

Wayne T. Galloway
www.fortloganchurchofchrist.com

13 Following the Messiah Episode 10 (11:41-26:32) Jesus' Appearances and Ascension

Opening:

1. You have viewed the video "Following the Messiah Episode 10 at www.appianmedia.org and have worked through the study guide Lesson 13 available by request at wtg2@hughes.net.
2. In the previous study we considered Jesus' burial and resurrection. In this study we will consider His appearances and ascension.

Into the Text:

The resurrection of Jesus is the most important single event in history. It might be argued that His crucifixion was the most important single event in history. By means of His crucifixion the debt for sin is paid (Col. 2:14), but without the resurrection there is no proof for victory over death. In 1 Cor. 15:3-5a Paul said, "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 . . ." He also said, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain . . . your faith is worthless and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:14-17). Everything hinges on the resurrection! That's why His appearances after the resurrection are so important. We will examine 10 appearances as enumerated in the Appian Media Study Guide.

1. Reading of John 20:11-18. Mary Magdalene.

This event occurred on the morning of the resurrection in the area of the garden tomb. The question that immediately confronts us in this text is why she did not recognize Him at first? Of course, no explanation is given in the text. Perhaps the tomb was dark and the sun was shining behind Jesus. Perhaps He appeared only as shadow in such a circumstance. She mistakenly thought He was the gardener. But soon realized that it was Jesus. It is pretty clear that she was not expecting to see Jesus alive, but when she recognized Him she exclaimed, "Teacher!" She went to the disciples and said, "I have seen the Lord!"

2. Reading of Matt. 28:1, 8-10. Cf. Lk. 24:1-10 Mary Magdalene, Mary, Salome and other women reported to the disciples.

With the multiple accounts in the gospels it is with some difficulty that we reconstruct the appearances. It is hard for me to distinguish some appearances.

Some may actually overlap. When they took hold of His feet and worshiped Him this may be the time at which He said, "Stop clinging to Me."

3. Reading of Lk. 24:33-35. Simon Peter.

4. Reading of Lk. 24:13-35. Cleopas and an unidentified companion on the road to Emmaus.

This text says, "Their eyes were kept from recognizing Him." Immediately I question, "Why?" I have no answer to this. But later the text indicates that, "He was known to them in the breaking of the bread." What was it about this experience that caused them to recognize Jesus? Was it something that He said when He blessed the bread? I don't know, but they did recognize Him. The text says, "He vanished from their sight." What does this mean? That He vaporized? That He left them? It seems that something unusual happened. It's like they did not know exactly what happened. Luke seems to just record the event without giving any explanation. Perhaps there is none to give.

5. Reading of Lk. 24:36-43. Cf. Jn. 20:19-25. The eleven (without Thomas).

This account presents us with some questions as well. They are inside the room. The doors are shut because of fear of the Jews. Jesus appears in the room. The way the account is phrased leaves us wondering how Jesus came into the room. The fact that they are startled and frightened and thought they were seeing a spirit adds to the mystery. And yet, He speaks to them, shows them His hands and feet, asks them to touch Him and says that He has flesh and bones and then eats a piece of broiled fish with them which confirms that He is real. One wonders if this is the kind of resurrected body that we will possess at His coming, but then "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom" (1 Cor. 15:50). So, is this some kind of intermediary body that Jesus possesses, one that is different from the imperishable body that we will ultimately have (1 Cor. 15:54)?

Galilean Appearances (8 days after the resurrection). Where does Jesus stay during this week? Does He need a place?

6. Reading of Jn. 20:26-29. Thomas is present with the others.

This account presents Jesus in the room "the doors having been shut." Again the way this is stated involves some level of mystery. It appears that Jesus can be in a room after the doors are closed. He can vanish out of men's sight. Quite mysterious! And yet, He can be felt, can eat, has flesh and bones and evidences physicality as usual. Thomas concludes, "My Lord and my God!"

7. Reading of Jn. 21:1-14. Seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee.

This event also lends an element of mystery to our investigation. They recognized that it was the Lord, but why the explanation? "None of the disciples ventured to question Him, 'Who are You?' knowing that it was the Lord." So, it was obviously the Lord, but not so obvious that there would be no mention of "who He was" in the text?

Galilean Appearances (a few weeks after the resurrection) Again, where is Jesus staying? Does He even need a place to stay?

8. Reading of Matt. 28:16-18. Disciples on the mountain.

Why do some doubt?

9. Reading of 1 Cor. 15:7. James and to all the apostles.

Ascension at the Mount of Olives (40 days after the resurrection) Where has Jesus spent this period of 40 days? He has only been with the apostles a very limited amount of time. Is He appearing to others? Teaching them and explaining the things concerning Himself in the Scriptures? No information is given that answers these questions.

10. Reading of Acts 1:6-12.

The ascension adds to the mystery of the circumstances when Jesus is "lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight." Unusual events to say the least! But these are not the only unusual events associated with Jesus. He was born of a virgin. Fulfilled multiple passages of Scripture. Claimed to be the Son of God. Performed miracles. Taught incredible things. Died on a cross although innocent of any crime and now has been raised from the dead and has appeared over a period of 40 days and has ascended into the clouds. No other religion calls on one to believe such an incredible plethora of "unbelievable" events. Is it any wonder some doubted? Is it any wonder that people doubt and do not believe today? It is one thing to believe that Jesus was a good man and taught good things. It is quite another to believe that He is the Son of God and that He is resurrected from the dead.

Application:

I recognize the challenge of believing what we have read and studied about. It is challenging to me. But what could we expect when God becomes man and dwells among us? Surely it would not be ordinary. It would be extraordinary! And that is the way the gospel accounts present the record of what happened. It's obvious in their descriptions that they had a hard time accepting it themselves. Who can blame Thomas for demanding to see for himself the print of the nails in His hands and to put His hand into His side? They record mysterious occurrences and give no explanation. Maybe it's because they had none, except that He was the Son of God.

One thing is for sure, they came to believe it, as incredible as it was. They laid their lives on the line preaching that He was the Son of God. The world is a different place as a result of Jesus having been here. Hearts have been changed. The grace of God has been manifest. His desire for our salvation is evidenced in the fact that He has sent His son for our salvation. What are you going to do with this information???

Will you believe in Him? Will you accept His dying for your sin? Will you be joined together with Him in death, burial and resurrection in baptism? Will you allow God to raise you to spiritual life? Will you give your life to Him in humility, thanksgiving and obedient devotion? Do you look forward to His return?

Our desire is that you place your trust in Him for the forgiveness of your sins and make Him the Lord in your life. Will you do that?