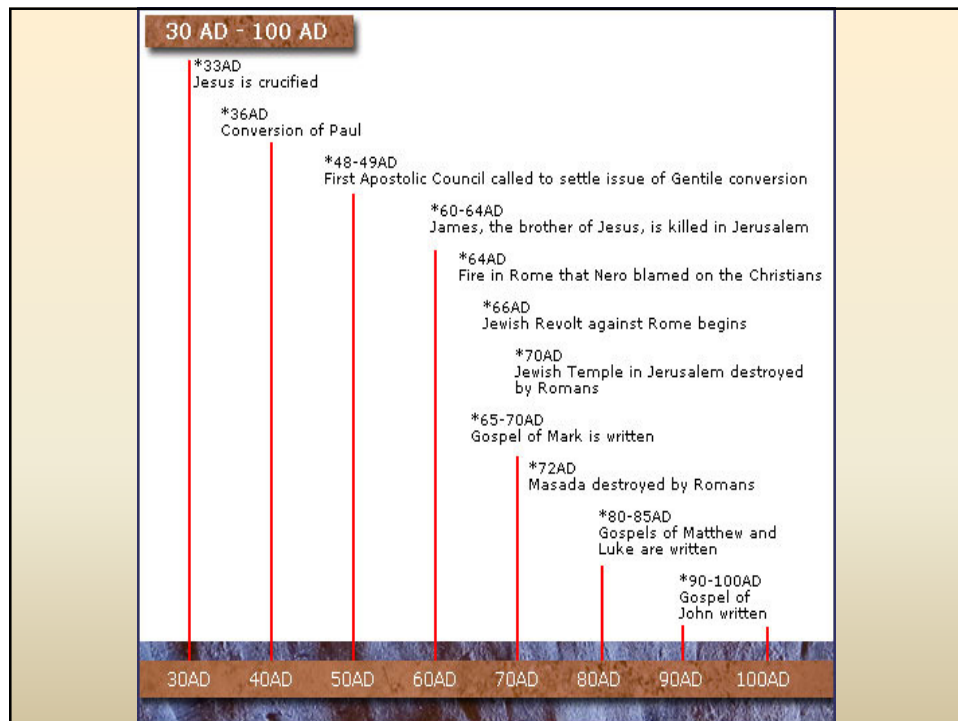
- Markian priority can make sense of nearly all of the patterns of agreement/ disagreement we find. Other theories require us to believe implausible or even absurd assumptions (sometimes several of them).

Evidence for Q

- Matthew and Luke frequently have identical wording when sharing stories not in Mark. This would suggest they shared a written document, which would retain it's meaning.
- But they always disagree on the order of those saying that are not in Mark. Which would suggest their source was not a narrative, but a collection of sayings.

The Logic of Biblical Criticism

- **Redaction Criticism:** is the study of how authors have created a work by modifying or editing their sources of information.
- If someone is to change a text, they presumably have a reason for doing so. Perhaps they disagree with their sources or feel the idea could be expressed in a better way. Perhaps they have a different tradition they are working from and wish to insert into the text...*but the only reason to change a text is if you are not satisfied with it in some way.* Unchanged source material should be compatible with the new authors message.



At the Baptism of Jesus...

Mark 1:10-11

- “And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘**You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.**”

Matthew 3:16-17

- And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘**This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.**’

The Misunderstood Messiah

Despite his authoritative teaching style and miraculous works people do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, only two people seem to understand the nature of Jesus identity in the first half of Mark...

- God (1:11).
- Demons (3:11, 1:24)
- But even his closest followers do not.
 - His family thinks he’s crazy (3:21)
 - Jewish leaders think his miracles come from satanic power (3:22).
 - His own disciples do not understand even though he performs incredible miracles like walking on water (4:41; 6:51-52) and feeding thousands with just one loaf of bread, causing Jesus to ask “Do you not yet understand?” (8;28)

Who do you say I am?

- Jesus asks his disciples who the people think he is.
 - John the Baptist
 - The Prophet Elijah raised from the dead.
 - After asking “who do you think I am?” Peter declares “You are the Christ”(8.29).

The Messianic Secret

- Peter and the disciples are “sternly ordered...not to tell anyone about him” (8:30) by Jesus.
- This happens several times in Mark after healing people, raising the dead, and casting out demons, he insists that they do not tell anyone of what happened.
- Why would Jesus not want anyone to know?
 - Some have taken this as evidence that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God and so his later followers had to explain why they were preaching otherwise.
 - The text itself hints that Jesus is afraid he will be misunderstood if people know he’s the Messiah because they have the wrong expectations.

Mark's Messiah as the Suffering Servant

- Jesus tells the disciples that he “must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders...and be killed, and after three days rise from the dead” (8:31).
- Mark portrays the Messiah not as a divine ruler but as a servant who must suffer for the sake of others before achieving glory.

Jesus on trial...

- Jesus only public pronouncement of his nature as the Messiah in Mark happens when he is asked directly by the high priest if he is “the Christ”
- Jesus confesses that he is and warns that he will soon arrive on clouds of heaven to judge the people.
- His statement is taken as blasphemy calling for a death sentence. The next morning he is given to the Roman governor Pilate who charges him with treason for claiming to be the king of the Jews.
- His followers are shocked and afraid for their lives when Jesus is executed.

Do his followers ever understand?

“But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’ ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; **and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.**”

- Original Ending Mk. 16.6-8a (65-70 c.e.)

The Son of God in Matthew

In Matthew Jesus openly proclaims his identity as the Messiah early on and several people recognize him as such.

- His family knows (told by an angelic messenger)
- The wise men from the east (who worship him)
- The disciples after seeing Jesus miracles.

Calming The Storm

Mk 6:51

“Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵²for they did not understand ...”

Matthew 14:32,33

- “When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”

Jesus Rejected by the People

- In Mark Pilate offers the people a chance to pardon Jesus. They refuse choosing a criminal instead.
- Matthew adds a detail found in no other Gospel. Pilate’s wife has been warned in a dream that Jesus is innocent. Pilate offers a pardon for Jesus to the people because he does not want to execute him.
- The crowd insists, having been influenced by the Pharisees. Pilate washes his hands saying “I am innocent of this mans blood; see to it yourselves” to which the crowd replies “His blood be on us and our children” (27:24,25)

Matthew: The Nation is Accountable

- Matthews Jesus does not hide his identity, in fact it is plain to see. This heightens the sense of Judgment when the people reject him.
- Mathews gospel also emphasizes
 - Jesus condemnation of the Pharisees
 - Jesus fulfillment of the Old Testament law

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (5:17-20)

Matthew’s Distinctive “Christmas” Narrative.



- Only Matthew and Luke mention the Christmas narrative.
- They both agree that
 - Jesus is born in Bethlehem
 - Jesus grows up in Nazareth
 - This is a fulfillment of Prophecy

Matthew 2.1-22

- Joseph and Mary appear to be living in Bethlehem (No mention of a census, the inn or a manger)
- Visited by the Magi (wise men) at their home some time after Jesus' birth.
- Leave Bethlehem for Egypt to avoid the slaughter of children ordered by King Herod. They stay until the time of Herod's death.
- Upon return they settle or "make their home" in Nazareth (in the north) after they discover it is too dangerous to live Judea (in the south because Herod's son is king).

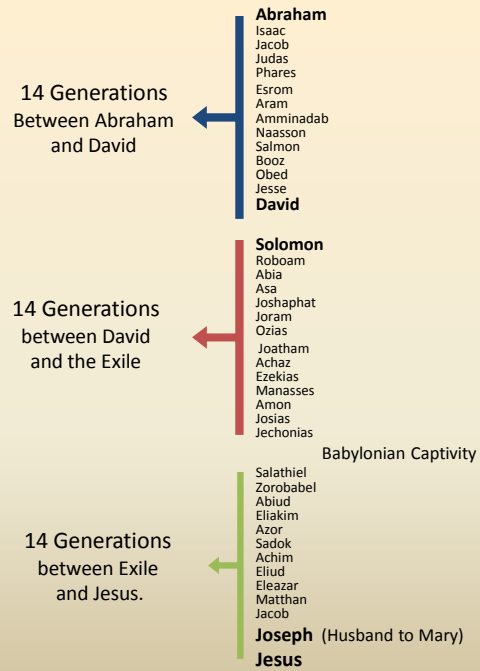
Luke 2.1-40

- Joseph and Mary live in Nazareth and must go to Bethlehem because of a census.
- Visited by shepherds the night of Jesus birth (no mention of the wise men or the star).
- Leave Bethlehem for Jerusalem (40 days after Jesus' birth) to make the appropriate sacrifices at the temple.
- Returned home to "their own town" of Nazareth after they fulfilled their temple obligations.

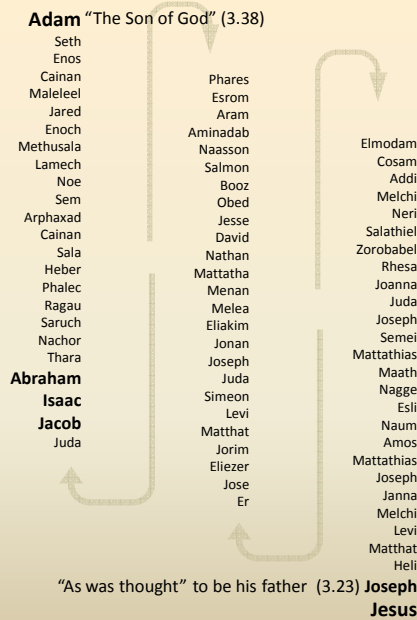
What do we make of the differences?

- Matthew portrays Jesus as *symbolically re-living episodes of Jewish history*
- Jesus is exiled in a foreign land like the Jews in Babylon
- Jesus must come out of Egypt and return to Israel like the Jews liberation from Egypt and journey to the promised land.
- Shortly after Jesus "passes through water" in his baptism, like the Israelites at the red sea.
- Then Jesus is prepared for his mission by resisting temptation in the wilderness for 40 days, like the 40 years spent in the dessert.

- Unlike Mark or John Matthew has a **genealogy** of Jesus, tracing his ancestry back to King David, to prove that he is a legitimate line of Davidic Kings.
- Matthew also draws attention to the number of generations between significant events Jewish history...concluding that they are equally spaced every 14 generations.



- Luke traces Jesus' ancestry all the way back to Adam (who is described as "the son of God") the first man, father of all humanity.
- Luke portrays Jesus as a *universal savior*. He is indeed the Jewish Messiah, but he is also the savior of the whole world—Jew and Gentile



Luke's Jesus: The Rejected Prophet

- Jesus not only sees himself as a Prophet but others do too (7.16). Jesus however recognizes that Prophets are killed by the people, often in Jerusalem.
- “it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem.”
³⁴**Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!** How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (13.33-34)”

Kingdom Come?

- Luke's rejects the apocalypticism of Matt and Mark
- To Luke there will be “an end of the age” (21.7-32) but it cannot be imminent because the gospel must reach the gentile world first. Luke's Jesus dispels the notion (found in Matt and Mk) that the apocalypse will happen within anyone's life-time...and when Luke's Jesus says the “Kingdom is near” it's in the sense that Jesus himself is near (10.9,11;11.20;17.21).
- There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the **Son of Man coming** in his kingdom (Mat 16.28).
- But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God' (Lk 9.27)
- As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately...(see 19.11-27)

Eternal Life and the Kingdom

Matt & Mk

- From that time Jesus began to proclaim, '**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.**'
- **Only the one who endures to the end will be saved...**Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake. (Mk 13)'

John

"I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without **being born from above...Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.** whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath"

- Most think John did not have access to the synoptic gospels, because the stories they have in common use entirely different language in John.
- This may indicate that all Gospel writers were sharing a common oral tradition.

One of these is not like the others...



Not Found In John	Only Found in John
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temptation in the wilderness • Most of the parables • casting out of demons • Transfiguration • No Lords supper • Not put on trial by the High priest • Not found guilty of blasphemy 	<p>Jesus as the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word of God • The creator of the universe • Equal with God • Sent from Heaven soon to return • To hear, see, reject him is to hear, see, reject the Father • Proclaims “you must be born again”

The “I Am” statements

- In the synoptics Jesus message is focused on the Kingdom but he is at times reluctant to speak about himself. In John the kingdom is hardly mentioned but Jesus continually attests to his own divinity.
 - Jesus uses the phrase “I am” 2 times in Mk & Lk, 5 times in Matt but 46 times in John.
 - The most striking is his statement “before Abraham was I am” (8.58) where he takes the very name of God first spoken to Moses (Ex. 3.14)
- Jesus says “I am..
- “the bread of life” (6.35)
 - “the light of the world” (8.12)
 - “the gate” (10.7)
 - “the good shepherd” (10.11)
 - “the resurrection and the life” (11.25)
 - “the true vine” (15.1)
 - “the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (14.6)

The Lamb of God

- John's gospel is the only one that refers to Jesus as "...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1.29)
- John is the only Gospel that has Jesus crucified before the Passover meal. John's Jesus is executed at the same time of day the Passover lamb would have been sacrificed.



The Time of Jesus Death

Mark

- Passover takes place on a Thursday
- Last Supper is a Passover meal (occurs the evening after Passover lambs are slaughtered; Mk 14)
- Jesus is crucified at 9am, the morning after the Passover meal was eaten (15.25)

John

- Passover meal takes place on Friday
- Last Supper not a Passover meal (occurs before lambs are slaughtered; no symbolism recorded)
- Jesus is crucified after noon, the day before Passover meal is eaten (19.14,16).
- Crucified men's legs are broken to hasten their deaths because of the holiday.

Jesus in the Gospels

Mark: The suffering servant; misunderstood Messiah

Matthew: Jewish Messiah

Luke: Rejected Prophet; savior to the world.

John: God incarnate; revelation of God to man; source of salvation.

But wouldn't it be better to just combine all the accounts?

- For centuries people have preferred to **Harmonize** discrepancies in the gospel narratives. That is, to search for explanations that could reconcile differences and integrate all 4 accounts into one narrative.
- Harmonization assumes that if properly interpreted the Gospels are consistent with one another...they just appear to be different because each Gospel contains only part of the story...that to understand the full meaning they must all be read together.



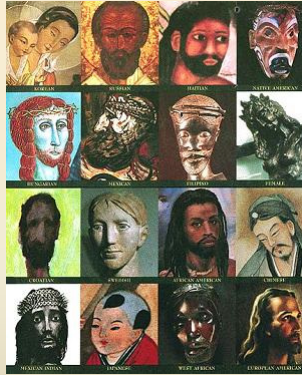
The Seven Last Words of Jesus

1	Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.	Lk 23.34
2	Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.	Lk 23.43
3	Woman, here is your son.	Jn 19.26
4★	My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?	Mk 15.34
5	I am thirsty.	Jn 19.28
6★	It is finished.	Jn 19.30
7★	Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.	Lk 23.46

A classic example of harmonization: “the Seven Last Words of Jesus” is used in many church liturgies...where an attempt has been made to combine and organize Jesus different statements into a chronological list.

Mark	Matthew	Luke	John*																					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Falls to ground. Pleads 3 times to “remove this cup from me” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pleads 2 times. Like mark “not what I want, what you want” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asks once, adding “if you are willing” [sweats blood only in later manuscripts] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say “father, save me from this hour?” No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.” 12.27 																					
<table border="1"> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.</td> <td>Lk 23.34</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.</td> <td>Lk 23.43</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>Woman, here is your son.</td> <td>Jn 19.26</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4★</td> <td>My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?</td> <td>Mk 15.34</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>I am thirsty.</td> <td>Jn 19.28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6★</td> <td>It is finished.</td> <td>Jn 19.30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7★</td> <td>Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.</td> <td>Lk 23.46</td> </tr> </table>				1	Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.	Lk 23.34	2	Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.	Lk 23.43	3	Woman, here is your son.	Jn 19.26	4★	My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?	Mk 15.34	5	I am thirsty.	Jn 19.28	6★	It is finished.	Jn 19.30	7★	Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.	Lk 23.46
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<p>*In John there is no garden of Gethsemane scene. The verse used for comparison is taken from Jesus’ discourse about his own death in chapter 12</p>																								

Which Jesus?



“The differences are significant and should not be downplayed as if Mark and Luke were portraying Jesus in precisely the same way. When modern readers act as if they were...they take neither account seriously, but rather create their own account.”

–Bart Ehrman

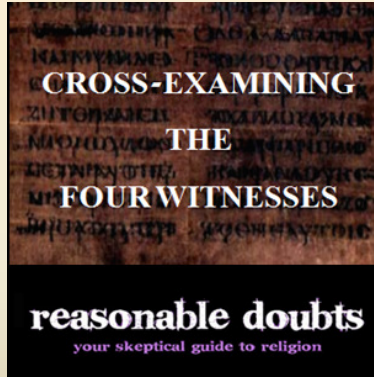
The Oxford Bible Commentary
by John Barton , John Muddiman
Publisher: Oxford University Press, USA; New Ed edition (February 6, 2007)

To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application
by Steven L. McKenzie , Stephen R. Haynes
Publisher: Westminster John Knox Press; Rev Exp Su edition (September 1999)

The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings
by Bart D. Ehrman
Publisher: Oxford University Press, USA; 3rd edition

Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography
by John Dominic Crossan
Publisher: HarperOne (February 18, 1995)

www.doubtcast.org



For more information...

Reasonable Doubts
Episodes 26 & 27

Matthew 28.7-20	Luke 24	John 20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me... the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ³³ But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened. ...While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mary Magdalene ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' ³Then Peter and the other disciple... were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there... [Mary] turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus... Supposing him to be the gardener... ¹⁶Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ' [teacher!]'... Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her... But Thomas (who was called the Twin'), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

The Resurrection Account

Matt & Mark

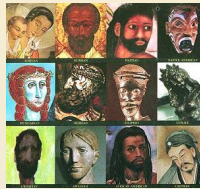
- Matthew provides the happy ending Mark never had, but still mentions the doubt of the disciples. Matthew has the disciples meet Jesus at Galilee, a reasonable place to go if that is where most of them lived.

Luke & John

- Luke has the disciples doubting too...(but some like Peter did believe) but provides a chance for Jesus to prove himself...also demonstrating that he is indeed a man.
- Luke has them meet in Jerusalem the focal point of the Prophetic aspect of his gospel.
- John's account is similar but targets a specific disciple as the doubter...Thomas (perhaps because there was another popular Gospel allegedly written by him that John disagreed with)

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