

What Happened After the Cross? Understanding the Appearances of Jesus

The Christian faith is founded on the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead. Testimonies about Jesus' appearances followed closely after the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. A number of individuals, several groups of people and a large crowd are all part of the historical evidence for the resurrection. But how are we to understand what kind of appearances the first Christians experienced? What actually happened during the 40 days following the crucifixion and, in the case of Paul, several years later outside Damascus?

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Introduction

1 Cor 15:3–8: Claims about a bodily – unique – supernatural – historical – foundational event.

Why believe it's true? Well attested event with a double confirmation of

– prophetic fulfillment

– testimony from eyewitnesses

1. What is behind the start of the Christian movement?

“Presumably what happened to Jesus was what happens to all of us when we die. We decompose. Accounts of Jesus's resurrection and ascension are about as well-documented as Jack and the Beanstalk.” Richard Dawkins

Evidence: The empty tomb & The appearances of Jesus

The appearances according to 1 Cor 15: Three individuals & three groups of people

The appearance to Paul was a “vision from heaven”, Acts 26:19. Should that frame our interpretation of *all* the appearances?

2. A timeline of the appearances: The four gospels & 1 Corinthians 15

During 40 days after the resurrection:

Sunday – The first week – The following six weeks – The ascension

3. Characteristics of the appearances

Places – Times – People – Categories – Situations – Time-frame – Purposes – Senses

Luke 24:36-49 “Touch me and see, a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have ... They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.”

Acts 1:3-4 “many convincing proofs ... during a meal”

The appearance to Paul was *after* the ascension and therefore in a different category: A vision.

Acts 9, 22, 26: Physical manifestations of light, sound and Paul and his companions all fell to the ground, but only Paul heard, saw (1 Cor 9:1) and talked with Jesus.

Paul not originally in the list?

4. The logic of our historical argumentation for the resurrection

We have access to historical information from eyewitnesses.

It is unlikely, because of the nature of the appearances, that the eyewitnesses were deceived to believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

It is unlikely, because of their willingness to suffer and die for their testimony, that they themselves were deceivers who knew that their testimony about the resurrection was false.

Conclusion

“He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so. This is the beginning of the New Creation: a new chapter in cosmic history has opened.” C S Lewis
Miracles