

# Proof Positive - The Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus Christ

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*To these [the apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. - Acts 1:3*

This morning and for the next few weeks, we are going to summarize and review each of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus recorded in Scripture. The fact is, there are numerous independent, reliable, and time-tested accounts from people who actually saw Jesus physically alive after He rose from the dead. These provide compelling evidence that the resurrection is indeed true, that Jesus lives, and that the word of God is absolutely accurate. In addition to these instances, it is certainly possible that Jesus appeared to others whose stories were not included in the Biblical text.

The gospels provide four differing accounts as to exactly what happened on that glorious morning and in the days that followed. These details are not contradictory, but rather complementary. Still, the passages have to be reconciled in order to tell the complete story. Various proposals have been put forward as to how these individual stories fit together in a proper sequence. For the purposes of this study, I will present my interpretation of these events. However, I am acknowledging at the outset that other possibilities exist. The most important thing is that they all happened, regardless of the precise order in which they occurred.

Let us begin by setting the stage for the events that would follow...

After Jesus died on the cross Friday evening, His followers hastily took His body down and readied it for burial. They rushed to bury Jesus in a nearby tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea. Because the Sabbath began at sunset that night, and no one was allowed to work on the Sabbath, there was simply not enough time to perform a proper burial or complete the customary procedures before dark. Thus, Jesus' body was wrapped in grave clothes and laid in the tomb prematurely. The grieving women who looked on fully intended to return after the Sabbath day (Saturday) was over in order to prepare the body of Jesus more properly for burial. To this end, they made and even bought some spices and perfumes to bring with them when they returned. Early Sunday morning, all of the women travelled together back to the tomb...

## I. THE FIRST APPEARANCE - MARY MAGDALENE (John 20:11-18; Mark 16:9-11)

Mary Magdalene is a prominent character in the gospel narratives. Her name suggests that she was from the city of Magdala which was located on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was only a short distance to the south of Capernaum, which was the base of Jesus' operations. Thus, it is very reasonable to believe that Jesus visited Magdala during His earthly ministry, though such a visit is not expressly mentioned in the Bible. Perhaps He encountered her while

He was there. Another possibility is that she had heard about the healing powers of Jesus and sought Him out, just as many others did in and around Galilee.

Scripture clearly states that Mary Magdalene had been possessed by seven demons. Whether in Magdala or elsewhere, at some point Jesus cast these demons out. Having experienced His miraculous healing firsthand, Mary Magdalene became a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. She was among the women who travelled with Jesus and supported His ministry financially.

Mary Magdalene had witnessed both the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. Early on Sunday morning, before the sun had risen, she (and the other women) came to the tomb where the Lord's body had been laid. When she arrived, she found that the stone had been rolled away. Fearing that the body had been stolen, Mary Magdalene hurriedly ran to tell Peter and John, leaving the other women there. She found them, told them what she'd seen, and then followed both men back to the empty tomb. By this time the other women had already left. After a brief visit, Peter and John returned to their homes still uncertain as to what had taken place.

Mary Magdalene remained alone at the tomb and wept over the absence of Jesus' body. Looking inside, she saw two angels seated where He had been laid. They asked her why she was crying. When Mary Magdalene turned around, she saw the risen Jesus but initially thought that He was the gardener. She asked Him if He had taken Jesus' body somewhere. The Lord simply answered, "Mary!" Hearing His voice, immediately she recognized the risen Jesus and fell at His feet to worship. He told her to stop clinging to Him because He'd not yet ascended, but rather to go and tell the disciples that He was alive just as He'd foretold. She hurried to do so, but they didn't believe her.

Mary Magdalene was the first person to personally witness Jesus Christ after He rose from the grave. Not only did she see Him, but she also spoke to Him and touched His resurrected body. What a tremendous blessing and honor this was!

## II. THE SECOND APPEARANCE - THE OTHER WOMEN (Matthew 28:8-10)

Along with Mary Magdalene, there were other women who came to the tomb that morning as well - including "the other Mary", Salome, and Joanna. "The other Mary" is most likely the same person as "Mary the mother of James". It is quite possible that she was Jesus' aunt, His mother Mary's sister. If so, she had been present at the cross just two days before. Salome was the wife of Zebedee, and therefore the mother of the apostles James and John. Joanna was one of the several women who, like Mary Magdalene, had been healed from some malady and had chosen to follow Jesus.

These women arrived at the tomb to find the stone rolled away. After Mary Magdalene departed, an angel appeared and spoke to them while they were waiting outside. He invited them to go in and take a look. He also told them to go tell the disciples that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee and they would see Him there. So these women went into the tomb as

instructed. When they entered, they were met by two angelic men who showed them the empty grave. The women were startled and terrified. Again they were told to go tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead, just as He'd predicted.

The women left the tomb in awe of what they'd just experienced, probably only minutes before Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John arrived. They were still very uneasy and afraid of all that had happened. They determined not to tell anyone other than the disciples about what was going on, at least until they could figure out if it was true or not. As they were returning to tell the disciples, the resurrected Jesus met them. The women fell at His feet and worshipped Him. Now they knew for certain that He was alive. Jesus echoed the words of the angel who'd spoken to them earlier, saying to tell the disciples to go to Galilee and meet Him there. Hearing this, the women now rushed to tell the disciples the amazing news. Sadly, the disciples did not believe their report either.

This group of other women were the second people to personally see, speak to, and touch Jesus Christ following His resurrection. Thus, the first two appearances that Jesus made after rising from the grave were to women. Though both Mary Magdalene and the other women went and told the disciples the remarkable news, it seems that neither of their testimonies were taken very seriously. The disciples were hesitant to accept that such a miracle could actually occur.

### III. THE THIRD APPEARANCE - PETER (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5)

Peter was one of the leading apostles. He was always quick to speak, and sometimes stuck his foot in his mouth as a result. Peter had denied Christ three times on the night of His arrest just over a day before. As such, he was still reeling with deep guilt and shame over what he'd said and done. Already that morning he'd received a report from Mary Magdalene that the tomb was empty and had gone to see for himself. But when he discovered that the body was missing, Peter was perplexed and feared that graverobbers had taken it.

The Bible does not give us any details about Jesus' appearance to Peter that day other than stating twice that it happened. When evening came and the disciples had all gathered together, Scripture indicates that the risen Lord had already spoken to Peter. The apostle Paul later confirms this in his writings. It must have occurred sometime on that same Sunday morning or early afternoon. When he told the rest of the disciples, they finally began to believe that perhaps Jesus' resurrection was indeed true.

Peter was the third person or group of persons to actually see Jesus after He rose again. The details of this appearance are unknown, but it did happen. Jesus was alive, and the number of witnesses to this fact was beginning to increase...

### IV. THE FOURTH APPEARANCE - CLEOPAS AND ANOTHER DISCIPLE (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35)

Cleopas has traditionally been identified as Clopas, the husband of “the other Mary” who was one of the women that had already seen the risen Jesus earlier that morning. He is considered to be the same person as Alphaeus, the father of James the Less. If this is correct, then Cleopas and Mary were a married couple who were the parents of one of the apostles. Furthermore, if this “other Mary” was the sister of Jesus’ mother Mary, then Cleopas would be her brother-in-law and the Lord’s uncle. Other historians have proposed that Cleopas was the brother of Jesus’ earthly father Joseph. In this scenario, he would still be Jesus’ uncle. Though his exact identity is uncertain, Cleopas was likely a close relative of Jesus.

It is reasonable to believe that Cleopas, his wife Mary, and perhaps some other companions had come from the nearby town of Emmaus to participate in the Jewish Passover celebration at Jerusalem. Over the course of their stay they may have seen Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion, and burial. On Sunday morning, Cleopas’ wife Mary went with the other women to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body while he remained at the house with the other disciples. Sometime later, the women returned reporting that the grave was empty, and that they’d seen and spoken to the risen Jesus. But the apostles and other disciples - including Cleopas - did not believe them. And so, perhaps around midday, he departed to go back home.

The Bible indicates that Cleopas was travelling with another disciple, but it does not give their name. Some have suggested that it was his wife Mary. Others believe it was someone else - perhaps a friend or another family member. Mary may have stayed behind in Jerusalem, perhaps to care for and comfort her grieving sister, while Cleopas went home without her. Regardless of who was with Cleopas, the two of them were talking about all that had taken place. As they walked, a stranger headed in the same direction down the road approached them and joined their conversation. Cleopas shared what had happened to Jesus that weekend, and about the incredible reports from the women that He’d risen from the dead. Apparently, they had left Jerusalem prior to the Lord’s appearance to Peter. After Cleopas spoke, the stranger began expounding on the Scriptures, explaining how all of these events were a fulfillment of prophecy.

When they arrived at Emmaus (likely in the mid-afternoon), Cleopas and his companion urged this stranger to stay with them for the night. He agreed, and they all went in together and sat down at the table to eat. The stranger took some bread, blessed it, broke it, and began to distribute it. As he did so, their eyes were opened and they recognized that He was the risen Jesus. In an instant, He vanished from their presence. The pair immediately got up and hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the apostles and others that they’d seen the resurrected Christ. It was only 7 miles from Emmaus to Jerusalem, which would take approximately 2-3 hours to walk - even less if someone was running. Thus, they arrived in Jerusalem later that same evening.

The fourth appearance of Jesus following His resurrection was to Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus. He walked with them, spoke with them, and even sat down to eat with them. What a marvelous occurrence!

## V. THE FIFTH APPEARANCE - THE DISCIPLES WITHOUT THOMAS (Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-25)

It was now Sunday evening and the disciples had all gathered together. They were hiding for fear of the Jews. This group included not only the apostles, but presumably many of the other disciples and women who followed Jesus. For some unknown reason Thomas was absent that night. Nevertheless, the rest spoke about the empty tomb and the wonderful events of the day. Mary Magdalene, the other women, Peter, and now these two who had just returned from Emmaus had all reportedly seen the risen Jesus. Could their testimonies be true?

As they talked, Jesus suddenly appeared to them in the room though the doors were securely shut. They were startled at first and believed that they were seeing a spirit. Jesus showed them the wounds and His hands and feet and invited them to touch His "flesh and bones". Then, to further prove that He had physically risen from the dead, Jesus asked them for something to eat. As they watched, the Lord ate a piece of broiled fish. Without a doubt, He was not a ghost or a spirit but rather a materially resurrected person.

Jesus then taught them that His death and resurrection were the fulfillment of Scripture. He told them that they were all witnesses of this amazing truth - that He was indeed the long awaited Messiah through whom God's salvation had finally come. Jesus then breathed on them, symbolically demonstrating that they would soon receive the Holy Spirit. He told them to wait until then before proclaiming this good news to others.

Jesus' appearance to the disciples, without Thomas, was the fifth such event that day. At least 10 apostles and likely several other disciples were present in that room to witness the risen Lord. It was a large gathering. According to the Biblical record, this was the final appearance of Jesus on the day of His resurrection.

## VI. THE SIXTH APPEARANCE - THE DISCIPLES WITH THOMAS (John 20:26-29, Mark 16:14)

Everyone but Thomas had now seen, spoken with, and in many cases had physically touched the risen Jesus Christ. They were all amazed and overjoyed that He was alive and well. They spoke about it amongst themselves almost constantly. However, Thomas had not yet had a personal encounter with the risen Lord and was left with only the disciple's spoken testimonies. While they were all insistent that Jesus was alive, Thomas was hesitant to believe until He saw Jesus for himself.

Because of his skepticism, over the centuries Christians have given Thomas the dubious distinction of "Doubting Thomas". Honestly, this is an unfair title. The Bible indicates that none of the disciples initially believed the reports of Mary Magdalene and/or the other women. They too refused to believe that Jesus had been resurrected until they actually saw and touched Him. The doubts that Thomas experienced were no different than those of the other disciples, yet he

alone received the notorious nickname. For an entire week, Thomas was left to wonder if Jesus had actually risen from the grave.

The Sunday after His resurrection all of the disciples were gathered together again in their Jerusalem residence. This time the apostle Thomas was present with them. The risen Jesus appeared to the entire group, but spoke directly to Thomas inviting him to touch His nail-scarred hands and sword-pierced side. Seeing this, Thomas believed and cried out “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus answered saying, “Blessed are those who have not seen yet still believe.”

This encounter with the disciples, most notably with “Doubting Thomas”, is the sixth post-resurrection appearance of Jesus Christ found in Scripture. The popular saying “Seeing is believing” originates from this story. As Christians today, our faith serves as the evidence of things not yet seen... such as the living Jesus.

#### VII. THE SEVENTH APPEARANCE - SEVEN OF THE DISCIPLES (John 21:1-23)

During the Last Supper, which occurred prior to His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus told the apostles that He would go before them into Galilee. On the morning of the resurrection, the angels at the empty tomb told the other women (not including Mary Magdalene) to tell the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee. The risen Christ restated this command when He appeared to these women on their way back from there. Thus, the disciples had been instructed repeatedly to meet Jesus after the resurrection somewhere in Galilee.

Depending upon the speed of one's steps, the route taken, weather conditions, and various other factors it might take around 10 days or so to walk from Jerusalem to Galilee. If the disciples departed shortly after the Lord's appearance to them (with Thomas), they might have arrived in Galilee sometime during the middle of the next week. This would be approximately 20 days after the resurrection. Most likely they went to the seaside city of Capernaum, which had been the home base of Jesus' earthly ministry.

A small group of these disciples - namely Peter, James, John, Nathanael (also known as Bartholomew), Thomas, and 2 others - decided to go fishing on the Sea of Galilee (Tiberias). They fished all night long and caught nothing. As the sun rose, they heard a man calling from the shore to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. They did so, and the nets were filled with fish - so many that they couldn't pull them up! Peter remembered a similar experience from a few years earlier when he'd first been called to become a disciple. Recognizing that the man on the beach must be the risen Jesus, Peter immediately dove into the water and swam to meet Him. The others rowed their boat ashore, dragging the fish-filled net with them.

That morning the Jesus and these select disciples had breakfast together on the beach. It was on this occasion that the risen Christ restored Peter and told him 3 separate times to feed His sheep. Jesus also spoke about the future persecution of both John and Peter, foretelling that

Peter would die as a martyr but John would survive. This, of course, actually happened just as the Lord predicted.

This breakfast on the seashore was the seventh appearance of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. It was His third encounter with the apostles as a group. His first 2 appearances to them had occurred in Jerusalem, once with Thomas and once without.

#### VIII. THE EIGHTH APPEARANCE - OVER 500 FOLLOWERS (Matt 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; 1 Corinthians 15:6)

Though the Bible does not directly state the location, tradition holds that the disciples and many other followers met with Jesus in Galilee on Mt. Arbel. This peak stands on the eastern shore of the Sea of Tiberias, only 20 miles south of Capernaum. It is the highest elevation in the region. Those standing on the top of the mountain could see for miles around and across the sea to the numerous places where Jesus had ministered. This would be a fitting place for Jesus to arrange a meeting with His disciples.

The disciples climbed the mountain, along with many others. Together the crowd numbered over 500 people. This was an appointed meeting, so they expected Jesus to be there. Sure enough, He appeared to them on the mountain top and delivered one of the most well-known commands in all of Scripture. It has become known as the Great Commission. Jesus told them to go into all the world, to make disciples of all people, to baptize them in His name, and to teach them the things of God. He then described some characteristics of those who would believe. In short, He told His disciples what they were to do now that He was going away...

This mountain-top meeting in Galilee with over 500 believers at once was the eighth appearance of Jesus Christ following the resurrection. The size of the crowd, coupled with the fact that many were still alive to corroborate their story at the time Paul mentioned it, make this event extremely significant. It was here that Jesus commissioned His church.

#### IX. THE NINTH APPEARANCE - JAMES (1 Corinthians 15:7)

Many men were named James during the New Testament era, just as many women were named Mary. This particular James was the half-brother of Jesus Christ. A few have speculated that he was also a disciple, but this is highly unlikely as he was a nonbeliever prior to Jesus' death. Like his other siblings, James doubted that his own half-brother could be the Messiah. However, following the resurrection James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He was a prominent figure in the early days of Christianity and was eventually martyred (stoned to death) for his faith. He also wrote the book of James.

Scripture gives no information or details about Jesus' encounter with his half-brother James. The only mention of it is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. It seems plausible that the appearance would have occurred somewhere in Galilee, where Jesus' family likely resided at

the time. Though nothing is known about it, such an occurrence would explain the radical transformation that took place in James' life. Before seeing the risen Jesus, James was lost in disbelief. Afterward, he rose in prominence to become a pillar of the New Testament church.

Jesus' meeting with his half-brother James was the ninth post-resurrection appearance. It remains uncertain as to what exactly happened or was said, but whatever it was James' life dramatically changed. Such is the case for many sinners who find Jesus today.

#### X. THE TENTH APPEARANCE - THE DISCIPLES (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:4-11)

Scripture suggests that Jesus made at least 3 appearances in Galilee - on the seashore where He ate breakfast with some of His disciples, on the mountain top where He delivered the Great Commission to over 500 people, and in an unknown place where He met His half-brother James. Following these appearances the disciples returned to Jerusalem, and one would presume that the newly converted James with them. Perhaps He'd told them to go back there during one of these 3 encounters. If they had been in Galilee for a week or more, then took another 8-10 days to return to Jerusalem, they would have arrived there almost 40 days after the resurrection. This perfectly fits the timeline as presented in the Bible.

Apparently, Jesus appeared to the disciples once again in their Jerusalem hiding place. He spoke to them and taught them there. He then led them out of the city towards the small village of Bethany, and they stopped on the Mount of Olives. It was less than 2 miles from Jerusalem to Bethany and the Mount of Olives was situated between them. This was one of Jesus' favorite places to visit. The Garden of Gethsemane was located at the base of the mountain, where Jesus often went to pray whenever He was in the vicinity.

The disciples asked the risen Jesus when He intended to return and restore the kingdom of Israel, but He told them not to be overly concerned with this. Instead, He promised that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came and would be His witnesses throughout all the earth. Then, as they stood there watching, Jesus ascended upward into heaven. After He had disappeared from their sight, 2 angelic men told them that He would someday return in the same manner. They returned to Jerusalem and waited.

The ascension of Jesus Christ from the Mount of Olives into Heaven was the tenth post-resurrection appearance. Since then, Christians have been anxiously awaiting His glorious return. Ten days after the ascension, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples and the New Testament church was born.

#### CONCLUSION

Over the course of this series, we have learned about 10 separate and well-documented appearances of Jesus Christ after His resurrection. He appeared to numerous people in several different places over a period of 40 days. His presence was so real that many of these people

actually died as martyrs for their uncompromising defense of His physical and literal resurrection. Why would they give up their lives if his was all a lie or an elaborate hoax? There is simply no other reasonable conclusion that any rational person can derive when one considers their eyewitness testimonies, the absence of Jesus' body, and the exponential growth of the early church despite heavy persecution. The only logical outcome is that Jesus had conquered death and had risen from the dead!

As Christians today, we must display the same confidence and assurance in the resurrection as these early believers did. We must stake our lives, reputations, and fortunes upon this fact. We must boldly stand for Jesus in the presence of our enemies and against all forms of oppression. We must continue to loudly proclaim that He lives even though this world would seek to keep us silent. We must find strength in His presence and through the power of the Holy Spirit to press forward in Jesus' name. We must do more than simply believe; rather we should know for absolute certain that Jesus rose from the grave, is alive today and seated at God's right hand, and will soon come again for us. Hallelujah!