

B. Appearances to the Disciples

The four gospels provide unique accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances culminating with His final ascension to the Father. Matthew and Mark are the briefest, with Matthew noting only two appearances: to the women as they left the empty tomb and to the Eleven in Galilee (28:9-20). Mark mentioned Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene, then to two individuals on a country road (16:12-13; cf. Luke 24:13ff) and finally to His eleven apostles. But whereas Matthew had Jesus appearing to the Eleven in Galilee, Mark stated only that they were gathered together for a meal (16:9-14). Among the four evangelists, only Luke described the episode on the Emmaus road, indicating that it occurred the day of Jesus' resurrection and preceded His appearance to the assembled disciples (cf. 24:13, 33-34). For his part, John also focused on Jesus' appearances to Mary and then the Eleven, first in Jerusalem the evening of His resurrection (20:19-25), then eight days later (presumably also in Jerusalem) (20:26-29) and finally at the Sea of Galilee (21:1ff; cf. Matthew 28:10; Mark 16:7).

1. Luke's account is also unique in mentioning an early appearance to *Simon* (24:34). Most commentators conclude that this refers to Simon Peter, although the other gospel accounts make no mention of Jesus appearing to Peter prior to that evening. In fact, Mark's account explicitly states that Jesus didn't appear to the Eleven until *after* His appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:9-14; ref. also Matthew 28:16-17; John 20:1-10, 19). Paul, however, seems to concur with Luke, stating to the Corinthians that Jesus appeared to Peter before the other apostles (1 Corinthians 15:3-5).

Another issue in this context is determining the speaker in verse 34. Was it the two Emmaus disciples or "the Eleven and those with them" who announced that the Lord had risen and appeared to Simon? The context suggests the latter, especially if "Simon" refers to Simon Peter. For why would the two visitors from Emmaus make this announcement about Peter when he was standing there before them? Wouldn't they assume Peter had already shared this astonishing news with his fellow disciples? But it makes sense that the group of disciples would blurt out this news to their two brethren the moment they arrived at the house. Then, after hearing that news, the Emmaus disciples began to share their own extraordinary experience (24:35).

One other general consideration is Luke's account of Jesus' appearance to the group in 24:36ff. If that appearance corresponds to John 20:19ff, it follows that the Emmaus road episode did in fact precede Jesus' first appearance to the Eleven as recorded by John (cf. Luke 24:13 with John 20:19). From that vantage point it makes sense to examine the Lucan context first and then John 20:19-25.

- a. Luke introduced this encounter with Jesus by observing that it occurred on the road linking Jerusalem with the nearby village of Emmaus. His account is the only biblical reference to Emmaus, but Josephus frequently mentioned this village in his writing, as do the Jewish Talmud and the non-canonical book of First Maccabees. Luke's only comment about Emmaus is that it was about seven miles from Jerusalem (24:13) and many scholars believe that the village lay on the road to Jaffa located on the Mediterranean coast to the northwest of Jerusalem.

Whatever Emmaus' location, Luke recorded that two individuals were headed there from Jerusalem when Jesus appeared to them on the road. Luke identified one of them as *Cleopas* (24:18), perhaps the husband of one of the women John mentioned as witnessing Jesus' crucifixion and burial (19:25; cf. Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55-57). This has led some scholars to conclude that these two persons were Cleopas (Clopas) and his wife, now returning to their home village of Emmaus following the troubling events of the previous days. Whoever they were, they clearly were part of Jesus' inner circle of disciples and were well known to the Eleven (cf. Mark 16:9-12). Already that first day they'd heard the report of Jesus' resurrection and knew exactly where to find the apostles when they returned to Jerusalem (ref. 24:18-24, 33; cf. John 20:19).

- b. Luke recounted that the two travelers were discussing the events of Jesus' death and burial and the claim of His resurrection when He approached them and inquired about their conversation. According to his account, they didn't know who He was (24:16) and only recognized Him after He'd joined them for their evening meal (v. 31). Some argue that they didn't recognize Jesus because they'd never seen Him before, but Luke's language implies that they were supernaturally kept from recognizing Him. And the wider circumstance suggests the reason for this: Their obscured sight was a sign highlighting their lack of spiritual perception (vv. 31-32cf. Acts 9:1-19). Like all of those who'd embraced Jesus as Israel's Messiah, these disciples had only a shadowy sense of who He was and what He'd come to accomplish (24:19-21); they had yet to recognize Him in truth – that is, as the Scriptures revealed Him and His messianic mission.
- c. The two disciples were amazed that this man walking with them seemed unaware of the events of the past few days. He appeared to be in the dark regarding Jesus of Nazareth, but that condition actually characterized *them*. They chided the stranger about his astonishing ignorance (24:18); he then rebuked them for their flawed perception and dullness concerning the scriptural witness to the Messiah (24:25-26). They'd stumbled over what had transpired with Jesus in Jerusalem because it didn't fit their messianic expectations (note esp. v. 26). It didn't occur to them that they'd misunderstood the Scriptures; after all, their understanding reflected the tradition and insight of Israel's rabbis and learned men. But if their understanding wasn't in question, the only other option was to question how this man Jesus could actually be the Messiah the Scriptures promised.

Whatever their convictions and "faith" in Jesus of Nazareth, these disciples didn't really know Him; they certainly didn't grasp the significance of the climactic events of the past days. And they weren't without culpability in their condition. Like their countrymen and forefathers before them, they'd been "slow of heart" to believe Yahweh's prophets, now culminating with His greatest and final Prophet (24:19; cf. Matthew 21:33-42, 23:29-37). Yes, the rabbis misguided the people, but the rabbinical teaching found fertile ground in darkened minds and sluggish hearts. Whether layman or rabbi, every Israelite shared the same blindness – the blindness that plagues all of Adam's offspring (2 Corinthians 3:1-4:3).

Exposing their condition, Jesus began to expound the Scriptures to them, showing and explaining how all of the sacred text bore witness to Him. Luke specifically noted that He did so in orderly fashion, moving through the Scriptures from the books of Moses into the Prophets (v. 27; cf. 24:44). This description draws on the Jewish scripture partitions of Law, Prophets and Writings (expressed by the Hebrew term *Tanakh*) and highlights the critical truth that the Old Testament scriptures reveal the Messiah, not by a handful of scattered proof-texts, but organically through the progress of the biblical storyline. This applies to the *Law* (the five books of Moses) as much as to the Prophets and Writings. Thus, when Jesus spoke of *fulfilling* the Law (Matthew 5:17), He was claiming to be the One revealed in and promised by the Law, not simply a person committed to a catalog of commandments (cf. Matthew 11:11-13; John 5:39-47; also Acts 3:12-26).

Israel's scriptures provided a truthful witness to the Messiah, but an insufficient one given the people's dullness. Jesus was veiled even to His disciples and the veil didn't lift just because He explained the Scriptures in terms of Himself. He'd done that throughout His ministry and yet Israel continued to misinterpret Him. Some embraced Him and most rejected Him, but *all* did so in terms of their own notions of Him. So it was that day on the road to Emmaus. Though the hearts of these two disciples burned within them as Jesus began to unveil the Messiah in all the Scriptures, they were yet unable to recognize *Him* as the one He spoke of.

- d. Dusk was falling when the three arrived in Emmaus and the disciples urged Jesus to remain with them overnight. It was then, as they reclined with Him at table, that their eyes were finally opened and they discerned the identity of their captivating companion. It's interesting that Luke associated this epiphany with Jesus' act of breaking bread (24:30-31), an image hearkening back to the Passover meal a few days earlier. Jesus had used that meal to explain to His disciples the meaning of His impending death, that by it He was fulfilling the Passover's promise of deliverance and covenant renewal and so transforming the meal which was its central symbol. Jesus disclosed Himself in the Upper Room through the breaking of bread and so it was this night as He reclined in Emmaus (cf. v. 35).
- e. The Lord who had veiled the eyes of these two disciples now opened them, but no sooner did He do so than He vanished from their sight (24:31). Astonished and filled with excitement, they immediately rose from the table and returned to Jerusalem, unwilling to wait until daylight to tell their brethren that the reports were true; Jesus the Messiah was indeed raised from the dead (vv. 33-35).

When the two arrived in Jerusalem, they found the Eleven gathered together with others of Jesus' followers. Again, the fact that these two disciples knew where to find the eleven apostles – who were now virtually in hiding (John 20:19) – shows that they were part of Jesus' inner circle. Already that day they'd heard the women's report of Jesus' resurrection and now, hearing that He had appeared to Simon, they announced to the group that they, too, had seen Him and spoken and dined with Him.