

"He Appeared"

The risen Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples over a forty-day period. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're examining the eyewitnesses of Jesus after His resurrection.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God has not been silent. He revealed His written word in both the Old and New Testament. He also revealed Himself through the person Jesus, who is called the "Word." John 1:1 to 3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And all things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." Jesus Christ has always existed and is divine! For this reason, it's easy to see how He rose again. Surely, the One who made the world could overcome death. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

We're looking at the historical record of the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. Jesus presented Himself alive by many convincing proofs to His disciples. And if we were to question these eyewitnesses whether Jesus really rose from the dead, the record reveals that they were fully convinced of His resurrection and were willing to suffer and to die preaching the gospel message of His death burial and resurrection. They wouldn't take it back!

Now we'll also briefly explore whether Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are credible witnesses. Can we trust them? We'll see why we can trust their independent accounts of His resurrection. And we're certainly not the first to do this, and we'll see how historians and legal scholars have handled the ancient evidence. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has been the most investigated events in history. Now no stone is unturned. The facts of the first century writers still remain the most important witnesses to the resurrection. And we'll see what conclusions scholars and investigators have made.

Now we offer this study free, in a little booklet called The Son Arose. And if you'd like a printed copy of our study and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from 1 Corinthians 15:3 to 8, and we'll explore the appearances of Jesus Christ after His resurrection.

Our reading today comes from I Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 3 to 8. Paul writes this epistle to the church at Corinth, in 54 A.D., and it is regarded as the first written evidence of the resurrection and the appearances. "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." That's a reading from God's holy word.

Let's pray together. "Father, we're thankful for all of the accounts of the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. And Father, we're thankful that they believed and were so convinced, and wrote of these things so that we might believe as well. Father, we're thankful for You and Your love, and may we always be Your servants. In Jesus name, Amen."

An undeniable evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ came in the responses of those who followed Him and knew Him best. Virtually all critical scholars recognize an unmistakable change in the disciples after Jesus “presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1, verse 3).

Now before the appearances and proofs of His resurrection, the disciples had lost hope; they were depressed, afraid, and doubting. Though the women brought back word of the empty tomb and what the angel said about His resurrection, Luke 24:10 to 11 says, “But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they didn’t believe them.” John 20, verse 19 speaks of the apostles hiding in an upper room with the doors locked, for fear of the Jews. And Thomas said in John 20:25, “Unless I see in his hands the marks of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” Now it’s evident these disciples required convincing before they would believe Jesus fulfilled His prediction. And even though they had seen many miracles, they couldn’t grasp how God would raise Jesus up.

The risen Jesus Christ, however, did prove Himself to His disciples. The New Testament provides numerous appearances of the Lord Jesus to the people who knew Him best. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene weeping outside the tomb in the garden. And when she realized Jesus was speaking to her, she grabbed hold of Him. And Jesus sent her to tell the disciples. Later that day Jesus appeared to Peter, to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and to the apostles without Thomas. Later He appeared to Thomas and invited him to feel the mark in His hands.

Now Jesus appeared to seven disciples while they were fishing at the Sea of Galilee and enjoyed a breakfast of fish and bread with them. Jesus appeared to “more than 500 brethren at one time.” He appeared to James. Matthew records His words telling them to make disciples of all the nations. Last of all He appeared to the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. Now Paul later received many revelations from the Lord. The book of Revelation in chapter one reveals how Jesus appeared to John.

Lee Strobel, interviewing Gary Habermas, put the number of witnesses to the resurrection appearances into perspective in his book, *The Case for Christ*, he wrote: “Without question, the amount of testimony and corroboration of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances is staggering. To put it into perspective, if you were to call each one of the witnesses into a court of law to be cross-examined for just fifteen minutes each, and you went around the clock without a break, it would take you from breakfast on Monday until dinner on Friday to hear them all. Now after listening to 129 straight hours of eyewitness testimony, who could possibly walk away unconvinced?”

The apostles are convincing to us, because they themselves were convinced. The disciples after the forty days of convincing proofs of the Lord’s resurrection were a very different group of men than they were just days before. No longer did they lack faith or hope. No longer were they unsure. No, they were a bold and outspoken band of witnesses who couldn’t hold back their message. And you can hear it in the words of Peter at Pentecost:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2, verses 22 to 24). The twelve declared that they were witnesses of the resurrection (in chapter 2, verse 32). This public declaration was exactly what the Jewish leaders wanted to prevent. Now interestingly, they knew the stone was moved and the tomb was empty. And now they know Jesus appeared to the disciples.

Now we can see their boldness continuing: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 3, and verse 13). When the Jewish Council charged Peter and John not to teach any more in the name of Jesus, Peter and John answered them, “Whether it’s right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4, verses 18 to 20). Later “the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison” (Acts 5, verse 17 and 18). Well when the high priest told them not to preach in Christ’s name, Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. Well when they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them” (Acts 5:27 to 33).

But later “when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus” (Acts 5 and verses 40 to 42).

Now the New Testament reveals how the Jewish leaders with anger stoned Stephen and began persecuting the church. Acts 8:1 to 3 says that “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, and he would put them in prison.” Now in those days, to be a Christian meant there was a price to pay, in those days and for some even today there is a price!

The Scripture records Stephen’s death by stoning in Acts 7 and the beheading of the apostle James in Acts 12. Ancient tradition provides how the apostles and other leaders died for their faith. And though these are human sources and may be flawed, they reveal what the early church recorded about these martyrs. Matthew suffered death from the sword in Ethiopia. Mark was dragged through the streets in Alexandria, Egypt. Luke was hanged in Greece. John was sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. Accounts about James the Just, the brother of Jesus, differ. Some say he was thrown from the pinnacle of the Temple, while others say that he was beaten to death. Bartholomew was whipped to death or crucified in Armenia. Andrew was crucified in Patras, Greece. Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India. Jude was killed with arrows. The Emperor Nero had Paul tortured and beheaded outside Rome.

Now these men remained faithful to Jesus and were committed to preaching the gospel, even if it cost their lives. One cannot dismiss their faith and total commitment. One must attribute their unquestionable loyalty to the truth that they preached. They wouldn’t have suffered death for a fraudulent lie. Paul expressed his conviction in Acts 20:24, “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” We must take this radical change into account!

You may ask, well “Phil, how can we trust the four gospel accounts as historical?” Gary Habermas, a recognized university professor and historian, in his book *The Historical Jesus* recorded and examined 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus outside the New Testament. Some were Christian, but many

were non-Christian, and some were archaeological. He found 129 reported facts revealing the life, person, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And he noted that Jesus is one of the most mentioned and most substantiated lives in ancient times.

The early church fathers, who lived in the second and third centuries, quoted the New Testament an astounding 36,289 times; and one can reconstruct the entire New Testament from these quotation with the exception of eleven verses. Now if the life, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus were simply a myth without credibility, one must wonder why so many writers within such a short time wrote about Him, quoted the witnesses, and regarded the New Testament testimony as the ultimate, divine authority for life and godliness.

Dr. Harvey W. Everest in his classic textbook, *The Divine Demonstration*, lists some criteria used to test historical evidence. When the criteria are met, we can judge the testimony to be the truth. First, the evidence is credible when the witnesses are honest, competent, and have the opportunity to know. The apostles and disciples were honest witnesses.

Second, evidence is credible when the witnesses agree in general statement, although they may differ on minor points. This is exactly the case with the four gospel accounts. They all note the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They all say the tomb was empty and the stone rolled away.

Third, evidence is credible when there is no known motive for imposture or faking. Well the apostles and preachers who witnessed Jesus didn't become rich or powerful because of their testimony.

Fourth, the testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are strongly against the well-being or interest of the narrator. Since most suffered martyrdom for their preaching, one cannot question whether they believed what they preached. God raised Jesus up!

Fifth, the testimony is reliable when such witnesses are numerous. More than 500 people saw Jesus alive, and some saw Him numerous times.

Sixth, the testimony is reliable when the recorded facts and the existing facts are related as cause and effect. Well one can substantiate the lives of many New Testament people in history. Geographical and historical references are to be correct.

Seventh, the testimony is reliable when recorded facts are sustained by existing documents, coins, games, or other public institutions. The existence of the church, their meeting on the first day of the week (that is the resurrection day), the taking of the Lord's Supper, and baptizing penitent adults in water uniting them with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection are direct results of the life, teaching, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now since the testimony of the New Testament meets these criteria, one can have confidence that these Biblical books are credible! For the earliest disciples, the Lord's resurrection was not a "leap in the dark"; there were too many witnesses who knew the truth!

Simon Greenleaf, professor of law at Harvard, and author of a three-volume classic work, *On A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, wrote a small work about the Testimony of the Evangelists. And he concluded, "Let [the Gospel's] testimony be sifted, as it were given in a court of justice on the side of the adverse party, the witnesses being subjected to a rigorous cross-examination. The result, it is confidently believed, will be an undoubting conviction of their integrity, ability, and truth." He believed the gospel accounts could hold up in a court of law!

Let's pray. "Father, we're thankful for so many evidences that are abundant and are revealed in so many different places by people who have investigated and examined those evidences. And Father, we're thankful that we do not have a leap in the dark, but can believe with confidence in the

resurrection of Your Son. Oh Father, help us to be faithful and obedient to His will. In Jesus name, Amen.”

1 Corinthians 15:1 to 2 speaks of the gospel message; Paul defines that message as the good news of the Lord’s death, burial and resurrection. Paul wrote, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.” Now they believed the message of Christ’s resurrection and took their stand on it! As long as they held to their faith and conviction, they were saved by it!

Those who lived at the time saw Jesus alive and knew the truth. They touched and ate with Him. Their preaching of His death, burial, and resurrection cost them dearly, but they were willing to suffer to proclaim the gospel message. They sacrificed their lives, because the message is true.

What about you? Do you believe the message is true? Will you hold fast? The salvation of the Lord comes to those who make a total commitment! Jesus said in Luke 9:23 to 24, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

Now your love for and faith in Christ must lead you to repentance, turning from sin to righteousness, from the world to following Jesus. Repentance is necessary; Jesus said that unless we repent, we’ll perish in Luke 13:3. Peter follows up in Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Won’t you repent and be baptized today?

Now we hope that today’s study about His appearance has strengthened your faith in Jesus. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of our study this month, we’re offering it free, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There’s also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area. You can also watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, “SearchTVMinistry”, and like what you see. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Don’t worry, we’re not asking for money. We’re here to help you get to heaven.

Focus your heart on God today by worshiping at church. Everyone needs a church family. And there’s probably a church of Christ in your area. And if you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one. We’ll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God’s Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.