Comparing the resurrection accounts: student handout

Module 10: The Resurrection Narratives and Early Creedal Traditions.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____ **Class:** _____

Central question: How do the earliest accounts of Jesus' resurrection compare, and what can a historian say about how they relate to one another?

Read each document's source note and the line saying what kind of source it is first. Fill in the chart and organizer with your partner. Every document comes from a page of ExtantBible; three of them include short passages from the ancient texts themselves, in a public-domain translation.

Document A: Paul's list

Source: The chapter page for 1 Corinthians 15 on ExtantBible, with the date from the book page, which follows Raymond Brown.

Primary source: Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, written 56 to 57 CE (the date most scholars give), in a public-domain translation (Berean Standard Bible (public domain, 2023)).

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve.”

1 Corinthians 15:3-5, Berean Standard Bible (public domain, 2023)

“After that, He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. And last of all He appeared to me also, as to one of untimely birth.”

1 Corinthians 15:6-8, Berean Standard Bible (public domain, 2023)

- Paul says he passed on what he had received (15:3). Cephas is the name Paul uses for Peter.
- His list, in order: Cephas, the Twelve, more than five hundred at once, James, all the apostles and, last of all, Paul himself (15:5-8). He names no women and tells of no visit to the tomb.
- Most scholars date the letter to 56 to 57 CE, about 25 years after the crucifixion, which most scholars date to 30 CE. The site labels both dates "Most scholars agree".

On ExtantBible: 1 Corinthians, chapter 15

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Document B: Dates, and who used whom

Source: The section "What was written early" on the What actually survives page, the book pages for the dates, and the Two-Source explanation on the page The first three Gospels.

A summary by ExtantBible (2026) of the dates and judgments in Raymond Brown, An Introduction to the New Testament (1997), and of the Two-Source explanation as Carson, Moo and Morris (1992) and Ehrman and Méndez (2024) describe it, with a short passage from Paul's Letter to the Galatians, written in the 50s (Berean Standard Bible (public domain, 2023)).

Account	Written (the date most scholars give)
1 Corinthians (Paul)	56 to 57 CE
Mark	65 to 75 CE
Matthew	80 to 90 CE
Luke	80 to 90 CE
Acts (by the author of Luke)	80 to 95 CE
John	90 to 100 CE

“Only after three years did I go up to Jerusalem to confer with Cephas, and I stayed with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.”

Galatians 1:18-19, Berean Standard Bible (public domain, 2023)

- Paul's letters are the earliest Christian writings that survive; Brown dates seven of them to the 50s, before any of the Gospels.
- Brown calls the list in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 an early sequence that Paul received. When Paul received it is not known; Brown reports the suggestion that he learned it on the visit to Jerusalem in the passage above, which Brown dates about 39 CE.
- Most scholars hold that Matthew and Luke each used Mark, because they follow Mark's order of events and much of its wording (the Two-Source explanation; the site's label is "Most scholars agree"). Nearly all scholars agree that the same author wrote Luke and Acts.
- A minority date the Gospels earlier: Carson, Moo and Morris put Mark in the late fifties and Luke and Acts in the early 60s. The site labels that view "Some scholars hold".

On ExtantBible: What actually survives: what was written early

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Document C: The Gospel endings, detail by detail

Source: Accounts compared on ExtantBible, with the chapter pages for Matthew 28 and Luke 24. The table gives each Gospel's detail in the site's short summary, with its verses.

Primary sources: the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, written 80 to 90 CE (the date most scholars give), in short passages from a public-domain translation (Berean Standard Bible (public domain, 2023)), with a table of all four Gospels summarized by ExtantBible (2026).

Detail	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
Women at the tomb	Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (16:1)	Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (28:1)	Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women (24:1, 10)	Mary Magdalene (20:1)
Who they see	A young man in a white robe, sitting inside (16:5)	An angel sitting on the stone (28:2-3)	Two men in dazzling clothes (24:4)	Two angels in white (20:12)
What the women do next	Run from the tomb and say nothing to anyone, afraid (16:8)	Run to tell the disciples (28:8)	Tell the eleven and the others (24:9)	Mary tells Peter and the other disciple that the body has been taken (20:2)
Where the eleven see Jesus	No appearance (the earliest text ends at 16:8)	On a mountain in Galilee (28:16-17)	In Jerusalem (24:33-36)	In Jerusalem, a week later again, then in Galilee (20:19)

“Then go quickly and tell His disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him.’ See, I have told you.”

Matthew 28:7, the angel speaking to the women, Berean Standard Bible (public domain, 2023)

“And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, gathered together and saying, “The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to Simon!””

Luke 24:33-34, the two disciples back from Emmaus, Berean Standard Bible (public domain, 2023)

“And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you. But remain in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Luke 24:49, Jesus speaking to the eleven in Jerusalem, Berean Standard Bible (public domain, 2023)

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- The site sorts each detail into four categories: the same detail; a minor variation (small differences in wording, number or emphasis that do not change what happened); a different detail (both could be true: a different or extra detail that does not rule out the other accounts); and a conflicting detail (as written, both cannot be true). All four Gospels have Mary Magdalene come to the tomb early on the first day of the week; "just after sunrise", "at dawn" and "while it is still dark" are minor variations of the same morning.
- One figure or two: Mark has one young man, Matthew one angel, Luke two men and John two angels. The site marks Matthew's, Luke's and John's as different details that could both be true: Mark mentions one figure but does not say there was only one.
- Where the eleven see Jesus: the site marks Matthew's mountain in Galilee as a different detail that could be true alongside Jerusalem in Luke and John (John tells both), and labels the call debated: Brown asks whether Luke's Jerusalem appearances and Matthew's Galilee appearance can be made one sequence.
- Two details are marked conflicting, both labeled debated: Mark's women say nothing to anyone (16:8) while Matthew's and Luke's tell the disciples (Document D), and Luke's disciples remain in the city (24:49) while Mark and Matthew send them to Galilee. Ehrman and Méndez contrast Luke's instruction with Mark's and Matthew's (ch. 9, pp. 164-165); Brown reports long efforts to combine the Jerusalem and Galilee appearances and asks whether that is possible (ch. 6).
- Paul and Luke both report an appearance to Peter, as Cephas or Simon. Only Matthew tells of guards at the tomb; only Paul of the five hundred and of James.
- Matthew 28:7 repeats much of the wording of Mark 16:7 (Document D). Shared wording and order are the evidence on which most scholars conclude that Matthew used Mark.

On ExtantBible: Accounts compared: the resurrection

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Document D: Mark's ending in the copies

Source: The page for the longer ending of Mark on ExtantBible, drawn from the standard Greek text (NA28) and the commentary of Bruce Metzger, with the chapter page for Mark 16.

Primary sources: Mark 16:7-8 (Mark was written 65 to 75 CE, the date most scholars give; Berean Standard Bible, public domain, 2023) and Irenaeus, Against Heresies, written about 175 to 185 CE (Ante-Nicene Fathers translation, 1885), with a summary by ExtantBible (2026) of the copies, of Metzger's commentary (1994), and of how Brown (1997), Carson, Moo and Morris (1992) and Ehrman and Méndez (2024) read 16:8.

Copy or writer	What it is, and its date	Mark 16:9-20
Irenaeus	A bishop of Lyon in Gaul who wrote about 175 to 185 CE	Quotes verse 19
Eusebius	A bishop and church historian of the early 4th century	Says almost all the Greek copies he knew lacked it
Codex Vaticanus	A handwritten Greek Bible, about the middle of the 4th century	Lacks it: ends at 16:8
Codex Sinaiticus	A handwritten Greek Bible with the whole New Testament, about the middle of the 4th century	Lacks it: ends at 16:8
Codex Alexandrinus	A handwritten Greek Bible, early 5th century	Has it

“But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you.’ So the women left the tomb and ran away, trembling and bewildered. And in their fear they did not say a word to anyone.”

Mark 16:7-8, the young man speaking to the women, then the last verse of Mark's earliest text, Berean Standard Bible (public domain, 2023)

“Also, towards the conclusion of his Gospel, Mark says: "So then, after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God""

Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.10.5 (quoting Mark 16:19), trans. Roberts and Rambaut, Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1 (1885)

- Mark's earliest text ends at 16:8. The site's label for the judgment that verses 9 to 20 were added later is "Nearly all scholars agree".
- Internal evidence (clues inside the text): Metzger notes that verses 9 to 20 use many words found nowhere else in Mark, and that verse 9 introduces Mary Magdalene as if for the first time, although 16:1 has just named her; the other women drop out of the story.
- What copyists did: some copies add a different, two-sentence ending after 16:8. Metzger argues that no copyist who had verses 9 to 20 would have swapped them for it, so those copies also point to a Mark that once ended at 16:8.

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- The longer ending is old: Irenaeus quotes it. The standard Greek text (NA28) still prints it, in double brackets to mark it as a later addition.
- Brown calls an ending at 16:8 the majority view. Some scholars argue that the last page was lost, since 16:7 promises an appearance in Galilee that Mark never tells.
- The women's silence (16:8) is one of the two details the site marks as conflicting, labeled debated. Ehrman and Méndez read it as written: the women tell no one, and scribes later added an ending more in keeping with the other Gospels (Box 2.2, p. 26; ch. 6, pp. 116-117). Brown says Luke greatly modifies Mark, so that the women do not stay silent (ch. 9, At the Empty Tomb). On the other side, Brown reports, and in a note assumes, reading 16:8 as a suspended ending that readers are expected to complete (ch. 7, nn. 57 and 96), and Carson, Moo and Morris suggest the women's fear may mean reverential awe (ch. 3, Mark, Text).
- With the longer ending switched on, Mark adds appearances to Mary Magdalene, two disciples walking in the country and the eleven at a meal, and Jesus taken up into heaven.

On ExtantBible: The longer ending of Mark (manuscript difference page)

Evidence organizer

	Question	Your notes and evidence (names and dates)
1.	Which of the five accounts was written first, and when do most scholars date it?	
2.	What does Paul say about where his list came from, what does Brown call it, and when might Paul have received it?	
3.	Name one detail all four Gospels share, one the site marks as a different detail that could both be true, and one it marks as conflicting.	

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	Question	Your notes and evidence (names and dates)
4.	Why does the site set out the works' views on the two details it marks as conflicting as written? For one of the two, name a scholar or book on each side.	
5.	Which appearance do Paul and Luke both report?	
6.	Where do Matthew and Luke place the appearance to the eleven?	
7.	Compare Matthew 28:7 (Document C) with Mark 16:7 (Document D). What do you notice, and what does it mean for counting their agreements?	
8.	Where does Mark's earliest text end, which two copies show it, and what label does the site give the judgment that verses 9 to 20 were added later?	

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	Question	Your notes and evidence (names and dates)
9.	Besides the copies, what evidence inside verses 9 to 20 points to a later addition, and what shows the verses are old?	
10.	What does this comparison not decide?	

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Your written answer

In one or two paragraphs, explain how the earliest accounts of the resurrection compare and how they relate. Cite at least three documents by letter, give the date of at least two accounts, name one agreement and one difference, and quote at least one primary source from the documents.

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Check your work: the single-point rubric

The middle column is the target. Note where the work falls short on the left and where it goes beyond on the right.

Concerns	Target	Going beyond
	Sourcing: Gives each account its date as most scholars give it, says which writers most scholars think used another, and identifies any copy it names with its date.	
	Close comparison: Quotes or points to specific details, with their verses, where the accounts agree and where they differ, and sorts them as the site does (same detail, minor variation, different detail, conflicting detail), saying where a call is debated and who holds each side.	
	Corroboration: Explains what an agreement between two accounts does and does not show when one writer may have used the other, using shared wording as evidence.	
	The copies: Explains why Mark's earliest text ends at 16:8, using both the copies that end there and the evidence inside verses 9 to 20.	
	Descriptive, qualified language: Attributes each view to those who hold it ("most scholars date", "Brown calls", "Metzger notes") and keeps the comparison of sources separate from statements of belief about the event.	

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