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## "I Will Come to You": An Investigation of Early Christian Beliefs about Post-Ascension Visitations of the Risen Jesus

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**“I WILL COME TO YOU”:  
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OF THE RISEN JESUS**

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**Abstract:** *While later Creedal Christians have come to view “the Ascension” recorded in the first chapter of Acts as a conclusive corporeal appearance of the Resurrected Lord, earliest Christians do not appear to have conceived of this appearance as “final” in any temporal or experiential sense. A careful investigation of canonical resurrection literature displays a widespread Christian belief in continued and varied interaction with the risen Lord relatively late into the movements’ development. Stringent readings of Luke’s account of the Ascension in Acts suggesting that Christ will not return until his second coming fail to consider the theological rhetoric with which Luke conveys the resurrection traditions he relied on in composing his account. Analysis of Luke’s narrative displays that his presentation of these traditions is shaped in a way to stress the primacy of the apostolic Easter experiences in establishing the apostles as authoritative “witnesses” in the early church over and against possible competing authoritative claims stemming from purported experiences with the risen Lord.*

**T**he thesis of this work loosely mirrors an observation made by Francois Bovon in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke: “The idea that there was an ultimate limit to the appearances of the Risen One does not come from the earliest stage of Christianity.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to find in the earliest Christian literature any definitive conclusion to these “more extravagant manifestations of religious experience.”<sup>2</sup> Such observations suggest that earliest Christians anticipated continued interaction with the risen Lord relatively late into the movement’s development. Furthermore, early Christians do not seem to have considered Christ’s

resurrection appearances recorded at the end of each gospel as final in any temporal or experiential sense. As Larry Hurtado has rightly noted, rather than the Easter appearances signaling a conclusion to the resurrected Jesus's earthly ministry, early Christians appear to have had a "powerful sense of revelation" associated with the figure of the risen Lord *after* resurrection morning, which was "perceived by recipients to have a new quality and *frequency* in their lives."<sup>3</sup>

The narrative structure of the endings of the gospels of Mark, Matthew, and John all readily attest to this expectation of continued interaction with the resurrected Jesus. While Luke's depiction of "the Ascension"<sup>4</sup> in Luke-Acts may appear more definitive in its closure, a careful survey of Luke's collective narrative reveals an expectation of continued interaction with the resurrected Jesus similar to the other gospels. However, Luke appears to have recounted the early Christian resurrection traditions he received in a manner best suited to convey a unique hierarchical theology surrounding the activities of the risen Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Luke's narrative seems to suggest a primacy of the apostolic Easter experience for establishing the tangible physical reality of the resurrection, while correspondingly implying that resurrection appearances to other early Christians served a variety subordinate purposes.<sup>6</sup> Central to this reading is Luke's apparent understanding of the Ascension as an event that signaled the risen Lord's final appearance to the *collective body* of the eleven remaining apostles. Despite this understanding, Luke does not appear to be arguing for a final *general* appearance of the resurrected Lord, or even that those who encountered the risen Lord after this point experienced him in a fundamentally different way. While Luke's Ascension has come to be viewed by many Christians as "the solemn close of the post-Resurrection appearances,"<sup>7</sup> involving a "change of [Christ's] state,"<sup>8</sup> a careful investigation of Luke's account and other canonical texts reveals that earliest Christians (including Luke) did not view the Ascension as a decisive close to Christ's post-mortals interaction with his mortal followers. Indeed, apart from a particularly stringent reading of Luke's account, it is difficult to find evidence that early Christians believed in any sort of "final appearance" of the risen Lord. These observations, coupled with a variety of additional literary evidence, suggest that earliest Christians may have viewed physical interaction with the resurrected Lord as an ongoing occurrence long after what has come to be termed "the Ascension."

### Early Christian Expectations

Perhaps no evidence is more indicative of early Christian attitudes toward post-resurrection visitations of Christ than the sheer number of early documents devoted to recording such experiences. From the first several centuries of the Christian movement, well over thirty documents survive that purportedly relate experiences with the resurrected Jesus.<sup>9</sup> The impressive nature of this number is compounded when one considers that many such texts record multiple encounters with the risen Lord.<sup>10</sup> While it is true that a significant portion of these texts represent a particular ideology whose relationship to Christianity has been widely debated (Gnosticism),<sup>11</sup> it should also be noted that nearly a third of the documents recording experiences with the resurrected Lord come from the biblical canon, and a substantial portion of the remaining non-canonical texts do not seem to be explicitly tied to a particular ideological group.<sup>12</sup> The significance of the collection of post-resurrection accounts being so widely represented is that belief in corporeal manifestations of the risen Christ appears to have encompassed a myriad of early Christian groups, and seems to be a unifying theme on which all agreed to varying extents.

Although it appears that early Christians generally accepted that the risen Lord continued to minister to the early Church after his resurrection, the purported theological content of those visits varies widely among the preserved documents. However, a broad survey of surviving post-resurrection materials highlights several consistent themes that early Christians may have considered valid reasons for Christ's post-resurrection manifestation. The surviving literature preserves four predominant purposes for which the risen Lord returned: 1) to validate his resurrected state,<sup>13</sup> 2) to expound the true meaning of scriptural passages,<sup>14</sup> 3) to commission missionaries and stimulate the missionary impulse of the Christian movement,<sup>15</sup> and 4) to convey new doctrine or to clarify teachings.<sup>16</sup> While there is a fifth reason that appears to have gained later acceptance in the Christian movement, it is uniquely associated with the figure of Paul and relates to the calling and commissioning of a previously uncalled apostle. While this purpose may not seem noteworthy to many modern readers of the New Testament (considering Paul's remarkable influence on the development of Christianity), Paul's contemporaries may not have accepted this claim as readily. This may explain why Paul's *apostolic authority* seems to have been repeatedly challenged by his opponents in Galatia and Corinth,<sup>17</sup> but his critics do not seem to question the authenticity of his experience

with the risen Lord. While early Christians would have accepted that the risen Lord could appear to his followers, it seems as though the commissioning of an “apostle” may not have been initially viewed as an accepted reason for Christ to return. Indeed, Paul is singularly unique among people described in all surviving resurrection literature in utilizing a resurrection appearance as a claim to apostolic authority. While other individuals who were not of the original Twelve had experiences with the resurrected Lord (Ananias, James the brother of Jesus, Hermas, etc.), there is no evidence that these individuals utilized their experiences in an attempt to claim *apostolic* authority.<sup>18</sup> While there is some evidence that James’ prominence in the early Church derived from his experience with the risen Lord,<sup>19</sup> James is typically portrayed as holding a position of authority in the church distinct from those of the apostles.<sup>20</sup>

The surviving resurrection literature can be separated into three major categories. The first are documents that claim to record interactions that take place immediately following Christ’s crucifixion and subsequent resurrection. These “Easter appearances” make up a significant portion of the extant materials and have several unique features that set them apart from other accounts. Perhaps most significantly, these accounts are primarily concerned with establishing the corporeal nature of the resurrected Christ and nearly always describe the “coming to faith” of Christ’s closest disciples. Additionally, such accounts often trace early Christian exegesis of Old Testament scripture back to the risen Lord, while defending the missionary impulse of the Christian community. Furthermore, these accounts often describe an imbue ment of power upon the original apostles (or a promise of such as in Luke’s account) and a commissioning of them as chosen vessels to carry the gospel message to the world.

The second significant category of texts are those that relate what modern interpreters might call the “visionary” experiences of the author. While it is often difficult to distinguish a “vision” from what was experienced by some of the disciples during the Easter experiences,<sup>21</sup> these accounts are most easily identified by their apocalyptic or eschatological content.<sup>22</sup> Such experiences often deal with the enthronement of Christ, or include visions of his second coming, and are thus distinguishable from the present and corporeal experience of the apostles on Easter. These accounts also tend to emphasize in a more striking manner than the Easter experiences the discontinuity of the resurrected body.<sup>23</sup> While some of these accounts are easily identifiable as “visionary” experiences, many of the accounts begin in such a way that the visionary nature



of the experience is ambiguous and might easily be construed as an experience similar to those experienced by the disciples during the Easter manifestations. This ambiguity often blurs the line between this "visionary" group of accounts and the third group of accounts that are "non-visionary" post-Ascension accounts of Jesus.

The third group of accounts is the primary topic of this work. These are accounts that record experiences that purportedly took place after Christ's enthronement, but still share many of the same features as the Easter accounts. Perhaps no experience is more paradigmatic of this category than Paul's call on the road to Damascus. Although Luke's portrayal of Paul's experience has disguised its similarities to the pre-Ascension experiences on Easter morning, a careful investigation of Luke's account in conjunction with Paul's letters reveals that the experience was not dissimilar to that of the apostles. As such, interpretations of Luke's account of the Ascension in Acts 1 as a final bodily appearance of the risen Lord will be shown to be incompatible with early Christian understandings of the same.

### **The New Testament Witness**

The incongruencies of the gospel endings have long been a thorny subject for the Christian community.<sup>24</sup> While each ends in a similar fashion, with the risen Jesus making an appearance to validate his resurrected state, each presents the story in a distinct and often temporally irreconcilable fashion:

Contrast Mark's frightened women fleeing the empty tomb with Matthew's great commission from the mountaintop in Galilee with Luke's account of the disciples walking back to Jerusalem with John's mysterious final appearance by the seashore. The mood, the dramatic shape of the ending, varies radically from one to another.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these seeming incongruities, Christians by and large have resisted attempts to reconcile these histories for the purpose of establishing a unified narrative.<sup>26</sup> The reason for this apparent resistance is at least in part because "the way [each gospel] talk[s] about the relation of text, history, and reader gets lost if one tries to impose such a single perspective."<sup>27</sup> Placher is correct in asserting that the multiplicity of the gospel narratives paradoxically provides the clearest picture of early Christian beliefs about the resurrected Christ.



Indeed, it seems as though the single most important theme of the endings of the gospels is that Christ was risen and continued to appear to many of his followers after his resurrection. These appearances are simultaneously personal<sup>28</sup> and corporate,<sup>29</sup> powerful<sup>30</sup> and mundane.<sup>31</sup> The united force of these varying experiences is that Christ has risen, he can and does appear to both individuals and the corporate leadership of the church, he provides power and companionship despite his death on the cross, and he can come to his disciples at any time and in any place.<sup>32</sup> While differing in presentation, the endings of the gospels present a unified voice: the risen Christ is still involved in the affairs of the fledgling Christian movement, personally and physically directing its efforts despite his place at the right hand of the Father. In each case, and in unique ways, the gospel authors describe to the reader the early Christian expectation that the resurrected Lord has interacted and will continue to interact with the church, leaving the “when” and “where” a matter of personal discovery. As Placher describes it, “These narratives invite their readers to find themselves living in the world of the narratives.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Pre-Ascension Accounts**

As has been discussed above, pre-Ascension accounts found in the canonical gospels typically appear to serve the very specific function of validating the corporeal nature of Christ’s resurrected state. The risen Christ is often touched, eats food, and walks with those he appears to in a manner similar to his pre-crucifixion interactions. While this is true for the majority of pre-Ascension accounts, there are several appearances recorded in the Gospel narratives that do not easily fit this formula. In particular, Christ’s post-resurrection appearance to Mary, the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and Christ’s appearance to a group of disciples at the sea of Tiberius cannot easily be construed as serving this function. These accounts are important to the overall thesis of this work because they display narrative similarities to the post-Ascension accounts found in Acts. By establishing some common themes of the pre-Ascension canonical accounts, it will lay a groundwork for properly understanding the post-Ascension visitations of Christ recounted by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles and by Paul in his letters.

### **Mark**

Like all of the gospel narratives, Mark’s account of the empty tomb begins with a group of women disciples going to the sepulcher on the first day

of the week.<sup>34</sup> As these women near the tomb, they see that the stone covering the mouth has been rolled away (Mark 16:4). Entering, they “saw a young man sitting on the right clothed in a white robe.”<sup>35</sup> No more identifying features are given, and despite no claims to be such, the man is obviously depicted as a heavenly messenger.<sup>36</sup> Seeing that the women “were greatly astounded,”<sup>37</sup> the young man attempts to console them: “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him” (Mark 16:6). The messenger then informs the women that they should tell the disciples and Peter that Christ will meet them in Galilee just as he promised (Mark 16:7).<sup>38</sup> Mark’s curious phrasing that the women should tell “his disciples and Peter,” may reflect the authoritative primacy Peter experienced in the early church as the first disciple to be called (Mark 1:16–18), the first to recognize Jesus’s messiahship (Mark 8:29), and perhaps the first male disciple to receive a resurrection appearance.<sup>39</sup> Rather than joyously rushing to tell the disciples, the text says that the women “fled”<sup>40</sup> “trembling and bewildered”<sup>41</sup> and that they “said nothing to anyone.”<sup>42</sup> Scholars generally agree that based upon available manuscript evidence, Mark’s narrative originally concluded immediately following Mark 16:8.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the earliest recoverable ending of Mark’s narrative concludes with the statement that the women were afraid, enigmatically concluding with the explanatory particle “for” (γάρ).<sup>44</sup>

Because of the “the sheer implausibility” of the “astonishing abruptness” with which Mark’s narrative closes, “a long tradition of distinguished scholars [have] even posit[ed] ... a lost final page of the original Gospel.”<sup>45</sup> For the most part, speculative suggestions of this type have been rightly avoided, as the abruptness of the ending at 16:8 coincides well with Mark’s characteristic rapid style and the equally abrupt beginning of the Markan narrative.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, the “fear” with which the women flee from the tomb is consistent with Mark’s presentation of the human response to the numinous throughout the gospel.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, because the earliest Christians would have been familiar with a variety of oral traditions about visitations of the resurrected Lord, “the ending is not abrupt when viewed as a proclamation in the midst of a Christian community which had often heard the resurrection stories, and no doubt understood them as the sequel to Mark 16:8.”<sup>48</sup> The assurance of the angel found in Mark 16:7, that the disciples would see the resurrected Jesus in Galilee,<sup>49</sup> would then not have been viewed as incomplete to an early Christian reader, as the promise of a visit from the

risen Lord had already been vindicated by several resurrection traditions already in circulation. Indeed, the angels' promise that "there you will see him" most likely refers to the same tradition of resurrection appearances cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, traditions that were well established at the time of Mark's writing. Rather than recounting these appearances, Mark places no limits on the number of visits that were experienced by the disciples or by the women. As Luke Timothy Johnson has observed, "Because Mark declares Jesus to be alive and ready to appear but does not attach his appearing to any specific times and places in the past, he leaves open for his readers the imaginative possibility of new encounters with the risen one."<sup>50</sup> Mark's abrupt ending ought then to be viewed as something of a theological statement: while the Lord has indeed been raised, his appearance to the community of Christian believers is not restricted in either time or space. As such, Mark wishes to convey to his readers the distinct possibility of future appearances of the risen Lord, while expertly contextualizing those that had already occurred at the time of his authorship.<sup>51</sup> These unique characteristics of the earliest gospel arguably render it the one most narratively open to continued interaction with the risen Lord.

Because the original ending of Mark at 16:8 only alludes to the possibility of future resurrection appearances, scholars generally agree that the subsequent verses (16:9–20) appear to be a later scribal attempt to explicitly reconcile Mark's account to the resurrection appearances recorded in the other gospels. These additional verses are generally referred to by scholars as "The Longer Ending":

This twelve-verse ending was probably added to a copy of Mark sometime in the late 2nd or early 3rd century ce. It is not found in the earliest or most dependable Greek manuscripts, and while it appears in many others, it is often marked with asterisks or critical notes indicating its secondary status. It appears to be composed of a mixture of elements from the other three Gospels and Acts.<sup>52</sup>

This longer ending includes an appearance to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9), an appearance to two disciples reminiscent of Luke's account of the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12), and a climactic appearance to the eleven while they are eating (Mark 16:14).<sup>53</sup> The composition nears its conclusion with a revised account of Luke's Ascension depicted in Acts 1, as the risen Lord is "taken up into heaven and [sits] on the right of God."<sup>54</sup> Despite this enthronement, the risen Lord is depicted as being actively involved in the proclamation of the gospel after his

Ascension, as the apostles “went out and proclaimed in all directions while the Lord worked together with them.”<sup>55</sup> Similarities between the longer ending of Mark and many of the apocryphal acts written during the second century suggest early Christians may have understood this reference to be a contextualization of a variety of alleged post-ascension physical manifestations to both the apostles and other believers. This longer ending, when read as an independent literary work, thus provides additional evidence of a strong post-resurrection appearance tradition relatively late into the second century. As Cadwallader has noted, “Even though we ought not confuse the various endings to Mark’s Gospel with the original Gospel composition ... they also testify to the diversity ... of the variety of experiences of [the] resurrection.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Matthew**

The literary dependence of Matthew on the gospel of Mark has been well established.<sup>57</sup> It was probably composed in the latter fourth of the first century CE<sup>58</sup> and represents one of the most influential gospels, as it has been “the Gospel most used by the church in its worship.”<sup>59</sup> Although Matthew depends upon Mark for a significant portion of its narrative material, Matthew’s portrayal of the discovery of the empty tomb and of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are significantly different than its predecessor. Despite this, Matthew, like Mark, preserves the ubiquitous early Christian tradition of post-resurrection appearances of Christ.

Matthew is the only canonical gospel to place its witness to the resurrection between accounts of active attempts to prevent or discredit claims that the Lord has risen.<sup>60</sup> “Precautions are taken to ensure that what has been entombed stays entombed (27:62–66). When these do not succeed, lies are purchased (28:11–15).”<sup>61</sup> Matthew’s narrative of “what actually happened” thus stands in stark contrast to the contrivances of those who would thwart the gospel message through any means possible. By setting his narrative against this backdrop, Matthew’s narrative actively challenges alternative explanations of the empty tomb, and in many ways lays a theological foundation for other post-resurrection accounts of Jesus to be taken equally as seriously as his own recorded events.

Similar to Mark’s account, Matthew’s narrative also begins with a group of women disciples traveling to the tomb early on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1). Matthew’s depiction of the event quickly diverges from Mark’s account by stating that only two women approached

the tomb, omitting Salome who is mentioned only in Mark.<sup>62</sup> The women, rather than coming upon the empty tomb, this time approach just as an angel of the Lord is descending from heaven (Matthew 28:2). In conjunction with the arrival of this heavenly messenger, a great earthquake occurs, and the guards, in a stroke of irony, become “as dead men.”<sup>63</sup> Like in Mark, the angel attempts to provide comfort to the women<sup>64</sup> and instructs them to “go quickly and tell his disciples” that “he was raised from the dead. And behold, he is going before you to Galilee; you will see him there” (Matthew 28:7). Matthew’s account, like Mark’s, has the angel provide the women with a limited mission to the apostles, something that is notably absent in both John and Luke’s later accounts. While the women in Matthew’s story still leave the tomb “quickly with fear,”<sup>65</sup> this time their fear is coupled with “great joy,”<sup>66</sup> and they immediately run to tell his disciples (Matthew 28:8). As the women are traveling to tell the disciples, suddenly, “Jesus met them” (Matthew 28:9 KJV). Matthew’s account is the only one that depicts the women touching the risen Lord, as they “held his feet and worshipped him.”<sup>67</sup> While the longer ending of Mark and the ending of John both attest to a tradition of Mary Magdalene as the first resurrection appearance to take place, Matthew is the only one that conveys an additional tradition of a resurrection appearance to “the other Mary” presumably “Mary the mother of James” mentioned in Mark 16. It might be argued that the “others” gathered with the eleven in Luke’s account included the women, but Luke’s account decidedly emphasizes the eleven’s experience in touching the savior. Like the angel, Jesus tells the women not to be afraid and that they should carry the message to “my brothers” and that they will see him in Galilee (Matthew 28:10).

Matthew’s account of Jesus’s appearance to the women concludes with them continuing on their way to tell the eleven what has occurred (Matthew 28:11). The eleven then go to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had said he would meet them (Matthew 28:16). The text does not specify the method by which Jesus approached or appeared but instead abruptly states that “when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted” (Matthew 28:17). The text also does not say why or which of the eleven doubted that it was actually him, although there is some sense that Jesus may have been approaching on foot and the doubt came as they looked at the form from a distance.<sup>68</sup> This interpretation matches Matthew’s previously muted description of Jesus “meeting” the women on their way from the tomb. While Matthew has a penchant for describing heavenly manifestations (such as the angel descending at the



tomb) with glorious detail, in contrast, his description of the risen Lord is remarkably mundane. The risen Lord receives no glowing or glorious descriptions and instead appears much like the earthly Jesus. By so doing, Matthew suggests to the reader the accessibility of the risen Lord by placing him more fully in the physical realm of mortals than in the heavenly realm of the divine.

Matthew concludes his narrative with the risen Lord promising that "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20 NRSV). In the context of early Christian beliefs regarding the resurrected Lord, it is quite probable that this last phrase was taken as a literal promise by the risen Lord that he would continue to appear to his followers continuously or repeatedly until the "end of the age."<sup>69</sup> The "end of the age" seems most likely to be a reference to the *Parousia*, the future end of time at which the Messiah would climactically return and begin his reign over the whole earth. Matthew thus articulates an early Christian expectation that the risen Lord would continue to physically interact with his disciples while remaining hidden from the world until his second coming. By closing his narrative with this implicit promise of future appearances, Matthew reminds readers of the earthly Jesus's earlier promise: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Furthermore, as the scene closes with the risen Lord still present amongst his disciples, Matthew reemphasizes the resurrected Jesus's status as "Emmanuel," or "God with us," a subtle reference to the declaration of the angel to Joseph found in Matthew 1:23–24. This emphasis of the abiding presence of the resurrected Christ is a unique aspect of the Matthean narrative and stands somewhat in contrast to the perceived closure of the resurrected ministry found in Luke-Acts.

## Luke

Luke's account of Jesus's ministry and subsequent post-resurrection appearances is undoubtedly the one that presents the "smoothest narrative coherence."<sup>70</sup> As such, it should come as little surprise that it has perhaps had the greatest impact on interpreting the endings of the other gospels.<sup>71</sup> While Luke's account shares significant themes with the other gospels, Luke portrays events in such a way as to best articulate his unique theological perspective. Indeed, "Luke is no mere chronicler of events; rather, he is set on persuading his audience that his interpretation of recent events is reliable."<sup>72</sup> This assertion is supported by the fact that Luke's account seems to be in direct response to other individuals'

attempts to record the events of Jesus's life.<sup>73</sup> It is not unreasonable to suggest Luke may have been somewhat dissatisfied with the previous accounts he had read and thus undertook his articulation of the gospel message to more clearly articulate its cohesive significance. If one accepts the scholarly consensus that Luke is literarily dependent upon Mark, the differences in presentation between Luke's account and Mark's may be indicative of those aspects of Christ's post-mortal ministry that Luke found most important. Luke seems primarily concerned with showing that the risen Lord is the force behind the apostle's mission to all the world and is also the driving force behind the new spirit filled church that is the hallmark of Luke's accounts. Because the authority of the apostles is so important to Luke's account in Acts, Luke seems to carefully guard against granting a tangible manifestation of the risen Lord to any but the authority figures of the early Church. As such, Luke's account is devoid of the appearance to Mary found in both Matthew and John's account (as well as the longer ending of Mark). While Luke certainly grants the revelatory validity of other appearances of the risen Lord (e.g., road to Emmaus), he seems to focus his narrative on the Savior's appearance to the apostles, while limiting the authoritative force of other accounts.

Luke begins his account with the story of the women discovering the empty tomb (Luke 24:1–9). Unlike Matthew and Mark, the reader is unaware who these women are until later in the narrative, and Luke's account appears to encompass the experiences of more women disciples than the other gospels (Luke 24:10).<sup>74</sup> Like Mark's account, the women come upon an already empty tomb (Luke 24:2). After entering and seeing that the tomb is empty, they "were much perplexed" (Luke 24:3–4). Two angels appear to the women to explain the import of the empty tomb (Luke 24:4–7). Luke conspicuously leaves out any instruction by the angels that the women are to communicate the events with the apostles, depicting their sharing of the experience to be their own volition (Luke 24:10). Unlike Matthew's account, Luke does not relay any of the resurrection traditions involving the women disciples having a vision of the risen Lord. Additionally, Luke's account further distances the establishment of veracity of the resurrection from the testimonies of the women by relaying that the apostles themselves disbelieve the women and that "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke 24:11).

While Luke's omission of any appearances of the risen Lord to the women is curious and has certainly resulted in a fair number of polemical



readings, Luke primarily seems to omit the appearances for the purpose of narrative cohesion:

Luke, [does] not deny [the women's] participation in the events. [He does] however, create a crescendo that builds from the empty tomb, witnessed by women, to the appearance to the eleven disciples.<sup>75</sup>

Luke's narration of the events can then be read at least partially as an attempt to articulate the fundamental Christian claim that the reality of the resurrected Lord is established by the witness of the apostles, not by the various testimonies of individuals who may have also had an experience with the risen Lord. As such, a highly personal appearance to Mary Magdalene (or appearances to other women) that was later vindicated by the experience of the corporate body of the eleven might seem to Luke a redundant witness, one that clouds one of the primary purposes of his narrative. While Luke certainly does not preclude other visitations, his emphasis is on the importance of the apostle's witness in establishing their authority in the early church.

After the episode of the empty tomb, Luke narrates one of the most iconic post-resurrection traditions of Jesus: the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The account states that on "the same day" of the discovery of the empty tomb, two apostles (we will learn one's name is Cleopas from verse 18) are traveling to a village outside of Jerusalem called Emmaus (Luke 24:13). Like other accounts the risen Lord seems to approach the disciples in an unremarkable fashion (Luke 24:15). As is characteristic of many accounts of the risen Lord, the disciples do not at first recognize him (Luke 24:16). With a hint of irony, the risen Jesus asks the disciples what they are discussing and allows them to relate their feelings about his own recent death (Luke 24:19–24). The disciples curiously state that "some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him" (Luke 24:24 NRSV). While Luke does not expressly recount any early Christian traditions about the risen Lord's appearance to the women in his earlier narrative, it is possible that his phrasing here still preserves his acknowledgement of such a tradition. The structure of the sentence by which "some of those with us" (τινες τῶν σὺν ἡμῖν) went to the tomb and "found the place as the women had said" (καὶ εὔρον οὕτως καθὼς αἱ γυναῖκες εἶπον) informs the reader that those who went to the tomb did so for the primary purpose of confirming the testimony of the women. As such, the corresponding δὲ (but) found in the next clause of the sentence may denote a portion of the women's testimony that was unable to be

verified. If so, the phrase “but him they did not see” (αὐτὸν δὲ οὐκ εἶδον) would stand in contradistinction to the women’s own experience and may preserve in Luke’s account the tradition of the appearance of the risen Lord to the women at the tomb. This reading reinforces the idea that although Luke was aware of the resurrection appearances to the women, he did not narrate the events in order to more clearly signal to the readers of his account the importance of the apostolic experience with the risen Lord.

After upbraiding the disciples for their unbelief, Christ, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27 NRSV). As the disciples near their destination, the risen Christ makes as if he is going to continue on the way, but the disciples urge him to spend the evening with them (Luke 24:28–29). The risen Lord consents, and as the disciples recognize him while he is breaking bread, he vanishes from their sight (Luke 24:30–31). The disciples immediately get up and return to Jerusalem to share these things with the apostles, but upon arrival, their story is preceded by the eleven’s assertion that the Lord had already appeared to Peter (Luke 24:33–34). The fact that the eleven assert to these disciples that “the Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon” (Luke 24:34 KJV), before the disciples recount their own experience with the risen Lord, stresses for the reader the primacy of the witness of the apostles in asserting that the Lord has risen. It also serves the purpose of establishing a hierarchy of appearances with the appearance to Peter and then to the eleven taking precedence over any personal experiences that individuals might have.

Luke’s portrayal of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is central to the overarching thesis of his two works: that the Spirit is the primary means of God’s interacting with the Church, especially to its ordinary members. While it is unlikely that Luke wishes to discount the religious experiences of any early Christians who may have interacted with the risen Lord, his narrative places distinct boundaries on both the frequency of such events and the authoritative import of such events. As such, Luke’s narrative of the road to Emmaus stresses for the reader that the shared experience of the disciples provides important keys for understanding how the risen Lord is primarily experienced within the Christian community of his own day. The story of the road to Emmaus ought then to be read as if the reader was the unnamed disciple.<sup>76</sup> The disciples list three means by which they identified the risen Lord, and these serve as Luke’s guidelines to the Church on how Christ’s continued

presence is primarily experienced. Luke suggests that the risen Lord may be found through a witness of the Holy Spirit ("did not our heart burn within us when he spoke to us on the road," Luke 24:32 KJV), the words of the scriptures ("when he opened the Scriptures to us?" Luke 24:32 KJV), and in the sacramental meal ("he had made himself known of them in the breaking of the bread," Luke 24:35 KJV).

Although Luke appears to have crafted the Emmaus narrative to better convey the authority of the apostles and the role of the Holy Spirit in the early church, this is certainly not to say that Luke has invented the story for his own aims. Indeed, the narrative has all the hallmarks of an orally circulated tradition and appears to predate Luke's composition.<sup>77</sup> It would then appear that Luke plucked from the circulating traditions a well-known episode involving early Christians who were not religious authorities, and who typified the average disciple of Christ who may claim a charismatic experience. Luke then placed and shaped the story to allow the reader to see that the charismatic experiences of early Christians ought to be viewed as subservient to the authority granting experiences of the apostles, and especially of Peter. In Luke's day this may have stood as a firm indictment of any individual or group who might have attempted to claim some sort of alternative ecclesial authority from a more recent manifestation of the risen Lord.<sup>78</sup> This matches Dunn's assertion that "authority in the primitive church was primarily charismatic in nature"<sup>79</sup> and, as such, could easily be challenged by appeals to alternative charismatic experiences.

Luke further emphasizes the unique nature of the apostolic experience as he continues his narrative. Just as Cleopas and the unnamed disciple are relating their experience, their story is again superseded by a more impressive manifestation of the risen Lord (Luke 24:36). It is thus not happenstance that Luke portrays this as happening "while they were saying this."<sup>80</sup> Everyone present is "filled with terror" because they "thought they were seeing a spirit."<sup>81</sup> In order to dispel such thoughts, the risen Lord invites them to "see my hands and my feet; it is I myself. Touch me and see: a spirit has neither flesh nor bones, which as you see, I have."<sup>82</sup> To further solidify his corporeal nature, the risen Lord asks if they have any food, takes what he is given, and eats it in the presence of the disciples (Luke 24:41–43). Luke highlights the corporeality of the risen Lord in a more emphatic fashion than in the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The risen Lord is immediately identifiable by all present, unlike the unrecognizable form seen by the disciples on the road. Additionally, the risen Lord allows the disciples

to touch his resurrected body, something that also did not occur in the Emmaus account. Finally, the eating of a meal with the eleven here stands in stark contrast to how Jesus vanished after breaking the bread at Emmaus. Luke's message seems clear: although the Emmaus disciples whom we are to identify ourselves with are presumably witnesses to the experiences being portrayed here, the emphasis is on the unique authority granting experience to the eleven mentioned in verse 33. In essence, Luke is establishing that the experience of ordinary Christians with the corporeality of the risen Lord primarily comes through the witness of the apostles. Christ stresses this fact with his emphatic statement that "you are witnesses of these things" (ὕμεῖς μάρτυρες τούτων, Luke 24:48), again, perhaps in opposition to claims by others in Luke's day that they too have experienced the risen Lord and as such also have been granted some measure of authority.

Luke concludes his gospel account with the Lord leading the group a short distance out of Jerusalem to Bethany where he blesses them (Luke 24:50). While in the process of blessing them, "it happened that he left them and was carried up into heaven."<sup>83</sup> While many have viewed the beginning of Acts as merely a more detailed account of this same event, the differences between the two accounts are not easily reconcilable, especially given the fact that they are written by the same author and presumably for the same audience. The two accounts are better understood as two distinct interactions with the risen Lord.<sup>84</sup> However, it is significant to note that Luke is the only gospel writer to conclude his account with Jesus physically leaving his apostles. It seems that Luke wishes to stress for his readers that the risen Christ will not always be physically present to the early Church, a note he highlights by relating the departure of Christ to cap his narrative.

As has been shown, Luke conveys the resurrection appearances of Christ in a manner distinct from Mark and Matthew, perhaps in an effort to theologically limit authority granting resurrection appearances to those associated with the apostles at Easter. While Luke's principal emphasis on the experiences of the apostles over and against personal resurrection manifestations in some ways must be viewed as a product of Luke's later composition date, an analysis of John (the latest of the gospels), shows that this emphasis is not necessarily indicative of the wider Christian sentiment in the early church.

## John

John is widely considered the latest of the gospels and, correspondingly, the one that most consistently portrays Jesus in divine language.<sup>85</sup> While even the most casual of readers can detect a difference between the "fourth gospel" and those that comprise the synoptic tradition, it is curious how radically different the gospel of John portrays the resurrection appearances than its predecessor in Luke. Whereas Luke wishes to carefully contain appearances of the risen Lord and associate them with a specific time in the church's past, John returns again to a broader conception of Jesus's post-resurrection activity found in Mark and Matthew, but in many ways pushes the narrative of Jesus's post-resurrection activity beyond the scope of even those gospels.

The first difference one notices between John and Luke is the return of the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. The account begins with Mary approaching the empty tomb, and seeing the stone rolled away from the door, Mary rushes back to Peter and the other apostles and tells them the alarming discovery (John 20:1–2). Peter and "the other disciple" run to the tomb to verify for themselves Mary's troubling claim (John 20:3–6). Upon seeing the empty tomb, the other disciple "believed," and both he and Peter return to their homes (John 20:8). The distraught Mary, however, remains outside the tomb weeping (John 20:11). As she is crying Mary bends down to look into the tomb and sees "two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet" (John 20:11–12 NRSV). These two angels address her and ask why she is crying (John 20:13). Mary seems unimpressed by the presence of the two heavenly messengers, receives no comforting message, and only acknowledges their presence to tell them that "they" (presumably someone with malicious intent) "have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:13 NRSV). As though to emphasize her seeming indifference to the heavenly manifestations before her, Mary turns around without hearing anything more from these remarkable messengers (John 20:14). By depicting Mary's interaction with the angels in such a brief fashion, John focuses the narrative forcefully on the appearance of the resurrected Jesus, not on the manifestation of the angelic messengers.

As Mary turns around, she is met by the risen Lord but is unaware that it is him (John 20:14). Jesus asks her the same exact question as the angels: "Woman, why are you weeping?" this time adding, "Whom are you looking for?" (John 20:15 NRSV). Mary, unaware that she is speaking to the risen Lord and assuming that she is speaking to the gardener, asks



him if he knows where the body of Jesus is (John 20:15). Jesus responds by saying her name, and upon hearing her name spoken by the risen Jesus, Mary recognizes that it is him (John 20:16). In contrast to her reaction to the appearance of the heavenly messengers, Mary is much more joyful at the appearance of Jesus and attempts to touch or hold him (John 20:16–17). Jesus intriguingly rebuffs Mary by stating that he has “not yet ascended to the Father” (John 20:17 NRSV). This in many ways seems to be similar to what Luke attempts with his portrayal of the disciples on the road to Emmaus: a definitive separation of those post-resurrection visits that are enacted to establish his resurrected state and those that are personal. However, John’s narrative does reestablish Mary’s role as a messenger to the apostles, as the risen Lord gives her specific instructions on what to communicate to the eleven (John 20:17).

As the remaining eleven disciples are gathered in a room on the evening of the same day, they too are visited by the resurrected Lord (John 20:19). Like in other accounts, the resurrected Jesus appears to the apostles despite the inhibitions of locked doors and solid walls (John 20:19). Ostensibly because Jesus has by this time “ascended to the father,” the risen Lord proceeds to validate his resurrected state by allowing the apostles to observe his hands and side (John 20:20). John’s account is thus unique amongst the gospels in that it explicitly places the “Ascension” or enthronement of Christ on the same day as the resurrection. Other later Christian literature, such as the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Gospel of Peter*, also preserves a tradition of ascension/enthronement occurring the same day as the resurrection.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, it appears that in the minds of early Christians, nearly *all* post-resurrection appearances of Christ were viewed as “post-Ascension” or “post-exaltation” appearances. Indeed, John’s account suggests that it is only after his “ascension” that Christ is truly able to minister in a resurrected form to the apostles at all.

John continues his narrative by depicting the risen Lord bestowing the Holy Ghost through his life-giving breath upon those that are gathered (John 20:22).<sup>87</sup> Jesus then leaves the disciples, although the method of his departure is not stated, and the reader is informed that this meeting was devoid of Thomas, one of the original Twelve (John 20:24). When the group narrates the account to Thomas, he famously states, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25 NRSV). Eight days later, this time with Thomas present, the Lord appears again within the closed room and repeats the process of allowing Thomas to validate his resurrected state by touching his resurrected (and ascended)

body (John 20:26–28). John's narrative is brought to a climactic close by the important words of Jesus: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29 NRSV). Placher has noted that this platitude most likely is meant to indicate those reading the gospel.<sup>88</sup> John makes clear to his readers through the words of the resurrected Jesus that belief should always predicate a charismatic experience like seeing the risen Lord. However, John does not place any limits upon such experience anywhere in his narrative. John's narrative concludes that "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30), a distinct allusion to additional post-resurrection appearances.

John further states that he has written these things that "you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31 KJV). Earlier in John's gospel, Jesus stated that "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NRSV). In essence, John has formulated the gospel in such a way as to suggest that receiving the risen Jesus is akin to a promise of eternal life. Earlier in the gospel, Jesus stated that even though he is going to "prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself" (John 14:3 NRSV). Additionally, Jesus stated, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18 KJV). Not simply a promise of post-resurrection visits to the apostles, Jesus also states that "they who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them" (John 14:21 NRSV). Seemingly confused as to what Jesus was insinuating, Judas (not Iscariot) asked, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" (John 14:22 NRSV). Jesus answers that if a man keeps his commandments, Jesus and the father will "make our home with him" (John 14:23 NRSV). Jesus reiterates that he will visit those he loves by stating, "You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice" (John 14:28 NRSV). Those who love Jesus would rejoice at these words presumably because Jesus would visit them after his resurrection and Ascension. In addition to the above passages, John 16:15–20 has also been identified as a promise of "postresurrectional communion with the risen Jesus" by several scholars.<sup>89</sup> These passages serve to establish a central theme of John's gospel: that the risen Lord continues to be present and active amongst true believers. Despite being the latest of the gospels written, John is



perhaps the most explicit in articulating the early Christian expectation of continued interaction with the risen Lord. In some ways, the themes found in the gospel of John can be read as “course corrections” for the Christian church that may have arisen during the time between Luke’s gospel and the writing of John’s account. Whereas Luke’s account is more definitive in its closure of post-resurrection appearances and emphasizes the primacy of the Apostolic experience with the risen Lord, John reestablishes “in the post-resurrection situation the horizontally unstructured relationship which characterized discipleship of the earthly Jesus.”<sup>90</sup> John is thus reemphasizing to the early Christian reader the ongoing theological conviction that every true follower of Christ may come in contact with the risen Lord regardless of their authoritative position or the passage of time.

Like the gospel of Mark, John too has both a shorter and a longer ending. For John, most scholars agree that chapter 21 was added later onto the text of John as it now stands.<sup>91</sup> As with the longer ending of Mark, the most important consideration for the purposes of this paper is that the addition was most likely written by a single author and as such represents an independent literary unit. Additionally, it is important to note that the literary composition appears more recent than rest of the fourth gospel. This, however, does not mean the tradition it preserves also exists in the same temporal relationship to the original ending. Most intriguing is the fact that such a story has been appended onto the end of a complete narrative and yet gained widespread acceptance. It is possible that this is primarily because the theology of the fourth gospel is such that an additional manifestation of the risen Lord was widely considered a consistent addition to the narrative.

The account opens with a statement that implies some amount of time has passed since the previous visitation: “After these things Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples.”<sup>92</sup> The appearance is not one that has any correlate in the synoptic tradition and takes place “by the sea of Tiberias” (John 21:1). The episode most certainly takes place after the Johannine conception of Jesus’s Ascension, and, given Luke’s insistence that the apostles remained in Jerusalem until the Spirit had been given, this account probably relates a tradition that purportedly occurred after Luke’s conception of the Ascension depicted in Acts 1. The account begins with Peter and six other disciples making the determination to go fishing, presumably a return to their old professions (John 21:2–3). The efforts of the disciples are decidedly unfruitful as they fish all night but catch nothing (John 21:3). Once again, Jesus’s appearance is decidedly

plain, as he stands on the shore with no fanfare and, as is often the case, unrecognizable (John 21:4). In an episode reminiscent of Luke 5:1–7, the Lord tells his disciples to cast the net on the right side of the boat, which results in a remarkable number of fish being caught (John 21:6). Like the breaking of the bread at Emmaus, or the speaking of Mary's name, this act makes Jesus immediately recognizable to them (John 21:6–7). The disciples make their way to the shore (Peter via a quick swim) and are instructed by Jesus to bring some of the fish to him so that they can have breakfast (John 21:7–12). Curiously, "none of the disciples dared ask him, 'who are you?' for they knew it was the Lord."<sup>93</sup> It is unclear why the disciples would wish to ask "who are you," as by this point in the narrative they have recognized who he is, and according to the account this was the third time that Jesus had appeared to the apostles (John 21:14). An alternative translation might render the question as "what are you?" (Σὺ τίς εἶ) and might reference a curiosity as to the Lord's current state after having been gone from the disciples for a significant period of time. Whatever the case, it seems as though the disciples were not expecting this manifestation of the risen Lord, whereas other appearances in the Galilee were predetermined by him and thus anticipated. The previous suggests that a prolonged period of absence may have occurred, and the episode thus probably preserves an appearance tradition independent of the Easter traditions. The risen Lord again eats with the disciples, but this time the eating does not seem to serve the function of validating the Lord's resurrected state. This seems to indicate, at least in the view of the author of John 21, that subsequent appearances of the resurrected Lord continued to involve his corporeal Easter form, and that his mode of interacting with his apostles had not fundamentally changed despite the passage of time. After the disciples and the Lord conclude their meal, the Lord and Peter exchange their now famous dialogue of love and its relationship to the care of the flock (John 21:15–19). Like Matthew and Mark, the story concludes with the risen Lord still present as both Peter and John follow Christ to an unknown destination (John 21:19–23). Again, this narrative detail seems to emphasize to the reader that Christ is still present to his community and has not been taken away in any final or decisive fashion. Even if members of the community do not now see the Lord, they are at least left with the definitive sense that such an appearance could happen again at any time and in the same fashion as the previous appearances. The author of the second ending of John concludes his narrative with an evocative statement as to the scope of Christ's post-resurrection activity: "But there are also many things which Jesus did;

if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25 NRSV). The context of this statement makes clear that the author is referring to those deeds perpetuated by the risen Lord in particular. As such, it is a reiteration of the early Christian tradition of repeated and ongoing interaction with the risen Lord. Painter has rightly noted, “From [John’s] perspective Jesus continues to teach after the resurrection and in a way not limited by the ascension.”<sup>94</sup>

### **Gospels Conclusion**

“For all the confusing chronology, for the manifest variations in tradition, the one thing upon which all four evangelists are agreed is that the tomb of Jesus was empty.”<sup>95</sup> I would add to the assertion of Albright and Mann that all of the gospels also agree upon a wide and varied tradition of post-resurrection visitations. That the gospel endings cannot be easily reconciled is a powerful witness to the pervasiveness of varied traditions of post-resurrection ministrations of the risen Lord. From the gospel narratives alone, we have accounts of at least two women who claimed to have seen the risen Lord (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary), several unnamed disciples (see Luke’s account of Emmaus and subsequent ascension), and several unique and independent resurrection appearances to the apostles. Any attempt to then read the gospels as retellings of one easily refutable resurrection appearance ignores the ubiquity of early Christian witnesses to the resurrection. The gospel endings ought then to be read as independent narratives that reflect multiple traditions of visitations of the resurrected Lord, rather than competing views of a few singular events.

All but Luke’s account narratively imply the plausibility of continued interaction with the risen Lord. Mark anticipates any number of visitations in his shorter ending, while the author of the longer ending reports multiple visits and then associates the missionary success of the apostles with the continued presence and interaction of the risen Jesus after his enthronement. Matthew’s account records the experiences of two women who see and touch the risen Jesus, and then closes with the resurrected Lord promising to be with his followers to the end of the age. John’s narrative concludes with an otherwise unknown manifestation of the risen Lord at the Sea of Tiberias and follows with an assertion that all the books in the world could not contain the number of ministrations of the risen Lord to his disciples. Even though Luke’s gospel is more restrictive of post-resurrection appearances of Christ, the narrative still

assumes a vibrant and robust post-resurrection tradition. For example, Luke's gospel relates an appearance of Jesus to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, references a visit to Peter, and also recounts the risen Lord appearing to the eleven and an unknown number of other disciples. While Luke omits a narrative recounting of the women disciples' experience with the risen Lord, he appears to acknowledge its existence in the reference found in the Emmaus account. Luke's emphasis on the Easter experience of the eleven and subsequent focus on the role of the spirit in the early church is contextualized by the later account of John. John follows Luke's lead in emphasizing the eleven's experience of touching the resurrected Lord as an important aspect of their call as apostles. Additionally, Luke and John both end with the promise of the Holy Spirit (John 20:22, Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:4–5, 8), whereas the earlier gospels promise Jesus himself as a presence. However, like the earlier gospels, John reemphasizes the ongoing role of the resurrected Lord in the affairs of his disciples. While acknowledging the contributions of Luke's account in establishing the Christian theological concepts of Apostolic witness and the role of the Holy Spirit in leading the church, John reminds followers of Christ that the risen Lord stands ready to interact with all true believers at any time and in any place.

It would then appear that the earliest accounts of Jesus's post-resurrection ministry more readily articulate expectations of continued interaction with the risen Lord. The rhetorical shape of Luke's later account seems primarily concerned with articulating a hierarchy of visitations through which the charismatic experiences of early Christians are constrained within the limits of Luke's theological framework. The later account of John, however, seems to question the rigidity of Luke's demarcation of appearances of the risen Lord between those to the apostles and those to ordinary believers.<sup>96</sup> However, John shares some of the same theological outlook as Luke about the significance of the Easter visits being uniquely associated with the apostles' privilege of touching the risen Lord.

### **Post-Ascension Accounts**

As has been established, the gospel authors appear to have accepted the risen Lord's ability and willingness to continue to manifest himself to his followers for an unconstrained period of time following his resurrection. However, this claim in and of itself is incomplete in establishing the premise of this paper. In order to assert that early Christians continued to expect interactions with the risen Lord after

the Ascension in a fashion similar to what was experienced prior to that event, additional evidence must be considered. We therefore turn to an investigation of Luke's highly influential account found in the Acts of the Apostles. This is our only canonical narrative source for definitive accounts of post-Ascension visitations of the risen Lord, primarily because the Ascension as a distinct theologically significant event seems to be a uniquely Lukan concept. As such, Luke's portrayal of each of these accounts reflects the Lukan position that manifestations of the risen Lord after the Ascension fundamentally differ in purpose than those experienced by the apostles during the Easter series of manifestations. A careful reading of Acts displays several instances of post-Ascension manifestations of the risen Lord that conform to this understanding. The most important of these accounts is undoubtedly Paul's Damascus experience. Because we have brief claims surrounding Paul's experiences from his own letters, a careful corroboration of the accounts will allow us to see how Paul's description of the event most readily aligns itself with the earliest traditions extracted from the gospel narratives of Mark, Matthew, and John. As such, rather than allowing Luke's account to dictate the reading of Paul's letters, one must take care to ensure that Luke's account is read through the lens of the combined witness of the three independent gospels and Paul's letters. Indeed, while it is apparent Luke wishes to present resurrection experiences that occurred after the Ascension in a manner distinct from those prior, the stark difference of experience between the Easter accounts and those after the Ascension seems to be a byproduct of a particularly stringent reading of Luke's account. Corroboration of Luke's account with other early Christian documents, not least of which are Paul's own letters, seems to suggest the earliest Christians maintained a more fluid conception of post-Ascension interaction with the risen Lord.

## **Acts**

Perhaps no work has been more influential in shaping traditional Christian understandings of the post-Ascension activities of the resurrected Lord than Luke's narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. Written as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke,<sup>97</sup> it shares remarkable continuity in both literary and theological themes with its predecessor.<sup>98</sup> Luke's account was written at a time when the early Christian community faced both external and internal threats. As such, like Luke's gospel, the narrative of Acts seems carefully designed to respond to issues faced by the early Christian community. One such threat may have been individuals claiming



competing ecclesiastical authority from charismatic experiences with the risen Lord. As such, Luke's portrayal of experiences of the resurrected Jesus after the first chapter of Acts is decidedly different than his portrayal of the Easter experiences of the apostles. Comparison of the account of Paul's experience as it is portrayed in its three references in Acts and as it is portrayed in Paul's own letters also yields interesting discontinuity.

Luke seems to shy away from ascribing a physical appearance of the risen Lord to anybody but the original apostles after the Easter appearances. Whereas appearances prior to Luke's depiction of the Ascension are described in bodily terms, thereafter they are more spiritual. The notable exception to this general trend appears to be that of Stephen, but as Stephen's experience comes at the time of his death and involves "an opening of heaven" it would appear that Luke did not view such an experience as being a danger to the authority of the apostles (Acts 7:55–56). As such, Luke's delineation between experiences before and after the Ascension does not seem to be one of fundamental experience, but instead seems to be a distinction between those that convey Apostolic authority and those that do not. Although Luke obviously subscribes to the early Christian belief of continued interaction with the risen Lord, Luke portrays interactions with the risen Lord differently between the manifestation of the Easter Lord and his post-Ascension appearances to Paul, Stephen, and Ananias.

Luke begins the narrative of Acts by providing a brief summary of the ending of his gospel (Acts 1:1–3). Scholars have variously debated the extent of the summary, with the most assertive arguing that the entirety of verses 1–11 are just a recapitulation of the gospel narrative couched in different terms. However, the dissimilarities between the two accounts are too great to ascribe simply to a difference of presentation, especially considering their shared authorship. Bovon has noted the differences between the two accounts of the Ascension:

[Luke] designates the location in two different ways. In Luke 24:50 he directs attention to Bethany, and in Acts 1:12 to the Mount of Olives. Although he pays no attention to chronology in Luke 24 (the readers always think they are following the events of an endless Easter day), Luke explains in Acts 1:3 that forty days have elapsed. While Christ faces the disciples in Luke 24 to bless them, in Acts 1 he turns his back on them without a gesture of comfort. Whereas in the Gospel the blessing maintains the link between the one who leaves

and those who stay behind (hence their joy), in Acts Christ is taken abruptly from the disciples, who are so disconcerted that it takes two angels to help them recover.<sup>99</sup>

What is then typically read as a restatement of the end of Luke's previous account of Acts actually only goes as far as the end of verse two and concludes with the verb ἀνελήμφθη "he was taken up." Verse 3 and on convey an entirely new resurrection appearance, one that presumably takes place after Christ's initial ascension recorded at the end of Luke's gospel. Luke states that Jesus had instructed his apostles "after his suffering by many infallible proofs for forty days."<sup>100</sup> The phrase used to denote Christ's appearance to his disciples "ὄπτανόμενος αὐτοῖς" can be literally translated "being seen by them." While there is some debate as to whether Luke's forty days should be taken in a literal or figurative sense, the Greek seems to imply that Jesus's presence amongst the disciples was intermittent and involved multiple comings and goings.<sup>101</sup> The force of the phrase probably indicates to the reader that Luke does not view these apostolic appearances as "visionary." The entirety of the purpose of these visits seems to be summed in the phrase "οἷς καὶ παρέστησεν ἑαυτὸν ζῶντα" literally "to whom also he presented himself living" (Acts 1:3). Luke's primary purpose in relating this account seems to be a validation of Christ's resurrected state; the forty-day period certainly provides such. Luke recounts a Pauline summary of this visit: "And for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses to the people" (Acts 13:31). Interestingly, Luke does not include in this quotation Paul's claim that he was also a witness to the resurrection as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15:8. Luke's depiction of Christ's intermittent ministry also focuses on the fact that a purpose of the resurrected Lord's manifestation was to provide "instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen" (Acts 1:2 NRSV), with Luke curiously depicting the Spirit as an integral part of the resurrection appearances. This would suggest that Luke does not view the conveyance of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost as an inhibitor to further manifestations of the risen Lord, as the Holy Spirit appears to be a key feature of Luke's descriptions of Christ's post-resurrection manifestations (Acts 1:2; Luke 24:32). Like in other accounts, Christ eats with his apostles (Acts 1:4), another indicator of the corporeal nature of this visit to the chosen apostles.

While Jesus is speaking to his apostles, one of them asks if Jesus is going to establish the kingdom at that moment (Acts 1:6). While the answer may be obvious to modern readers, this question is entirely valid



within the context of early Christian experience, as it seems as though the early Church initially may have expected Jesus to triumphantly return quite soon after his death (the *Parousia*). However, Luke apparently wishes to make evident that not every post-resurrection appearance of Christ will be in conjunction with the coming of the *Parousia*. Jesus's answer that the timing of his return is not a bit of knowledge that is fit for the apostles to know is a quick rebuttal (Acts 1:7). Jesus then asserts again that they are to be his witnesses in all the nations. The apostles will be able to achieve this mission because of the promise of power that will be given to them by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Jesus is then taken up into heaven in a cloud, a method of ascension common to heroes in Greco Roman literature, and also reminiscent of the "cloud of Gods glory" in the Old Testament accounts.<sup>102</sup> It seems obvious that Luke envisions Jesus's physical body as accompanying him into the heavenly sphere, a fact that indicates Luke does not necessarily wish to suppress expectations of Christ's continued manifestation in corporeal form. As the apostles are standing looking up into heaven, two men dressed in white appear and ask the apostles why they are staring up into heaven (Acts 1:10). The answer to the question seems abundantly obvious: the apostles are staring longingly after their risen Lord and wishing for his immediate return. The sense of loss is emphasized by the threefold repetition of the phrase "into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The angels attempt to comfort the apostles by telling them that "the same way in which he was taken up, he will return" (Acts 1:11). While this has traditionally been read by the church as a prophecy regarding Christ's second coming, the context of the response when read in conjunction with Luke's desire to separate appearances of Christ from the coming of the *Parousia* seems to imply that this may also reference future visitations of the resurrected Jesus to his apostles not connected with his second coming.

After the Ascension, the group of apostles returns to Jerusalem, and the narrative proceeds to give an account of the selection of Matthias to replace the deceased and disgraced Judas. After recounting Judas's grisly death, Peter asserts that "one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection" (Acts 1:21–22 NRSV). Peter's suggestion is somewhat opaque. Ostensibly one of the individuals in attendance at the meeting is to be selected and ordained to the same status as the original eleven. While certainly there were many who had "accompanied" the eleven "during all the time that the Lord

Jesus went in and out,” it is unclear how any of these individuals could be “a witness to his resurrection,” in having been present “when he was taken up from us.” The text of Acts makes clear that the Ascension that occurred on the Mount of Olives and that Luke just narrated occurred only in the presence of those eleven who Jesus had chosen in his mortal ministry.<sup>103</sup> The answer to the question readily presents itself when considering that Luke recounts a visit and an Ascension in his gospel that was attended by individuals other than the apostles (Luke 24:33–50). Luke’s gospel places this first ascension at Bethany, a town located on the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:50). It is not unreasonable to suggest Matthias may have been present at this first Ascension. Peter makes it clear that the new apostle is to be considered on the same standing despite not being present at the most recent Ascension. Correspondingly, the Ascension at Bethany is clearly seen as an event capable of bestowing apostolic witness upon the observer. Thus, what many readers view as the decisive end of the gospel of Luke is really just one example of what Luke believed to be multiple instances of individuals observing Christ’s ascent into the heavenly realm. Because Luke records two Ascensions, both of which are capable of bestowing apostolic witness, it seems that even Luke viewed the Ascension in a somewhat fluid fashion. The remainder of Luke’s account supports this reading, as it is rife with additional visitations of the risen Lord.

Luke repeatedly emphasizes in his narrative that the apostles are those that have “seen and heard,” and are God’s witnesses to the world.<sup>104</sup> Luke’s emphasis on the role of the apostles as witnesses of the resurrection displays his desire to carefully distinguish between the authority granting Easter appearances and other similar but non-authority-granting charismatic experiences. A peculiar account in Acts that may illustrate Luke’s unique understanding of the Easter accounts is found in Acts 5:19–20. Just prior to this account, the apostles had been thrust into prison by the High Priest and the Sadducees (Acts 5:17–18). As the Twelve were in prison, the text states that “the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors at night and escorted them out.”<sup>105</sup> The term “angel of the Lord” (Ἄγγελος Κυρίου), has a long line of usage in the Greek Septuagint as a “form expressing divine epiphanies and is often a circumlocution for God.”<sup>106</sup> Early Christians often interpreted the phrase in the Old Testament to denote the pre-incarnate Christ.<sup>107</sup> While nearly every modern translation renders the term “an angel of the Lord,” it could also be rendered “The angel of the Lord” or “The Lord’s Angel.” While this distinction may seem superfluous, there is some precedence of Luke

using the term “angel” to denote a person’s spiritual entity.<sup>108</sup> The use of the term here becomes very ambiguous when the individual delivers a message that the apostles are to “go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life” (Acts 5:20 NRSV). The words of the heavenly messenger are most intelligible when placed on the lips of the resurrected Lord, otherwise the statement is somewhat cryptic. Additionally Luke seems to make a distinction between an “angel of God” and the “angel of the Lord” throughout his narratives although the difference is not entirely apparent.<sup>109</sup> Luke does use the term angel to denote when God appears to Moses in a burning bush despite the fact that the narrative found in the Old Testament says God appeared to Moses.<sup>110</sup> There is also some ancient precedence for taking this particular Angel as a manifestation of the risen Lord designed to establish his corporeality.<sup>111</sup> Because the passage does have the “angel of the Lord” interacting with the world in a corporeal fashion, it would certainly blur the distinction Luke attempts to make between the pre-Ascension and post-Ascension appearances of Christ. As such, Luke may have attempted to emphasize that this was a manifestation of the risen Lord not intended to convey the reality of the resurrection by using the same construction he uses to denote Peter’s spiritual and post-mortal entity (Acts 12:15). Additionally, there is evidence of other early Christian documents having their Christophanies adjusted to be more theologically suitable by substituting an angel or a martyr in the place of Christ.<sup>112</sup> As such, it is possible that this text has been adjusted somewhat either by Luke or a later editor to better match Luke’s theological aims. While it may be unwise to suggest that every use of the phrase “angel of the Lord” in Luke’s account denotes a resurrection appearance of Jesus, there are several striking parallels between events Luke ascribes to the “angel of the Lord” in Acts and other events that occur in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles that are ascribed to the risen Lord himself.

The next appearance of the risen Lord recorded by Luke occurs in Acts 7:55–56 and caps the famous martyrdom of Stephen. While Stephen sees the risen Lord in a distinctly corporeal fashion, the visitation takes place at the end of Stephen’s life, leaving no room for the manifestation to be construed as one granting apostolic authority. As such, Luke’s portrayal of the event is uncharacteristically visual, whereas those events that Luke wishes to contrast with the Easter experiences of the apostles focus predominantly on the auditory content of the experience. This rhetorical move allows Luke to stress the difference in purpose of the pre- and post-Ascension manifestations of Christ, with those after the

Ascension being primarily for the purpose of conveying messages or comfort instead of establishing the physical reality of the resurrected Christ.

Stephen had just delivered a powerful speech that accused the Sanhedrin of unlawful behavior (Acts 7:53). The governing body was infuriated and “ground their teeth at him” (Acts 7:54 NRSV). Unfazed by their apparent anger, the account states that Stephen, being full of the spirit, and “gazing into heaven saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”<sup>113</sup> Seemingly to reinforce the actuality of the event, Luke has Stephen state to the audience in the very next verse, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right side of God.”<sup>114</sup> The verb used by Stephen to state that he “sees” is *θεωρέω*, which means “to look at, or gaze upon.” The verb occurs 58 times in the New Testament with 21 of those occurrences being used by Luke in his gospel or in Acts. Notable references include those watching Jesus on the cross including the hostile Jewish rulers,<sup>115</sup> the disciples fearing that his apparition was a ghost after the road to Emmaus,<sup>116</sup> the Lord telling the disciples that “a spirit does not have flesh and blood as you see me have,”<sup>117</sup> and Peter addressing the crowd stating that “the man whom you see is now healed.”<sup>118</sup> That Stephen is able to see the risen Lord while those surrounding him do not highlights the personal nature of the visitation, and allows Luke to recount the visual experience without attempting to delineate between it and the easter appearances. In Lukan theology, the Lord appears to those who need his assistance and who have the Holy Spirit. Those who do not have the Holy Spirit either do not see him (Acts 7:54–57, 9:7) or are injured in some manner by his glory, as in the instance of Paul (Acts 9:8–9).

Paul’s experience with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus is perhaps the most famous non-Easter appearance of Christ. Luke’s initial portrayal of Paul’s experience in Acts 9:3–7 focuses on the auditory content of the experience while omitting details about what Paul may have visually experienced. This auditory emphasis is consistent with Luke’s attempts to theologically distinguish between the apostolic Easter appearances and other early Christian experiences with the risen Lord. Unfortunately, this emphasis has resulted in confusion as to whether Paul saw the risen Lord or just experienced an auditory conversation amid a blinding light. The experience is referred to twice more in the text of Acts during speeches given by Paul (Acts 22:6–21, 26:12–18) and briefly by Paul in Galatians and 1 Corinthians. In each of these non-narrative accounts, Paul more obviously describes the event as a visible manifestation of

the resurrected Lord, which he believes grants him authority equivalent to the other apostles.<sup>119</sup> This stands in contrast to the reticence with which Luke treats Paul's claims to apostolic authority. Indeed, Luke's hesitance to suggest that Paul's experience was equivalent to the Easter experiences in many ways appears to reflect a general early Christian consensus. Only Paul uses his experience with the resurrected Lord as a defense of apostolic authority. Other early Christian resurrection accounts that depict the conveyance of authority are almost exclusively tied to Christ's own handpicked apostles. Rare instances of appearances to non-apostolic figures (i.e., the Shephard of Hermas, Ananias, Mary Magdalene, the Damascus disciples), are distinct from accounts of the Easter appearances to the apostles and are never used to lay claim to apostolic authority. Luke's auditory emphasis thus may reflect an attempt to theologically constrain Paul's experience to one that granted an important personal mission, while avoiding the dangerous precedent of portraying the event as an Apostolic resurrection witness.

Luke's first reference to Paul's experience in Acts 9:3–5 begins with Paul traveling with companions to Damascus, ostensibly to continue his fervent persecution of those who follow "the way."<sup>120</sup> As he is traveling, "a light out of heaven shone around him."<sup>121</sup> As Paul is encompassed by this light, he falls to the ground and hears a voice speaking to him (Acts 9:4). As is characteristic of Luke's portrayal of post-Ascension manifestations, Luke focuses his description of the event on the auditory content of the experience while minimizing the visual aspects. In this way the reader does not confuse this resurrection account as one designed to establish Christ's corporeal resurrection and thus establish Paul as an apostolic witness. The first indication that Paul may actually have had a visual experience like that of the apostles rather than solely an auditory experience is Luke's assertion that those traveling with Paul "heard the voice but saw no one" (Acts 9:7 NRSV). Presumably this statement is to distinguish their experience from Paul's own as he heard a voice *and* saw an individual. While this observation may not be conclusive, corroboration with other accounts of Paul's experience suggest visual aspects of Paul's experience were omitted in Luke's narrative account, and thus indicate that Luke's preoccupation with the auditory content of the vision may be for his unique theological purposes.

Paul and his companions continue their journey to Damascus, but Paul has been stricken blind from his experience (Acts 9:9). The three days during which he cannot see may be symbolic of the three days during which Christ laid in the tomb, a time during which no one saw



the resurrected Jesus. As Paul approaches Damascus the narrative takes a sudden shift to a man named Ananias. The text records an experience Ananias' had with the risen Lord that Luke also seems to portray in distinct fashion. Rather than receiving a message from an angel or from the Holy Spirit, the text states that "the Lord addressed [him] in a vision."<sup>122</sup> The term "vision" (ὄραματι) is somewhat difficult to render. It is problematic because, apart from one other canonical instance, it is used entirely in Acts. The only other use in the New Testament occurs in Matthew 17:9 when Jesus uses the term in reference to his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. The literal translation of the word is "that which is seen, visible object, sight,"<sup>123</sup> and may refer to an experience received while either awake or asleep. C. K. Barrett has noted, "The Lord spoke to him in a vision; that is, the Lord (evidently Jesus; see V. 17) was both seen and heard."<sup>124</sup> As it stands, there appears to be no textual reason to assert that Ananias experienced anything fundamentally different than the apostles on Easter, except that the experience does not appear to have included an invitation to eat with or touch the risen Lord. Luke's inclusion of the term "vision," thus functions as a literary marker to the reader, denoting that the experience is different in scope than the experience of the apostles.

Ananias appears to recognize the risen Jesus immediately and converses with him for a relatively lengthy period of time (Acts 9:10–15). Again, Luke's description of the risen Lord is nonexistent, and the account focuses primarily on the auditory portion of the event, presumably in an effort to downplay its similarities to the experience of the apostles at Easter. In speaking with the Lord, Ananias is told to find Paul and restore his sight (Acts 9:12). Ananias follows the instructions given to him and, as he is blessing Paul, asserts that "Jesus appeared to you on the way" (Acts 9:17). Here the word reverts to the aorist passive participle ὀφθείς of the verb ὀράω. Speaking of "ὀφθείς," the aorist passive form of the verb, O'Collins has written:

[we have] various examples not only of the risen Christ "appearing" (as in 1 Cor 15) but also of "appearances" of angels (e.g., Luke 1:11; 22:43; Acts 7:30–35), and of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration (Mark 9:4; Matthew 17:3). [We then understand] *ōphthē* ... to mean "Christ appeared," "became visible," "showed himself," or "let himself be seen ... Apart from one reference to an Old Testament theophany (Acts 7:2) and the appearance of a Macedonian in a night vision to Paul (Acts 16:9), the central role of *ōphthē* in the New Testament



comes in reference to appearances of Christ in the aftermath of his resurrection (Luke 24:34; Acts 13:31; 1 Cor 15:5, 6, 7, 8). In short, *ōphthē* was used to identify visionary experiences of the risen Christ.<sup>125</sup>

Contextualizing the verb used here to describe Paul's vision with other instances of its use throughout the New Testament seems to make clear that this was a visible manifestation similar to those manifestations of the risen Lord prior to the Ascension:

Clearly linked with this Christophany language are the many references to "seeing" the risen Christ: for instance, "he [the risen Christ] is going before you into Galilee; there you will see [*opsesthe*] him" (Mark 16:7; see Matt 28:7, 10). "Seeing" him on the mountain, the eleven disciples adored him (Matt 28:17). . . . Thomas comes to faith because he has "seen" the risen Christ; those are blessed who come to faith without having "seen" Christ, as the original witnesses did (John 20:29; see 1 Pet 1:8). Likewise, Paul (in 1 Cor 9:1) implies that the Corinthians have not experienced what he has experienced: his "seeing" (the risen Lord) should be distinguished from any other "coming to faith." When the New Testament refers to some of the first disciples experiencing the risen Christ, the language of "seeing" predominates. Their decisive experience of the risen Christ came through seeing him.<sup>126</sup>

In short, Paul and Ananias' use of the verb *ὁπάω* corresponds well to other uses of the same verb throughout the New Testament to denote corporeal manifestations of the risen Lord. As such, while Luke focuses on the auditory content rather than the visual aspects of these events, it does not appear as though Paul experienced something fundamentally different than the Easter experiences of the apostles. While Paul's experience is couched in more heavenly trappings than the Easter experiences (e.g., the light shining from heaven), he still appears to have seen the risen Lord in a visual manifestation with an audible message in a manner consistent with the Easter experiences.

The next post-Ascension account recorded by Luke comes in Acts 16:7. Like the previous accounts, the passage minimizes the visual aspects of the experience. Paul and Silas have been traversing "the region of Phrygia and Galatia" because they were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6 NRSV). "When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia," but notably this

time rather than being stopped by the Holy Spirit, the party is stopped by “the Spirit of Jesus,” who “would not allow them to do so.”<sup>127</sup> The “Spirit of Jesus” (τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ) is contrasted over and against the Holy Spirit, insinuating that this force was a distinct entity preventing them from going in a particular direction. Contextualized against other manifestations of the Lord recorded by Luke it would seem plausible that this again represents a post-Ascension manifestation of the risen Lord. Luke’s particular hesitance to describe this experience in visual terms may derive from the fact that it occurred to two individuals at once and thus comes dangerously close to a corporate religious experience like those experienced by the apostles at Easter.

Luke records another appearance of the risen Lord to Paul in Acts 18:9. The text says that “the Lord spoke to Paul in the night through a vision.”<sup>128</sup> As in Acts 9:10, the word for vision is again ὄραματος and denotes a visible object. However, as is characteristic of Luke’s accounts of post-Ascension manifestations of the risen Lord, no description of the visual aspects of the experience are given. Luke focuses instead on the auditory content of the experience, which includes the Lord telling Paul, “Do not be afraid” (Μὴ φοβοῦ) “because” (διότι) “I am with you” (ἐγὼ εἰμι μετὰ σοῦ, Acts 18:10). The Lord’s promise to Paul that “I am with you” is strikingly reminiscent of the same promise given to the apostles at the end of Matthew’s gospel (ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι, Matthew 28:20), and also consistent with the portrayal of the Lord’s involvement in the preaching of the word found in the longer ending of Mark (Mark 16:20).

Luke gives an additional description of Paul’s Damascus experience in Acts 22:6–21. The account has subtle differences but maintains the same overall message and feel as the previous narration. One notable difference is that the narrative is more explicit in stating that Paul has indeed seen the risen Lord. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the two accounts of Paul’s Damascus experience in Acts that quote Paul (Chapter 22 and 26) are far more explicit in claiming a visual experience with the risen Lord than Luke’s narrative portrayal of the event in Acts 9. Paul states in Chapter 22 that “those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me” (Acts 22:9). Additionally, as Paul is recounting the words of Ananias, Ananias states that Paul has seen “the Righteous One” or alternatively “the Upright One” (perhaps a reference to Christ’s risen state) and received “a message from his own mouth.”<sup>129</sup> Significantly, Ananias states that Paul “will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:15).

Paul has one of the more striking post-Ascension experiences in Acts 23:11. Here, Luke states, "That night the Lord stood near to him."<sup>130</sup> The Lord then delivers to Paul a message of comfort and predicts that he will testify in Rome (Acts 23:11). This particular experience does not match Luke's typical portrayal of post-Ascension manifestations but is in many ways paradigmatic of earliest Christian accounts of interactions with the risen Lord. Lacking the heavenly trappings of the Damascus experience or the "visionary" designation of Luke's other accounts, the Lord is mundane in his appearance and appears suddenly. Additionally, the Lord appears for a remarkably simple purpose: to provide comfort to Paul in a time of fear.

The final experience with the risen Lord recorded in Acts is the third and final Lukan account of Paul's Damascus experience. The account differs in several fundamental aspects from the previous two renditions. Most notably, Jesus himself states to Paul, "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you" (Acts 26:16 NRSV). It is fitting that Paul's final experience with the risen Lord is perhaps the most explicit in the narrative. The risen Lord leaves no doubt as to what Paul experienced by stating that he has "appeared" (ᾤφθη) to Paul and appointed him to be a witness. The grammatical structure of this appearance is identical to the one described by Luke in his gospel of the risen Lord appearing to Peter (ᾤφθη Σίμωνι), utilizing the aorist passive of the verb ὁράω and placing the recipient of the experience in the dative case (Luke 24:34). Paul's own description of Peter's experience in 1 Corinthians 15:5 utilizes the same construction (ᾤφθη Κηφᾶ), and here Paul's visionary experience is described by the risen Lord in identical terms as the formative Easter event (ᾤφθη σοι, Acts 25:16). Luke's hesitation to describe Paul's experience in the same terms as the original eleven curiously dissipates near the end of Acts. This seeming shift is no doubt deliberate. Luke's portrayal of post-Ascension manifestations of the risen Lord seems designed to protect against authority granting experiences of the risen Lord after the Easter accounts. While Luke supports Paul and his gentile mission, one can get a sense from Paul's letters that not everyone accepted his claim to apostleship. Even Luke is definitively vague about Paul's status as an "apostle" per se, typically reserving the title for the corporate Twelve.<sup>131</sup> As such, one can imagine how much more staunchly Luke might attempt to prevent individuals from claiming authority from heavenly manifestations of the risen Lord than he did of Paul. Luke's narrative of the missionary efforts of Paul

might then be read as Luke's validation of Paul's status as a true apostle. For Luke, the divine approval of Paul's mission has been expressed through the signs and wonders that have accompanied Paul throughout the narrative, and these are a better indication of Paul's apostolic authority than his claim to any sort of charismatic experience with the risen Lord. Just as the mission to the gentiles was validated in some ways by "signs and wonders,"<sup>132</sup> so too has Paul been validated as an apostle. As such, it is only after the reader has seen the Lord's validation of Paul throughout Luke's narrative and Paul is about to give his own life for the testimony of Jesus that Luke definitively grants Paul the title of "witness." Indeed, in the first account of Paul's experience, the risen Lord only provides Paul with instructions to follow, omitting any reference to his newfound status as a witness to the nations (Acts 9:4–6). In speaking to Ananias, the Lord seems to make Paul's status as a witness to the nations depend on how Paul responds to these instructions in the face of persecution: "I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:16 NRSV). In Luke's second description of the event, Paul's call as a witness is placed on the lips of Ananias and also couched in future terms: "You will be his witness to all mankind."<sup>133</sup> It is only in the final narrative of the event that the Paul is specifically told by the Lord that he has received a call to testify to the world: "For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you" (Acts 26:16 NRSV). Luke articulates the narrative in a way that best conveys his own theological understanding of certain events. James Dunn has called this Luke's "stylizing of both material and history," which is perhaps a fitting description of Luke's narrative presentation of post-Ascension appearances of the risen Lord and in particular Paul's experience on the road to Damascus.

### **Pauline Literature**

We turn now to the earliest textual accounts of interactions with the risen Lord, as Paul's letters to the Galatians and 1 Corinthians represent two of the earliest Christian documents extant. While Luke is careful in his presentation of the visual nature of Paul's experience, Paul is unambiguous in his claims of having seen the resurrected Lord. Correspondingly, Paul asserts that this experience carries the same apostolic weight as those experiences given to the eleven at Easter. Additionally, Paul appeals to a long tradition of post-resurrection (and often post-Ascension) visitations of Christ as a support for his own

experience granting apostolic authority. Paul also utilizes his experience on the Damascus road as a defense of his construal of the gospel message. Curiously, Paul devotes remarkably little attention to defending the authenticity of his experience, and what few critiques of Paul we can deduce from his letters are remarkably devoid of attacks on his actual experience. As such, the plausibility of Paul's claim of seeing the risen Lord does not appear to be the primary issue for Paul's critics. Instead, their critiques seem centered on whether such an experience granted apostolic authority. As has been noted previously, such a claim is entirely unique to Paul and may have been viewed as incongruous with generally accepted purposes for which the risen Lord may appear.

### Galatians

The Epistle to the Galatians is one of three New Testament texts that relate Paul's revelatory experience on the road to Damascus, and one of two composed by Paul himself.<sup>134</sup> In order to best understand Paul's reference to his Damascus experience in Galatians, a few observations about the occasion of the letter are in order. In some or all of the churches established by Paul in the Galatian region, individuals seem to have begun to preach a "Jewish" form of Christianity. Paul identifies these individuals as "trouble-makers" (τράσσοντες, 1:7; 5:10) and "agitators" (ἀναστατοῦντες, 5:12). Foremost amongst the oppositional stances taken by these "trouble-makers" was the belief that Christian converts must also adhere to the mandates of Torah, most specifically the requirement of circumcision. Because the "gospel" preached by Paul was at fundamental odds with salvific restrictions associated with Torah observance, Paul viewed the efforts of his opponents as wholly incompatible with his own message.<sup>135</sup> It seems that, in an effort to discredit Paul's claims about circumcision, these "Judaizing" opponents cast direct aspersions on Paul's apostolic authority. As such, a significant portion of the Galatian text is employed in a defense of Paul's apostleship, as well as a rejection of the theological premises of his opponents. Although Galatians is inherently spare regarding details of what Paul experienced on the road to Damascus, Paul's understanding of the *import* of that event is made abundantly clear in the epistle. Most importantly, Paul claims in unambiguous language that his experience qualified him for the same apostolic status as others who had experienced the risen Lord.

Reference to Paul's "call"<sup>136</sup> on the road to Damascus becomes explicit in only a few places in the Galatian text (1:1, 11–12, 16). Paul lays claim to direct authority from the risen Lord by labeling himself as an



apostle in the very first words of the epistle (Παυλος ἀπόστολος). The general usage of ἀπόστολος in the New Testament is in reference to an individual who possesses a special commission from Christ. When Paul uses the term in reference to himself, he is in essence laying claim to authority identical to those ἀπόστολοι who were commissioned by Christ during his earthly life<sup>137</sup> and subsequent post-resurrection appearances (Matthew 28:16–20). Paul claims that his apostleship was “neither from man nor through man”<sup>138</sup> but “through Jesus Christ.”<sup>139</sup> Paul goes further when he asserts that his authority was derived “through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.”<sup>140</sup> From this phrase we are able to assume that Paul viewed his apostolic authority as uniquely tied to the actuality of his experience with a corporeally resurrected Christ.

Paul’s brief allusion to his call discussed above serves as a precursor to two more references to the event later in the same chapter. In verses 11–12, Paul employs his experience with the resurrected Lord as a defense for his particular theological claims.<sup>141</sup> Paul states that he received his interpretation of the gospel message “through revelation of Jesus Christ.”<sup>142</sup> In verse 16, Paul states that God saw fit to “reveal his son in me” (ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί) “in order that” (ἵνα) “I might proclaim him in the nations” (εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, Galatians 1:16). Significantly, nearly all of Paul’s own claims about his own experience with the risen Lord parallel the salient features of the Easter visits to the apostles. Paul claims that he received a special commission to preach the gospel to the world from a visible resurrected Lord. Additionally, Paul claims that his understanding of the gospel derived primarily from his experience with the risen Jesus, a claim that mirrors Luke’s account of the apostles receiving pivotal scriptural exegesis from Jesus himself. As such, Paul is not merely claiming a “visionary” experience with the risen Lord but seems instead to be intentionally describing an analogous experience to those of the original apostles. Contrary to Luke’s account where the glory of the risen Lord is stressed along with an auditory rebuking of Paul’s previous endeavors, Paul emphasizes his unique commission to be a witness to the nations and that he too experienced the risen Lord in such a manner that he was able to authoritatively proclaim the risen Lord’s resurrected corporeal state.



## 1 Corinthians

Like Galatians, 1 Corinthians is another of Paul's well authenticated and relatively early letters.<sup>143</sup> Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul seems primarily concerned with reestablishing a lost sense of unity amongst the Corinthian saints. To do so, Paul provides doctrinal council on a variety of different theological topics, including the resurrection in chapter 15. However, as was the case in Galatia, there seem to have been present in the Corinthian community individuals who challenged Paul's apostolic authority and thus also his authority to adjudicate these matters of doctrinal debate.<sup>144</sup> The nature of the challenge again seems to be primarily associated with Paul's use of the title "apostle," not necessarily a challenge of the validity of Paul's revelatory experience.<sup>145</sup> This is supported by Paul's own emphasis throughout the epistle, as he typically states his experience as an accepted fact and then argues for his apostolic credentials from that point. Thus, Paul and his opponents seem to differ primarily in relation to the implications of Paul's experience, not with the plausibility of the experience itself.

Paul opens the epistle much like his correspondence to the Galatians, emphatically claiming apostolic authority from Christ: "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."<sup>146</sup> That Paul lists another individual (Sosthenes) as a co-sender of the epistle but does not ascribe the same apostolic status to him serves as a stark contrast to Paul's claim.<sup>147</sup> Paul then proceeds to provide council and exhortation to the Corinthians but returns to a defense of his apostolic authority later in chapter 9 when his argument demands such. In chapter 8, Paul has addresses the issue of eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols. The main thrust of his argument is that although eating idol-meat is not inherently sinful, an individual ought to be circumspect in their consumption of idol-meat so as not to cause those around them to falter in their faith.<sup>148</sup> The argument is interrupted briefly by a section of text in 9:1–3 designed to defend Paul's status as an apostle.

Paul's apostolic defense is striking in its simplicity. He begins with a series of four rhetorical questions, each anticipating an affirmative answer.<sup>149</sup> The first question, "Am I not free?" (Οὐκ εἰμι ἐλεύθερος) serves to tie Paul's defense of his apostleship into the topic of the previous verses, that of freedom.<sup>150</sup> The second and third questions, "Am I not an apostle?" (οὐκ εἰμι ἀπόστολος) and "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (οὐχὶ Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἑώρακα), serve as mutually reinforcing statements and seem to be the most critical to understanding Paul's claim.<sup>151</sup> By switching to the emphatic form of the negative (οὐχὶ), Paul

emphasizes the importance he places on his vision of the risen Lord.<sup>152</sup> While this switch certainly displays Paul's belief that his vision should be sufficient evidence of his apostleship, Conzelmann rightly points out that a vision of the risen Lord would not in and of itself be constitutive of an apostolic call in the view of other Christians.<sup>153</sup> As has been noted, this perhaps might explain the criticism Paul receives regarding his use of the term. Regardless of other's opinions of his status as an apostle, Paul confidently states that he has "seen Jesus our Lord," apparently expecting this fact to be both widely known and widely accepted.<sup>154</sup> Because it seems as though Paul's opponents may not have accepted Paul's apostolic status (without rejecting his visionary experience), Paul reinforces his claim through an appeal to his missionary efforts in the fourth rhetorical question: "Are you not my work in the Lord?" (οὐ τὸ ἔργον μου ὑμεῖς ἐστὲ ἐν κυρίῳ). By so doing, Paul makes any indictment of his own apostleship also an indictment of the community at Corinth.<sup>155</sup> He establishes this further in the next phrase: "If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 9:2 NRSV). Similar to the theme promoted by Luke in his depiction of Paul's efforts in Acts, Paul views his missionary success as additional evidence of his apostolic credentials. By stating that "at least I am to you," Paul is "certainly not renouncing his title for the areas outside the territory of his own mission but is securing the basis for his argument: *here* I am indisputably an apostle, hence I am an apostle. Your own existence is proof of it."<sup>156</sup> The concluding phrase, "This is my defense to those who would examine me" (1 Corinthians 9:3 NRSV), ought then to be read as an emphatic closure of the argument, not as an introduction to the following body of text.

Paul utilizes his experience with the risen Lord in much the same manner in Chapter 15. While the majority of readers tend to focus on Paul's use of a list of early Christian encounters with the risen Lord to defend the physical reality of Christ's resurrected body, Paul's initial rhetorical move is to include himself in a long line of witnesses of Christ's resurrected state, a list primarily comprised of apostles (1 Corinthians 15:5–8). The list makes clear that Paul sees no fundamental difference of experience between his own manifestation of the risen Lord and those granted to the apostles in the Easter visits. A careful investigation of the list of experiences also yields interesting information that will aid in understanding earliest Christian beliefs about the activities of the risen Lord.

Paul begins the chapter by informing the Corinthians that he is imparting to them "what I in turn had received" (1 Corinthians 15:3 NRSV). Scholars have taken this phrase to indicate that the following verses with their formulaic expressions of faith may preserve a pre-Pauline kerygmatic formula.<sup>157</sup> "That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:3–5 NRSV). There is some debate as to whether this kerygmatic formula ended just after the phrase "and that he appeared to Cephas" (καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ) or whether it included "then to the twelve" (εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα).<sup>158</sup> The majority of scholars maintain that the kerygmatic formula ends after the word Κηφᾶ, and that although the following phrase εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα is uncharacteristic of Paul, it nonetheless represents a Pauline addition.<sup>159</sup> The appearance of Christ to Cephas noted here most likely refers to the same appearance referenced in Luke 24:34 during which the risen Lord appeared first to Peter prior to his appearance to the remaining eleven apostles. As was noted previously, the verb ὤφθη ("was seen" or "appeared") used to describe the appearance to Peter is the same verb used by Paul to describe his own experience with the risen Lord.

The appearance "to the twelve" mentioned in verse 5 does not find an easy correlate to a canonical account.<sup>160</sup> Paul's use of the phrase "the twelve" (τοῖς δώδεκα) is unique to this verse and wholly uncharacteristic of his writings.<sup>161</sup> Those who argue that "εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα" was part of the original kerygmatic formula often do so precisely because Paul's statement would be so unusual. The primary correlative issue arises when considering that if Paul was referencing one of the canonical accounts of a post-resurrection appearance to the apostles he more accurately would have used the number eleven to describe them.<sup>162</sup> Rather than postulate that the "symbolic strength of the number" somehow overrode Paul's typical penchant for "meticulous accuracy,"<sup>163</sup> as well as his seeming aversion to the moniker, it seems likely that Paul is using the appellation quite intentionally.<sup>164</sup> This, however, does not necessarily entail that Paul is using the term "the twelve" in reference to the acknowledged authority group *en masse*. Instead, in light of the fact that Paul's list records four noncanonical experiences with the risen Lord (his own experience is the only appearance that can be reliably correlated to a narrative in the canon), it seems possible, if not probable, that this is a reference to another non-canonical visitation, one that might have occurred to the Twelve after the calling of Matthias.<sup>165</sup> This interpretation has ancient precedence: "Since

Judas was no longer present, some of the Fathers speculated the Twelve must have included Matthias (e.g., Origen, Chrysostom, Eusebius, Theophylact, and Photius.)<sup>166</sup> As such, it is another likely indication that earliest Christians did not have a conception of a “final appearance” of the risen Christ to his disciples and that the pool of widely accepted traditions relating manifestations of the risen Lord was much wider in the ancient world than those few experiences recorded in the canonical accounts.

Paul continues his list of witnesses with another non-canonical visitation: “Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died” (1 Corinthians 15:6 NRSV). While some have attempted to possibly connect this visionary experience with the day of Pentecost, it would be quite difficult to match Paul’s emphasis on the visual manifestations of the risen Lord with the account of Pentecost as it appears presently in Acts.<sup>167</sup> Whatever the experience entailed it appears clear that Paul is attempting to establish the historical and observable veracity of the Jesus’s resurrected state.<sup>168</sup> By stating such a large number, Paul precludes any interpretation of these experiences as merely “visionary.”<sup>169</sup> Paul emphasizes the availability of these witnesses to verify the experience by stating that although some of these witnesses have died, “most of [them] are still alive” (ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι).<sup>170</sup>

Paul records two additional extracanonical accounts in the following verse: “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:7 NRSV). The James mentioned here is almost certainly James of Jerusalem also known as James the brother of Jesus.<sup>171</sup> James’ vision is recorded in the fragmentary Gospel of the Hebrews.<sup>172</sup> Paul’s emphasis on “all the apostles” implies that Paul considers the group of apostles to be much larger than the Twelve.<sup>173</sup> This group might have included “missionaries, and some of them may even be the Seven mentioned in Acts 6:1–6.”<sup>174</sup> It might be noted that Stephen was one of the seven mentioned in Acts 6 and is the only one of the group to have a canonically recorded experience with the risen Lord.<sup>175</sup> However, as the recorded experience of Stephen comes as he is being stoned to death, it seems unlikely that this is the experience that Paul is purportedly referencing. The force of the statement seems to be implying that all apostles have seen the risen Lord, a point important to Paul’s own apostolic defense.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, the word order of the statement τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν “suggests that the emphasis falls on *the apostles*, not on *all*.”<sup>177</sup>

Paul concludes this line of equal witnesses with reference his own experience: "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (Acts 15:8 NRSV). In reference to Paul's use of the phrase "last of all," Fitzmyer has rightly noted:

[Paul] is not trying to say that there were no further appearances of the risen Christ after him but is only explaining the sense of the gen. "of all," as he puts himself at the bottom of the list, even though he claims to be an "apostle" of equal rank. It is best understood as an expression of humility.<sup>178</sup>

Perhaps the most important bit of information we can glean from this list is that Paul "makes no distinction between the risen Christ's appearances to him (after Pentecost) and the appearances to others between the day of the discovery of the empty tomb and the Ascension."<sup>179</sup> "Paul added his own vision of Christ as the sixth to the list of five transmitted to him (1 Cor 15:8). That makes sense only if it were of the same type, that is, if it were a matter, in each instance, of the Christ who had already been exalted to God making his appearance."<sup>180</sup> Paul has thus unambiguously associated his own experience with the authority granting experiences of the apostles at Easter. Furthermore, Paul has claimed that the post-Ascension manifestations of the risen Lord to numerous individuals were experienced in fundamentally the same manner as the very first Easter appearance to Peter. As one of the earliest Christian authors, Paul's writings provide strong evidence that earliest Christians believed in a fluid and ongoing interaction with the risen Lord even after the event described in Acts that has come to be termed "the Ascension."

### Conclusion

It seems apparent from our investigation that earliest Christians expected manifestations of the risen Lord from the first Easter appearance up through an unspecified, albeit relatively late period in the movements' development. In conjunction with this expectation, there appears to have been a wide variety of roles that the risen Lord assumed in earliest Christian communities, including comforter, exegete, giver and clarifier of doctrine, and director of missionary activities. While it is certainly outside the realm of this particular investigation, it would not be surprising to find that expectations of interactions with risen Lord dwindled with correlative proportion to the standardization of such processes in the early Church. It is perhaps after this standardization that

individuals began to view Luke's description of the Ascension as the cap of a "final appearance" of the risen Lord. Despite such interpretations, it would appear that Luke-Acts does not attempt to temporally limit interactions with the risen Lord or even articulate a change in experience of those who witnessed the risen Lord after the Ascension. Instead, Luke's narrative portrayal of post-Ascension interactions with the risen Lord stresses the difference of purpose between the Easter and post-Ascension appearances of Jesus. As such, Luke-Acts may be read as a narrative that seeks to combat claims to ecclesiastical authority derived from purported charismatic experience with the risen Lord by limiting and subjecting such experiences to the authority granting experiences of the apostles at Easter. Luke does not, however, appear to have attempted to theologically limit experiences with the risen Lord after the Ascension either temporally or experientially. It logically follows that earliest Christians did not view their religious experience as temporally unique. In fact, early Christians seem to have believed that God's "means of interacting and communicating with his creation and his people" had "come to focus on Jesus Christ in a complete and final way."<sup>181</sup> Indeed, an individual who had perhaps travelled with the mortal Christ, listened to his teachings, and witnessed or at least heard of his death and subsequent resurrection would have had a distinct understanding of Christ's irreplaceable role in the administration and continuation of the movement. It should then come as no surprise that earliest Christians may have continued to expect corporeal manifestations of the risen Christ after the point that the later tradition may have marked as the cessation of theologically valid experiences with the resurrected Lord.

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### Endnotes

1. Francois Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, Hermeneia Commentary Series, trans. James Crouch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 389.
2. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 3.
3. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 71, emphasis added.
4. "The Ascension of Jesus" is a phrase used to describe the event during which the resurrected Jesus was taken up from among his Apostles as recorded in Acts 1:9–11. The phrase seems to have primarily derived from the English translation of the Vulgate section title for Acts 1:9–11: "*Ascensio Iesu*." Luke situates this event as taking place forty days (or, if his phrase is taken figuratively, a good long time) after Christ's resurrection from the dead. "After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God." Acts 1:3 NRSV.
5. "By using these ascension accounts to form the link between his two volumes Luke would seem to indicate their significance for a proper understanding of his theology and purpose." John F. Maile, "The Ascension in Luke-Acts," *Tyndale Bulletin* 37 (1986): 29.
6. Resurrection appearances in early Christianity do not appear to have been reserved exclusively for Christ's original Apostles, nor enacted solely for the purpose of establishing Christ's resurrected state. In fact, experiences with the risen Christ in early Christian literature are often strikingly mundane in their apparent purpose, as the risen Lord conveys messages and otherwise interacts with individuals for reasons not traditionally viewed as necessitating a manifestation of the resurrected Jesus. While there are a host of non-canonical materials that support this claim, of particular note for this paper are the following appearances recorded in Acts: Jesus's appearance to Ananias for the purpose of sending him to Paul (9:10–15), the Lord comforting Paul (18:9), the

Lord warning Paul of impending danger (Acts 22:17–21), and the Lord strengthening Paul before his final journey to Rome (23:11). Early Christian literature also suggests these experiences often occurred to individuals who, as far as modern scholarship can deduce, exercised remarkably little religious influence over the development of the early Christian movement. The two disciples who experienced the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus are excellent examples of this phenomenon (Luke 24:13–35). Although one is mentioned by name (Cleopas in verse 18), there is very little information recorded in the early Christian tradition about this individual. Another example is Ananias in Acts 9:10–15 who sees the risen Lord but then drops from the narrative. Additionally, a number of those experiences recorded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 were given to individuals whose identities are otherwise unknown.

7. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* states, “For Christians the Ascension marks the solemn close of the post-Resurrection appearances and signifies the rule of Christ in the present.” F. L. Cross, ed., “Ascension of Christ,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 114.
8. “We also understand that Jesus’s ascension involves a change of state, as the curtain closes, not to open again until his return. The eye of our body cannot now see Jesus.” George C. Fuller, “The Life of Jesus, After the Ascension (Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:9–11),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 392. The Catholic Catechism on the Ascension states that “Jesus’s *final apparition* ends with the *irreversible* entry of his humanity into divine glory, symbolized by the cloud and by heaven, where he is seated from that time forward at God’s right hand. ... Christ’s Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus’s humanity into God’s heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11); this humanity in the meantime hides him from the eyes of men (cf. Col 3:3).” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 659, 665. Similar language is found in the Heidelberg Catechism: “Question 46: What do you mean by saying, ‘He ascended to heaven’? Answer: That Christ was taken up from the earth into heaven before the very eyes of his disciples and remains there on our behalf until he comes again to judge the living and the dead. Question 47: But isn’t Christ with us

until the end of the world as he promised? Answer: Christ is truly human and truly God. In his human nature Christ is not now on earth; but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit he is never absent us." *Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. Faith Alive Christian Resources, Christian Reformed Church in North America, 46–47, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/heidelberg-catechism#toc-god-the-son>. Statements such as these are paradigmatic of the theological understanding that has come to be associated with the Ascension. While most Christians would not argue that the risen Lord no longer interacts with his believers, the assumption is that those interactions take place in a fundamentally different manner than his interactions with his Apostles prior to the Ascension. Primarily, modern Christians tend to "spiritualize" visual experiences of the risen Lord after this point, classifying them as "visionary" experiences. An excellent example of a paradigmatic post-ascension interaction with the risen Lord are the now-famous visions of Julian of Norwich. See Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Barry Windeatt (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

9. These documents include, but are not limited to, The Gospel of Matthew, The Gospel of Mark, The Gospel of Luke, The Gospel of John, The Acts of the Apostles, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, The Revelation of John, The Sophia of Jesus Christ, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of the Hebrews, Apocryphon of James, Shepherd of Hermas, Apocryphon of John, Gospel of Mary, Dialogue of the Savior, 2nd Apocalypse of James, Epistula Apostolorum, Acts of Peter, Acts of John, Acts of Andrew, Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles, The Book of Thomas the Contender, Coptic Apocalypse of Paul, Dialogue between John and Jesus, Letter of Peter to Phillip, Kerygmata Petrou, 1st Apocalypse of James, Gospel of Phillip, and The Freer Logion.
10. Of particular note are the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. In many of these texts, the risen Jesus makes himself manifest to the protagonist of the story in a variety of ways at several places in the narrative. The canonical Acts of the Apostles also shares this same feature.
11. See David Brakke, *Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). Gnostic teaching primarily derived from claims of "secret

knowledge” that had been given to various apostolic figures through a manifestation of the resurrected Lord. Interestingly, many texts from which Gnostics derived their theological views explicitly claim to be a record of post-Ascension visitations of the risen Christ. The Apocryphon of James is one such text. In the opening paragraphs of the document, James, the purported author, states that the following revelation had been given to him and Peter by the corporeal Jesus “after departing from us while we gazed after him. And five hundred and fifty days since he had risen from the dead.” See Francis E. Williams, translator, “Secret Book of James,” *Early Christian Writings* (website), <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/secretjames.html>. Because patristic refutation of Gnostic beliefs is so well documented, some might assume that the Gnostic claim of post-Ascension visitations of Christ was far-fetched to early Christians and held little or no credence amongst “orthodox” believers. While the extent to which Gnosticism held sway in the early Church is debated, the movement was certainly large enough to pose a significant threat to the early Church. The fact that Gnostics could convincingly attribute many of their doctrines to post-Ascension appearances of the resurrected Lord implies that it was at least plausible to the majority of early Christians that resurrection appearances had continued to occur after the Ascension. Irenaeus himself recognizes the plausibility of the Gnostic claim: “[A]nd by means of their craftily-constructed plausibilities draw away the minds of the inexperienced and take them captive. ... By means of specious and plausible words, they cunningly allure.” See Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies: Book I*, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, *Early Christian Writings* (website), <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book1.html>. Irenaeus suggested that the purpose of his own work *Against Heresies* was “that men may no longer be drawn away by the plausible system of these heretics.” There was no doubt to Irenaeus that Gnostic texts were fabrications and that “these men falsify the oracles of God.” However, the Gnostic claim that Christ had continued to appear to the Apostles after the Ascension does not appear to be a particularly significant issue for Irenaeus. Indeed, despite the relative ease with which Gnostic texts and beliefs might have been refuted through an appeal to the Ascension as the end of corporeal manifestations of Christ, patristic refutation of Gnostic beliefs is curiously devoid

of attacks on the appearances of Christ in Gnostic sacred texts. Admittedly, Gnostics appealed to many of the same texts early Christians did in their development of doctrine. An attack on the Gnostic position would thus, in many ways, be an attack on the orthodox Christian position as well. However, critiques of Gnostic doctrine, especially those of Irenaeus, focus primarily on the form of Gnostic doctrine and the corrupted nature of their scriptural exegesis used to support it. Irenaeus seems to then have taken for granted the fact that the resurrected Christ had indeed communicated with the Apostles after his Ascension. Additional evidence of this comes from Irenaeus' repudiation of three particular Gnostic groups, the Valentinians, the Ophites, and the Sethians. Irenaeus lays out in detail the particular beliefs of each of these groups in the first book of his iconic work *Against Heresies*. After detailing the particular doctrines of these Gnostic groups, Irenaeus explains their interpretation of several canonical passages that allowed them to derive such beliefs from scripture. Irenaeus' methodology is such that he states a Gnostic belief and then points to a particular scripture or tradition that has been utilized to support the heretical idea. In the midst of detailing several instances of mistaken Gnostic scriptural interpretation, Irenaeus states that the Gnostics find evidence for their doctrine of the eighteen Aeons from the fact that "the Lord, conversed with His disciples for eighteen months after His resurrection from the dead." Although it certainly appears that the specific eighteen-month designation is a uniquely Gnostic claim, the rhetorical structure of the passage (with Irenaeus detailing a heresy and showing how it has been mistakenly validated in scripture or the tradition) suggests that a lengthier post-resurrection ministry of Christ was actually a tradition accepted at least by Irenaeus himself, if not by the Christian community at large. The significance of such a statement is that there seems to be, at least during the late second century, competing ideas about how long the resurrected Lord continued to minister to his Apostles after his resurrection. Whether or not Luke is to be taken literally on his "forty-day" ministry of Christ, the eighteen-month tradition preserved by Irenaeus appears to be a competing early Christian view in regard to the length Christ's post-resurrection activities.

12. Achtemeier, Green, and Thompson have noted a variety of texts that record post-resurrection appearances of Christ that received

significant circulation in the early Church but were not Gnostic. These include The Gospel of the Hebrews, The Gospel of Peter, Shepherd of Hermas, a variety of apocryphal Acts, and several non-canonical apocalypses. See Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 596.

13. Modern readers are typically most familiar with this reason. Many visits preserved by the canonical gospels are of this type and many of the extracanonical materials also convey similar themes. Even Gnostic documents that are theologically resistant to a bodily resurrection of the risen Lord often depict the Lord appearing for the purpose of explaining the nuances of his resurrected state to his followers. Thus, even those documents that argue against a bodily resurrection of Christ often depict the risen Lord as returning to Earth to in some way demonstrate the characteristics of his resurrected body.
14. This is a theme preserved by Luke in his gospel in 24:25–27 and 44–47. Significantly, other non-canonical texts also depict the risen Lord as explaining certain passages of scripture. The early Church thus intriguingly traces much of the creative exegesis that is at the very heart of the Christian faith directly to the resurrected Jesus.
15. Consider for example the great commission found in Matthew 28:16–20. While this may seem like an obvious outgrowth of the gospel message to modern Christians, it may not have been so apparent to Christ's followers shortly after his death. Whereas the mortal Jesus was somewhat exclusive in his teaching only to Israel, the risen Jesus opens the missionary efforts to the world. His Apostles who just days before had fled from the Jewish authorities and hid in fear, were then instructed to go out on a public mission in which they would encounter significant opposition. There can be no doubt, then, that this particular aspect of the risen Lord's post-resurrection instructions was not mundane or self-evident to the early church, but instead seem to have been viewed as one of the most important aspects of Christ's post-resurrection activities. One needs only contrast a similar group like the Qumran community to the early church to see how significant this theme was to the post-resurrection appearances of Christ.



While both the Christian movement and the Qumran community were eschatological and apocalyptic, one remained predominantly reclusive while the other developed into an evangelical movement. For similarities between the early Christian movement and the Qumran community, see Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 162–63. Nearly every document that preserves a manifestation of the risen Lord depicts him as instructing the recipient to share the message they have received with other individuals. Even in those accounts that preserve “secret teaching” traditions, the risen Lord provides the individual with a qualified mission in which they are to share the message they received with the worthy or elect.

16. While many modern individuals may assume the conveyance of new doctrine is a predominantly extra-canonical theme of the resurrected Lord’s post-mortal activities, there is considerable evidence of this in the canonical materials as well. Consider for example Christ’s descent into Hell described in 1 Peter 3:18–20 and 4:6. While the canon is silent as to when this doctrine was communicated to the early church, the extra-canonical Gospel of Peter traces it to an appearance of the risen Lord shortly after he is resurrected and departs from the tomb. For additional examples of extracanonical accounts that attempt to establish new doctrine, see Wilhelm Schneemelcher, introduction to *New Testament Apocrypha* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 1:228–31.
17. See James A. Kelhoffer, *Conceptions of “Gospel” and Legitimacy in Early Christianity* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).
18. Paul however is not shy in ascribing such authority to others. Notably Paul classifies James as an apostle in Galatians 1:18–19 and again in 1 Corinthians 15:7. Additionally, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul’s list of “apostles” is significantly more inclusive than the original Twelve and seems to suggest that Paul is utilizing the term in a manner distinct from traditional conceptions to denote an individual who had received a manifestation of the risen Lord.
19. See John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).
20. See Acts 15.
21. For example, Mary Magdalene’s experience as recorded in the Gospel of John, or the disciples on the road to Emmaus as recorded

in the Gospel of Luke. In each of these accounts, the risen Lord is merely seen and doesn't present his resurrected body for inspection as he does in other Easter accounts.

22. See for example the canonical Book of Revelation. The heavenly and eschatological content of the account make it fairly easy to distinguish from those accounts recorded in the gospels in which the risen Lord is present to his disciples in a corporeal fashion rather than those same individuals being taken up to, or being privileged with a vision of, the heavenly realm.
23. Even those accounts found in the canonical gospels often stress the discontinuity of Christ's resurrected body from the mortal Jesus. In his resurrected state, Jesus can appear in closed rooms (John 20:19; 20:26; and Luke 24:36) and is often unrecognized by even his closest followers (John 20:14; and Luke 24:16). However, these visionary accounts often stress the discontinuity in much more radical fashions. Perhaps most notably is the ability of the risen Lord to shapeshift into a variety of forms as in *The Shepherd of Hermas*.
24. "Having four different stories of Jesus's ministry is at least inconvenient, and their inconsistencies lead beyond inconvenience to embarrassment and potential scandal." William C. Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 87.
25. Placher, *Narratives*, 90.
26. "With very rare exceptions, Christians have respected the distinctness of the four different Gospels. One should not take this for granted." Placher, *Narratives*, 87.
27. Placher, *Narratives*, 88.
28. Consider for example John's account of the risen Lord's visit to Mary in John 20:11–17. The entire purpose of this visit seems to be to console the weeping woman and reflects a set of resurrection appearances whose purpose seems remarkably personal.
29. Consider Jesus's appearance to "the eleven, and them that were with them" in Luke 24:33–53. While not in the gospels, Paul's account of the experience of the "500" in 1 Corinthians 15 is also an excellent example of the risen Lord appearing to a significant group of early Christians.

30. John's account of the risen Lord conferring the Holy Spirit on the Apostles found in John 20:22–23 is an excellent example of this. Additionally, the depiction of the risen Lord at the sea of Tiberius in John 21 has elements of the powerful Christ.
31. The incredibly quotidian nature of the risen Lord partaking in meals with the disciples (Luke 24:41–43; John 21:1–15) is a remarkable aspect of these accounts and certainly has symbolic significance that reflects early Christian understandings of the accessible nature of the resurrected Lord.
32. This is reflected in the suddenness with which the risen Lord often enters these narratives. Additionally, emphasis on the fact that the Lord enters into the locked rooms in which the disciples are staying is also a powerful symbol of the risen Lord's ability to come wherever he pleases.
33. Placher, *Narratives*, 102.
34. "When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him." Mark 16:1 NRSV. See also Luke 24:10, Matthew 28:1, and John 20:1.
35. "εἶδον νεανίσκον καθήμενον ἐν τοῖς δεξιοῖς περιβεβλημένον στολὴν λευκὴν, καὶ ἐξεθαμβήθησαν." Mark 16:5.
36. The white clothing, his lack of apparent amazement at Jesus's resurrection, and the matter-of-fact statement that Jesus has been raised all point to a heavenly or divine manifestation (Mark 16:6). Scholars have identified this standard apocalyptic character as an "interpreting angel," a heavenly messenger that "interprets" the meaning of certain events by instructing the protagonist of the narrative.
37. ἐξεθαμβήθησαν.
38. This promise was previously recorded in Mark 14:28.
39. "In this particular commission, the sly addition of 'and to Peter' is probably a double entendre. On the one hand, the women are to announce the news *especially* to Peter, the first disciple to be called (1:16–18), the first to recognize Jesus's messiahship (cf 8:29), and the one who, in the near future, will be granted the first resurrection appearance." Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, Anchor Bible Commentary Series (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 1086. The

appearance to Peter is not reflected in the Markan narrative, but the tradition is well attested elsewhere in early Christian tradition including in Paul's resurrection appearance list recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:5–8.

40. ἔφυγον.
41. τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις.
42. καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδέν εἶπαν.
43. *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1844.
44. ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ “for they were afraid.”
45. Placher, *Narratives*, 90.
46. Robert P. Meye, “Mark 16:8 — The Ending of Mark's Gospel,” *Biblical Research* 14 (1969): 33–43.
47. Meye, “Ending,” 35.
48. *Ibid.*, 39.
49. Curiously, the Greek verb προάγει used in 16:7, which is typically translated “he is going,” can alternatively be translated “he will lead” with the object being the apostles. This alternative rendering may be preferable to many on theological grounds, allowing for a reconciliation of those gospels that have Jerusalem as the place of the first visit, as well as Luke's account of the “forty days.”
50. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 150. See also Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1096.
51. Alan H. Cadwallader, “The Hermeneutical Potential of the Multiple Endings of Mark's Gospel,” *Colloquium* 43, no. 2 (2011): 141–42.
52. *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1844.
53. This third appearance, while sharing some literary parallels with Luke, Matthew, and John, is the most distinct of the three detailed in the longer ending of Mark.
54. ἀνελήμφθη εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ. Mark 16:19.
55. ἐκεῖνοι δὲ ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν πανταχοῦ τοῦ κυρίου συνεργούντος. Mark 16:20

56. Cadwallader, *Hermeneutical Potential*, 146.
57. Warren Carter, "The Gospel According to Matthew," introductory essay in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1745.
58. Ibid.
59. Johnson, *Writings*, 165.
60. E. Carson Brisson, "Matthew 28:1–10," *Interpretation* 65, no.1 (January 2011): 72.
61. Ibid.
62. This is a point of divergence for all four gospel narratives. Mark states that three women went to the tomb: the two Marys and Salome (Mark 16:1). Matthew states that only the two Marys went to the tomb (Matthew 28:1). John states that only Mary Magdalene came to the tomb (John 20:1). Luke omits Salome in favor of Joanna but states that there were other women accompanying the two Marys and Joanna (Luke 24:10).
63. ἐγενήθησαν ὡς νεκροί. The irony comes from the fact that these living guards have figuratively died while the crucified Christ has in reality been made alive. Matthew 28:4.
64. Matthew 28:5 "Do not be afraid ..."
65. ἀπελθοῦσαι ταχὺ ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου μετὰ φόβου.
66. χαρᾶς μεγάλης.
67. αἱ δὲ προσελθοῦσαι ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας καὶ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ. Matthew 28:9.
68. Note how the apostles "see" him before Jesus "came to them." Matthew 28:18.
69. See the following particularly instructive essay: Mark Harris, "The Coming and Goings of the Son of Man: Is Matthew's Risen Jesus 'Present' or 'Absent'? A Narrative-Critical Response," *Biblical Interpretation* 22 (2014): 51–70.
70. Placher, *Narratives*, 89.
71. This is most certainly true with the ending of Mark, as it is quite possible that the longer ending of Mark is entirely a result of the disparity between Mark's shorter ending and the ending of Luke's gospel. Additionally, because Luke is the only author to

articulate the risen Lord's ascent into heaven modern readers of the New Testament are canonically conditioned to place the same cap on the end of each of the other gospel narratives under the assumption that they detail events that occurred sometime before the Ascension recorded by Luke. As such, Luke's gospel (and in addition Acts) has often been the lens through which the endings of the other gospels are interpreted.

72. Joel B. Green, "The Gospel According to Luke," introductory essay in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1848.
73. "Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account." Luke 1:1–3 NRSV.
74. Luke's account seems to make more women present at the tomb than the others as "this was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them."
75. Bovon, *Luke 3*, 353.
76. "It is only logical that Luke's Christian readers identified with the disciples of Emmaus. They too have heard the word, understood the Scriptures, participated in the Lord's Supper, and perceived his presence." Bovon, *Luke 3*, 375.
77. "The story of the Emmaus meeting has the characteristics of this original oral literature. The story stands on its own; it is of limited size and involves only a few characters; in addition, it fulfills a function that goes beyond the episodic; when it is told, it nourishes the faith of the first communities." Bovon, *Luke 3*, 369.
78. While the scholarship of Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar is often quite humorous in its minimalist and polemical readings of the New Testament text, there are some aspects of their work that are plausible when significantly tempered. One such assertion is that Luke's portrayal of the Ascension was invented to combat authoritative claims made by competing groups of early Christians who were utilizing charismatic experiences with the risen Christ to further their own ideological agendas. Funk's assertion that Luke invented the Ascension is undoubtedly unwarranted,



especially considering that Luke's own conception of the import of the Ascension does not match the description provided by Funk. However, as is displayed in later Gnostic literature, there were most certainly individuals and groups within early Christianity who may have appropriated the resurrection traditions for their own ideological aims. Consequently, Luke's emphasis on the primacy of the Apostolic witness to the resurrection may be in reaction to such splinter groups but was certainly not invented solely for that purpose.

79. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 182.
80. Ταῦτα δὲ αὐτῶν λαλούντων αὐτὸς. Luke 24:36.
81. πτοηθέντες δὲ καὶ ἔμφοβοι γενόμενοι ἐδόκουν πνεῦμα θεωρεῖν. Luke 24:37.
82. ἴδετε τὰς χεῖράς μου καὶ τοὺς πόδας μου ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι αὐτός: ψηλαφήσατέ με καὶ ἴδετε, ὅτι πνεῦμα σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα οὐκ ἔχει καθὼς ἐμὲ θεωρεῖτε ἔχοντα. Luke 24:39.
83. καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εὐλογεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτοὺς διέστη ἀπ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν. Luke 24:51.
84. "Because of the 'forty days' of Acts 1:3, several authors think that Luke 24:50–53 represents not the final ascension but the conclusion of an appearance scene. Acts 1 recalls other appearances and the ultimate ascension." Bovon, *Luke 3*, 410.
85. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 126–28.
86. "The New Testament and the earliest Christian literature (roughly up to Justin and Irenaeus) know and confess an Easter exaltation of Christ. ... Early in the second century the *Epistle of Barnabas* invited people to celebrate Sunday, regarded as the eighth day, for the twofold reason that on this day Jesus 'arose from the dead, and appeared, and ascended into heaven.' The *Gospel of Peter* contains an extraordinary story of the resurrection, which amazed the guards at the tomb. Accompanied by two angels and followed by the cross, Christ comes triumphantly from the tomb. Here resurrection and exaltation occur together." Bovon, *Luke 3*, 408.
87. This is reminiscent of Christ's breath that grants life to Adam found in Genesis.

88. Placher, *Narratives*, 97–98.
89. Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1081.
90. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 360.
91. Johnson, *Writings*, 466.
92. μετα ταυτα ἐφανέρωσεν ἑαυτὸν πάλιν Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς. John 21:1.
93. οὐδεὶς ἐτόλμα τῶν μαθητῶν ἐξετάσαι αὐτόν Σὺ τίς εἶ; εἰδότες ὅτι ὁ κύριός ἐστιν. John 21:12.
94. Painter, *Just James*, 178.
95. W. F. Albright, and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary Series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 360.
96. “John seems deliberately to turn his back on the increasing institutionalization and sacramentalism of his time, maintaining the Pauline link with the past without subordinating Spirit to tradition, and resolving the problem of the slackening of eschatological tension by individualizing worship rather than institutionalizing it. Perhaps John thus represents those who hanker after the direct relationship with Jesus which his disciples enjoyed during his ministry on earth.” Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 359–60.
97. The overwhelming consensus amongst New Testament scholars is that Luke and Acts were written by a single author to be read as a two-part work. This opinion is supported textually by the author’s own introduction: “In the *first* book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught... [Emphasis added].” Acts 1:1 NRSV.
98. “A variety of structural, stylistic, and thematic elements coalesce to convince nearly all contemporary scholars that Luke-Acts is a united witness within the NT canon.” Johnson, *Writings*, 188.
99. Bovon, *Luke 3*, 406.
100. “μετὰ τὸ παθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις, δι’ ἡμερῶν τεσσαράκοντα” Acts 1:3.
101. C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, in the International Critical Commentary Series (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:70.

102. Exodus 13:21; 16:10; 19:9; 34:5, Leviticus 16:2. The Greek word is νεφέλη and is used in each instance.
103. Luke describes those present on the Mount of Olives as “τοῖς ἀποστόλοις” a term Luke uses almost exclusively in reference to members of the original Twelve (Luke 6:13, Acts 1:26). This reference is further solidified when the group arrives at their lodging in Jerusalem and Luke states that the group consists of “Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.” Acts 1:13.
104. Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:20; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15; 23:11.
105. Ἄγγελος δὲ Κυρίου διὰ νυκτὸς ἤνοιξε τὰς θύρας τῆς φυλακῆς ἐξαγαγών. Acts 5:19.
106. Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 142.
107. Susan R. Garrett, *No Ordinary Angel: Celestial Spirits and Christian Claims about Jesus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 248–49.
108. See Acts 12:15 when the early Christians hear Peter at the door and do not think it is him.
109. Compare the Angel of God found in Luke 12:8–9; 15:10; Acts 10:3; Acts 27:23 and the Angel of the Lord found in Luke 1:11; 2:9; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7; 12:23.
110. See Acts 7:30, 35, 38.
111. The Venerable Bede stated in his commentary on Acts, “So that Thomas would not doubt that the Lord bore flesh and blood when he had seen him entering with the doors closed, behold, he himself, while he was still clothed in mortal flesh, made his departure with his companions though the doors were closed.” Bede’s interpretation seems to suggest that the risen Lord accompanied the Apostle’s out of the prison in a parallel manner to the way he had appeared to the Apostles behind closed doors. Arator had a similar interpretation of the passage: “If anyone in addition considers Thomas, with his feeble heart, let him seek teaching from this: seeing that the closed door, being penetrated, admitted God then, is it astonishing if [Christ], in the flesh, approaches a gate in this manner, [he] whom a virgin bore, whom the unviolated womb

of his mother conceived? What reason, I ask, was there to take human flesh unless it was to resurrect it? Returning after that, he presents his side for a witness and teaches that the ashes of our body must be made new by the example of his own, proving they are his limbs by their wounds.” Interestingly, both interpreters seem to utilize this passage in some way to authenticate the resurrection of the Lord. Francis Martin, ed., *Acts*, vol. 5 of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 64.

112. M. R. James has noted one particularly striking example in the apocryphal Acts of Andrew. Because our only extant copy of the Acts of Andrew is communicated through a paraphrase of the work by Gregory of Tours it is unclear how much of the Acts has been adjusted by Tours or a previous individual. M. R. James states that at section 20 of the Acts, where Andrew is granted a vision of John and Peter, he is “sure that John in the latter part of this vision has been substituted by Gregory for Jesus. The echoes of the Acts of John and of Peter are very evident.” M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament: Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 344.
113. “ἀτενίσας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἶδεν δόξαν θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ.” Acts 7:54.
114. “θεωρῶ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς διηνοιγμένους καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν ἐστῶτα τοῦ θεοῦ.” Acts 7:55.
115. “θεωρῶν” Luke 23:35–43. See also Luke 23:48 when the crowd witnesses the signs of Jesus death “θεωρήσαντες.”
116. “θεωρεῖν” Luke 24:37.
117. “θεωρεῖτε” Luke 24:39.
118. “θεωρεῖτε” Acts 3:16.
119. 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:5–9.
120. “τῆς ὁδοῦ ὄντας” Acts 9:2.
121. “αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ” Acts 9:3.
122. καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν ὄραματι ὁ κύριος. Acts 9:10.
123. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.04.0057>.

124. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 453.
125. Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: Origins, Developments, Debates* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 52, 56.
126. Ibid.
127. καὶ οὐκ εἶασεν αὐτοὺς τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ. Acts 16:7 NRSV.
128. Εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος ἐν νυκτὶ δι' ὄραματος τῷ Παύλῳ. Acts 18:9.
129. ἰδεῖν τὸν δίκαιον καὶ ἀκοῦσαι φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ. Acts 22:14.
130. Τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ νυκτὶ ἐπιστὰς αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος. Acts 23:11.
131. As has been noted above, Paul is referred to as an Apostle only twice in Acts 14:4, and 14. This number is more striking when considering Luke uses the title 39 times total in Luke-Acts and Paul is the main protagonist of the narrative from Chapter 9 onward.
132. σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα. Acts 15:12.
133. ἔση μάρτυς αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους. Acts 22:15.
134. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus is explicitly discussed in Galatians 1, 1 Corinthians 9 and 15, and several times in Acts. While Paul may reference his experience in others of his epistles, they are less explicit in their portrayal of his encounter with the risen Lord, and as such will not be investigated at length in this work.
135. "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ... As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!" Galatians 1:6–9 NRSV
136. The similarities between Paul's account and accounts relating the calls of the Old Testament Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah were noted by Krister Stendahl in his classic essay *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*. In agreement with Stendahl's observations, Paul's experience will here be referred to as a "call" rather than a "conversion."
137. See Matthew 10.

138. οὐκ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι’ ἀνθρώπου. Galatians 1:1
139. διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ Galatians 1:1.
140. διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατὴρ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν. Galatians 1:1.
141. “For I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” Galatians 1:11–12 NRSV
142. δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Galatians 1:12
143. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia Commentary series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 2, 13; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 31–32.
144. Paul goes to great lengths throughout the text to enunciate his claim to apostleship (1 Corinthians 1:1; 4:9; 9:1–3; 12:28–29; 15:7–9). This emphasis seems to be over and against individuals who are questioning that claim (9:2).
145. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary Series (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 353.
146. “ΠΑΥΛΟΣ κλητὸς ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ,” 1 Corinthians 1:1.
147. Sosthenes is identified as ὁ ἀδελφὸς “our brother.” By being listed as a co-sender of the letter, Sosthenes is identified as some kind of authoritative figure to the Corinthian church. Despite the fact that both Sosthenes and Paul are “God’s servants, working together” (3:9) Paul identifies himself as an apostle in a way unique from the role that Sosthenes is fulfilling. It thus seems clear that Paul’s definition of the term “apostle” is uniquely tied to his experience with the risen lord.
148. “Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.” 1 Corinthians 8:131 NRSV.
149. Russell B. Sisson, “Abductive Logic and Rhetorical Structure in 1 Corinthians 9,” *Proceedings EGL & MWBS* 26 (2006): 93.



150. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 152.
151. "[W]e understand *have not I seen Jesus our Lord?* as part of 'a unique foundational witness to a truth-claim about Christ' which is bound up with apostolicity." Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1201.
152. "Since the Damascus-road appearance ... seems to be so important to Paul, the alternation of the particles here may be deliberate for emphasis. *Jesus our Lord*. This relatively uncommon designation probably is to be associated with Paul's stress on the activity of the risen Lord." William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation*, Anchor Bible Commentary series (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 237.
153. "In v 1b his claim to this standing is based on his vision of Christ (cf. Gal 1:12ff; 1 Cor 15:6ff). This is a conclusive argument, inasmuch as the receiving of a commission from the risen Lord is constitutive for the concept of apostleship — and yet again it is not conclusive, since it is obvious that not every vision confers this dignity." Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 152.
154. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 356.
155. Ibid.
156. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 152.
157. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 541. See also Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 251.
158. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 549.
159. Ibid.
160. Because the gospels record multiple instances of the risen Lord appearing to the Apostles it would be extremely difficult to pinpoint to which of these instances Paul is referring. (Mark 16:14–20, Matthew 28:16–20, Luke 24:36–53, John 20:19–23, 20:26–30). Additionally, the fact that the statement is that Jesus appeared "to the twelve" and not "to the eleven" causes other interpretive issues.
161. "[T]his is the only place in the Pauline letters where *hoi dodeka* occurs. Paul never refers to them as such, even though this was already the stereotyped title in the early church for the original group of disciples that Jesus chose as his closest collaborators (Mark 3:14–19; Matt 10:1–4)." Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 550. "Paul uses the term the Twelve only here, preferring the term *the apostles*." Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1205.

162. Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 321.
163. *Ibid.*
164. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 257.
165. Acts 1:15–26. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 257.
166. Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1205.
167. “This appearance is not recorded elsewhere in the NT, and it has nothing to do with Pentecost (Acts 2), despite claims that it does. ... The event of Pentecost was not a Christophany, but an outpouring of the Spirit. No one knows whether the 500 refers to a group in Jerusalem or in Galilee.” Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 550. “The appearance to more than five hundred brothers at one time is mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament. The only other sizable groups mentioned in the other records are the hundred and twenty who met to elect a successor to Judas (Acts 1:15) and the unspecified number assembled at Pentecost (Acts 2:1). Since Paul never equates the reception of the Spirit with an appearance of the risen Christ, any identification of numbers here would be questionable.” Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 322.
168. See Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 550.
169. “[I]f this word excludes a possible reference to visionary experiences a temporal force is entailed, i.e., we should find it difficult to conceive of ‘upwards of 500 visions occurring at the same time and place.’” Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1205. See also Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 543
170. 1 Corinthians 15:6 NRSV. “Where does the emphasis lie, on their death, or on the fact that some are still alive? Probably the latter, because the implication is that they could still provide the testimony themselves.” Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 550–51.
171. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 551. See also Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1207.
172. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 551. Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1208.
173. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 551.
174. Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 322.
175. See Acts 7:55–56.
176. “‘Then to all the apostles’: this sounds as if the circle of apostles was a closed one, and not identical with the circle of the Twelve. Who

is an apostle? The important thing is that *all* apostles have seen the risen Christ. This is accordingly definitive for the concept of an apostle. If he is thinking of a single appearance before them all, then Paul of course was not present. But indeed he is the straggler." Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 258–59.

177. Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1208.
178. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 552.
179. Ibid.
180. Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 7–21*, trans. Robert W. Funk, Hermeneia Commentary Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 214, <https://archive.org/details/1984-e.-haenchen-john-2.-a-commentary-on-the-gospel-of-john-chapters-7-21-hermeneia/1984%20E.%20Haenchen%20-%20John%202.%20A%20Commentary%20on%20the%20Gospel%20of%20John%2C%20Chapters%207-21%2C%20Hermeneia/>.
181. James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), xii.

