

Resurrection: Many Infallible Proofs

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Introduction

There is no event in all history that is more important than the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus had not been raised, then His death would merely be a sorrowful and unjust execution of an innocent men. If God raised Him up and proclaimed Him to be the Son of God, however, then we have evidence of life beyond the grave. For this reason, we must examine the documentary evidence, asking whether the bodily resurrection is credible history. William Lane Craig recognized the unique importance of this study,

“Unlike any other religion, Christianity put itself to the historical test through explicit interaction with history in the Roman Empire of the first century. Many often miss this point: No other religion comes close to Christianity in that you can test it against history” (Craig 2000, 27).

Craig commented that the resurrection is the ultimate miracle provided for us by God in order to prove beyond any doubt that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. No one in history successfully claimed to have resurrected himself from death. He writes:

Without the belief in the resurrection the Christian faith could not have come into being. The disciples would have remained crushed and defeated men. Even had they continued to remember Jesus as their beloved teacher, His crucifixion would have forever silenced any hopes of His being the Messiah. The cross would have remained the sad and shameful end of His career. The origin of Christianity therefore hinges on the belief of the early disciples that God had raised Jesus from the dead (Craig 1988, 116-117).

The resurrection is indeed at the core of our faith in Christ. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, he is a false prophet; but if He did rise from the dead, then His resurrection confirms not only His place as the Son of God but His credibility as the source of the truth that leads to eternal life. Our salvation at the time of baptism assures our salvation “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). Belief in and confession of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is itself essential to salvation (Romans 10:9-10).

It is only right that those who believe should provide their reasons to those who doubt, hoping the skeptic will come to faith. Just as our Father in heaven desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4), so also do we. A skeptic questions whether a belief is true, coming at a question out of their own reasoning and experiences. We must not be afraid of questions and must “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:15-16. All quotations of Scripture are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.).

Skeptics often criticize Christian believers of having sacred cows; a sacred cow is a belief that is often unreasonably immune from criticism or opposition. Skeptics further believe Christians have presumed beliefs without any evidence. Some have thought Christians have made a leap in the dark rather than drawing their faith from evidence. While skeptics disapprove of sacred cows, they must admit they also have their own presuppositions. Skeptics dismiss the possibility of miracles, because they have never seen one, and they do not know anyone who has

seen one. If our search for the truth stops with such empirical evidence, we may miss some other lines of evidence and ways of knowing something besides empirical evidence.

To suggest that Jesus arose from the dead, is the Son of God, is Lord, and is the only way to the Father in heaven will undoubtedly offend the adherents of every other religious system. Beyond that, it will also offend postmodern people who regard all truth as relative rather than absolute. Since postmodern people regard the claim of absolute or settled truth as arrogant and insulting, they dismiss it altogether. Despite this, we must insist on the uniqueness of the Christian faith. Just as a crucified criminal who had risen from the dead and had become Savior of the world seemed ridiculous to the pagan societies of the ancient world, so the uniqueness of Jesus appears ridiculous to some today. For this reason, we must offer clear evidence for what we understand.

What evidence shall we believe about the resurrection? No one living today can provide eyewitness testimony for what happened nearly 2000 years ago. The resurrection of the body of Jesus Christ was a unique event and not reproducible. Do we suggest a leap in the dark, as some do? How, then, can we by any credible evidence believe Jesus Christ arose from the dead with such conviction that we ask people to commit their lives to Him as Lord?

We do not argue for the resurrection from our own empirical perspective but from historical and circumstantial evidence. The circumstances surrounding the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ were not done in a corner (Acts 26:26). Multiple eyewitnesses testify the resurrection of Jesus happened, and the existence of resulting circumstances are unexplainable otherwise. Examining the evidence as many skeptics have, one may conclude the bodily resurrection of Jesus is not unreasonable or a leap in the dark. To examine this question fully, we must consider some preparatory questions. We must first answer questions that give us

an opportunity to evaluate the historicity of the resurrection. In Chapter One we'll explore several important questions that need to be answered before we explore the many evidences for the resurrection in Chapter Two. Chapter Three investigates and answers the alternative theories posed by skeptics, and Chapter Four discusses the credibility of the testimony of the four gospel accounts and challenges the reader with what they must consider from the fact the resurrection is true.

Chapter One

Is the Resurrection Possible?

Before we can discuss the resurrection, there are several preliminary questions we must discuss that provide the grounds upon which the resurrection rests. We will explore whether Jesus actually lived on earth, whether miracles can happen, and what is the background evidence for miracles in the first century. Answering these questions will set the stage for exploring the minimal facts approach to the resurrection presented by Gary Habermas and Michael Licona.

Did Jesus Really Live?

If we cannot show any historical evidence that Jesus was a real person, then any discussion of the resurrection is in vain. We should examine the historical evidence for the life of Jesus Christ the same way we examine historical evidence for others who lived in ancient times. If we wonder whether the scholar, teacher, and philosopher Socrates (c. 470-399 B.C.) was a real person, we examine the works of Plato who knew him and recorded his actions and teaching. Socrates was widely known in his day and developed the Socratic Method by which he brilliantly helps his opponents take apart their thoughts and motives. Socrates was known as the father of moral philosophy. While many gladly acknowledge the life of Socrates, because of his accomplishments and the writings of Plato, one could hardly accept the historicity of Socrates while rejecting the historicity of Jesus.

While we have less than 450 ancient manuscripts of the works of Plato, we have more than 5800 manuscripts of the New Testament documents. Daniel B. Wallace spoke of the abundance and the credibility of the early New Testament manuscripts we have available:

Today we have as many as 12 MSS from the second century, 64 from the third, and 48 from the fourth—a total of 124 MSS within 300 years of the composition of the NT. Most of these are fragmentary, but the whole NT text is found in this collection multiple times.

How does the average Greek or Latin author stack up? If we are comparing the same time period—300 years after composition—the average classical author has no literary remains. But if we compare all the MSS of a particular classical author, regardless of when they were written, the total would still average at least less than 20 and probably less than a dozen—and they would all be coming much more than three centuries later. In terms of extant MSS, the NT textual critic is confronted with an embarrassment of riches. If we have doubts about what the autographic NT said, those doubts would have to be multiplied a hundredfold for the average classical author. When we compare the NT MSS to the very best that the classical world has to offer, the NT MSS still stand high above the rest. The NT is by far the best attested work of Greek or Latin literature from the ancient world (Wallace 29-30).

This contrast between the evidence for Jesus and other classical authors like Plato should not be dismissed. The independent, twenty-seven books of the New Testament provide a credible record for the life of Jesus Christ. The New Testament, however, is not the only resource we have substantiating the existence and life of Jesus Christ.

Christian writings in addition to the New Testament also speak of the reality of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Works like the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Teaching of the Twelve and authors like Ignatius, Polycarp, Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria reveal that Christianity was widespread by the first half of the second century. All of them point to Jesus living and teaching in the first century.

When the people who wrote the New Testament and many of the second century writings stress the need for truth and character, it is hard to imagine that they themselves are committing themselves to a mythical character or legend. No, they believed Jesus was real. They took His warning against lying seriously (Revelation 22:8).

It is one thing to say that you believe in a certain person; it is another to believe so strongly in that person that you are willing to suffer persecution and even die proclaiming the truth. The apostles, according to early history, were willing to be beaten and to die for their faith not only in the man Jesus but also for Jesus as the Lord and Christ, the Son of the Living God, risen from the dead, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Each one of the apostles (except John) died a martyr's death for their faith. Eusebius said John was to be boiled in oil, and when he was miraculously delivered from that death, Eusebius says that he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where we find him writing the book of Revelation.

In addition to believers, some who did not believe in Jesus religiously also admit his existence and his influence. In fact, some of the Roman historians of that era also acknowledge Jesus lived. One example of this is Cornelius Tacitus, one of the greatest of the Roman historians, who was born about 52 AD, and wrote of the burning of Rome by Nero in 64 AD. In his *Annals* 15.44, Tacitus speaks about Nero's blaming the fire upon the Christians. He wrote:

“Therefore, to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, from whom they got their name, had been executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor; and the pernicious superstition was checked for a short time, only to break out afresh, not only in Judea, the home of the plague, but in Rome itself, where all the horrible and shameful things in the world collect and find a home.”

For Tacitus, “*Christus*” would have been considered a proper name; but to the Jews and for the first Christians, it referred to the Messiah.

The Jews did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah and would have referred to him merely as Jesus. It is thought that this information came from a summary report from Pilate himself. It may surely be one of the ironies of history that the only mention Pilate receives from a Roman historian is in connection with the part he played in the execution of Jesus.

Another Roman historian, Suetonius, wrote in 120 A.D. of the lives of the first twelve Caesars, from the life of Julius Caesar onward. In his *Life of Nero* (26.2), Suetonius says: "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men addicted to a novel and mischievous superstition." Another possible reference to Christianity occurs in Suetonius's *Life of Claudius* (25:4), of whom he says: “As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.” This reference to Claudius’ expelling the Jews from Rome (ca. 49 A.D.) can also be found in the New Testament, Acts 18:2,

It is likely that the strife among the Roman Jews at that time was over the introduction of Jesus Christ. Suetonius wrongly infers that "*Chrestus*" (Christ) was actually in Rome at the time.

The prophecy of Agabus in Acts 11:28 is "that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius." Suetonius confirms this report in his *Life of Claudius* 18.2, where he mentions that during Claudius's reign there were "constant unfruitful seasons."

Lucian, a Greek satirist likened to Mark Twain, wrote in the second century about Christ in these words in a work entitled, *On the Death of Peregrine* 11-13:

"The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day--the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. . . . You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property" (Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 206).

From this same source we also learn that the Christians had "sacred writings," which they read frequently. They also spared no trouble or expense to help each other in matters affecting their community. Unfortunately, the goodness of Christians led them to be easily taken advantage of by unscrupulous people. Whether Greeks or Romans, people were aware of the Christ, his teaching, and the godly lives of His followers. Yes, Jesus was real and His followers were devoted completely to Him.

We could also cite the writings of Pliny the Younger, the Emperor Trajan, or the Emperor Hadrian, who all lived in the early second century and wrote about Jesus and Christians. The evidence that Jesus lived is no longer disputed by serious historians. Gary Habermas in *The Historical Jesus* presents a significant case for believing that Jesus existed from resources beyond the twenty-seven documents of the New Testament:

We have examined a total of 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus, which include 19 early creedal, four archaeological, 17 non-Christian, and five non-New Testament Christian sources. From this data we have enumerated 129 reported facts concerning the life, person, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, plus the disciples' earliest message (251).

Habermas adds:

Much of ancient history is based on many fewer sources that are much later than the events that they record, as we have seen. While some believe that we know almost nothing about Jesus from ancient, non-New Testament sources, this is plainly not the case. Not only are there many such sources, but Jesus is one of the persons of ancient history concerning whom we have a significant amount of quality data. His is one of the most mentioned and most substantiated lives in ancient times (252).

Suggesting, then, that Jesus was a mythical person and invented by people in later centuries ignores the evidence of the eyewitnesses of the New Testament and the circumstantial evidence that results from His life.

The British author and skeptic, H.G. Wells (1866-1946), had to admit the central place of Jesus Christ in the history of mankind. "I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess

as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.”

Josephus (AD 37-100) was a first-century Jewish historian who lived through the war of A.D. 66–70; his works (*The Jewish War*, *Antiquities of the Jews*, *Against Apion*, and his autobiography, the *Life*) are useful sources of information concerning first-century Palestine. Josephus also wrote about Jesus:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day (*Antiquities*, XVIII, 33).

Origen says that Josephus did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah (*Contra Celsum* 1:47). For this reason, many scholars have debated whether Josephus penned these words. However, Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* (1:11) quotes the passage as genuine.

In 1972 Professor Shlomo Pines of Hebrew University in Jerusalem argued for an Arabic version of this same text which he believes to be older than the Greek one. This version was found in a church history written by Agapius, an Arab bishop in Baghdad. The Arabic version reads:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and from the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive.

Accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah of whom the prophets have recounted wonders.

Professor Pines believes that medieval Christian censorship was probably responsible for the difference between the two versions. Whether one accepts the Greek or the Arabic, the essential story of the death and resurrection of Jesus was known by Josephus and recorded in his *Antiquities of the Jews*.

Edwin Yamauchi, professor of history at Miami University, asserts that we have more and better historical documentation for Jesus than for any other religious founder including Zoroaster, Buddha, or Mohammed. Yamauchi said this, concluding what nonbiblical sources testify about Jesus Christ:

Even if we did not have the New Testament of Christian writings, we would be able to conclude from such non-Christian writings as Josephus, the Talmud, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger that (1) Jesus was a Jewish teacher; (2) many people believed that he performed healings and exorcisms; (3) he was rejected by the Jewish leaders; (4) he was crucified under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius; (5) despite this shameful death, his followers, who believed that he was still alive, spread beyond Palestine so that there were multitudes of them in Rome by A.D. 64; (6) all kinds of people from the cities and the countryside—men and women, slave and free—worshiped him as God by the beginning of the second century (Yamauchi, 221-222).

Despite numerous objections from nonbelievers in recent years to the existence of Jesus Christ, Gary Habermas has argued,

Surprisingly few scholars have asserted that Jesus never existed or have attempted to cast almost total doubt on his life and ministry. When such efforts have occurred, they have been met by rare outcries from the scholarly community. We have seen that these attempts are refuted at almost every turn by the early and eyewitness testimony presented by Paul and others, as well as by the early date of the Gospel (*Historical Jesus*, 46).

For this reason, we can speak with confidence that Jesus did indeed live, die on a cross, and be raised from the dead on the third day.

Can miracles happen?

Should one reject the miraculous on naturalistic grounds? The philosopher David Hume, who championed naturalism charged that miracle claims are untrustworthy and are never believable. Many may argue that they have never seen a miracle and do not know anyone who has. Our concern, however, is not “What does the majority believe?” Our concern is the truth. Biblically speaking, a miracle is an event brought about by the power of God; it is a temporary exception to the ordinary course of nature. God used miracles for the purpose of confirming His message and power are truly supernatural (Hebrews 2:3-4). Signs and miracles confirm God’s word.

A miracle is an event one cannot explain based on the laws of nature but must be attributed to the supernatural. The philosopher Anthony Flew said, “A miracle is something which would never have happened had nature, as it were, been left to its own devices” (5:346). Normal events stay normal, all things being equal. But if there is a God who created the world

and sustains it, and if that God can intervene supernaturally in history, then all things are not equal. God has the power to transcend the laws of nature. Though David Hume argued that a miracle was a “violation of the laws of nature,” miracles do not break natural laws. As Douglas Groothuis observed, “The day Christ raised Lazarus, people all over the world were still dying and staying dead. The law of nature had not changed. But natural laws speak only to natural events. Supernatural events are outside their purview” (533).

Hume thought all miracle claims are based on the superstitious misunderstandings of “ignorant and barbarous nations.” However, one cannot really understand what a miracle is unless one knows the laws of nature. We fully grant we need a higher level of evidence to substantiate a miracle claim than we do for non-miraculous events.

Sometimes people object to God’s existence, saying “Faith in God isn’t scientific; it’s a leap in the dark.” Many suppose if you believe in science, you can’t at the same time believe in God. They forget God is the maker of all things, including the human ability to know anything and reason. They suggest faith in God is unreasonable. Really? Have you considered that many credible scientists and logicians have professed faith in God? For instance, the book of Romans in the New Testament was used for centuries as a primary source in the study of logic. According to Louw and Nida’s, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, there are 122 separate vocabulary words in the semantic section dealing with thinking and reasoning (I:349-361). Yes, the Lord and His people knew how to think in the first century; and they know how to think today. Stines observed:

When pressed, the naturalist must answer the same question as the theist. Namely, if everything has a cause, what caused the system of nature in which “everything has a cause”? The best answer they can give is: the universe “always was.” In other words,

the universe (or multi-verses, for that matter) or 'whole system' is self-existent. We see by this argument that naturalism is no more scientific than theism when it comes to the uncaused cause. The only argument is whether the uncaused cause is a self-existent something, as the naturalist asserts, or a self-existent someone, as the theist affirms. No amount of science or experimentation can give the answer to that question (Stimes, 10).

The a priori dismissal of God from the beginning is not helpful in explaining how an ordered universe came to be. Belief in an intelligent, powerful being is not illogical. The Bible's testimony that the universe points to God is not meaningless.

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands (Psalm 19:1).

The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens. (Proverbs 3:19).

“Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:15-17).

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have

been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).

“For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God” (Hebrews 3:4).

Even closer to home is the nature of man himself, of whom God has said is made in His image (Genesis 1:26-27). On a physical basis the human body is a wonder of wonders; no one can study the human body for long and not realize that it was intelligently designed. Wayne Jackson’s book, *The Human Body: Accident or Design?* presents a convincing argument the human body came to be through an intelligence and power that could not come from random accidents or evolution. David wrote,

“I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.

My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret,

And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth” (Psalm 139:14-15).

Jackson asks, “If the living cell is more ‘ingenious’ than any ‘man-made system,’ who made it? Are we to conclude it just happened? That is wholly illogical” (Jackson,13). We have trillions of cells in our bodies, and they are marvelously designed and show their function. For instance, the human red-blood cells are saucer-shaped and fairly flat, permitting the transfer of oxygen and carbon dioxide throughout the body. Nerve cells, on the other hand, “have long, thin extensions to transmit messages.” These exceptionally complex cells didn’t just happen! God designed and built them for their functions. Only a wise God could make them!

Charles Darwin in the *Origin of Species* said, “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive,

slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.” Then he added, “But I can find no such case.” However, later in the *Origin of Species* Darwin spoke of the eye. He said, “To suppose that the eye...could have formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree possible” (167). Bioengineer John Lenihan said, “The eye is an exceptionally sensitive optical instrument displaying many striking features of design and performance; even the windscreen washers and wipers have not been forgotten” (Lenihan, 75).

Darwin doubted himself and frequently confessed his lack of knowledge. He did not know in 1859 what we know today about the eye. Darwin spoke often about all the things he was guessing and did not know for sure. To this day, the theory of evolution remains an unproven theory. A theory in science is a substantiated explanation confirmed through observation and experiment, but macroevolution remains unproven. No one has ever seen one kind of animal become another kind.

While we can observe how new species within a kind evolves, we have no record of one kind of animal becoming another. There is no laboratory experiment that can test it, and the fossil record doesn't reveal this kind of transition. No one has seen or been able to explain how an animal without a vertebrae became an animal with one. No one has ever explained how a cold-blooded animal became a warm-blooded animal. These changes are monumental and not reproducible in the lab. Even Darwin admits at the end of *The Origin of Species* there is a Creator responsible for the origin of life.

Science can sometimes tell us what happened, but it cannot always tell us who, why, or how. It can theorize and guess, based on what it knows; but science cannot test and verify the creation or beginning. It cannot tell you the origin of life. It cannot tell you how one-celled animals became multi-cellular, how cold-blooded animals became warm-blooded, how spineless

creature developed a vertebra, how fish developed the ability to breathe underwater, or how birds developed the ability to fly.

Man may discover in recent years what is in the eye, but constructing an eye in the beginning demanded a power and intelligence far beyond that of humankind. It demanded God. One may further admit man is more than a physical being. He has a moral governor called the “conscience.” Science cannot tell you how you became a conscious, moral being. Faith in God and the testimony of Scripture makes sense of this world. It is far more believable to accept God as Creator than it is to accept our conscious, moral life arose accidentally out of non-living matter. No one can empirically see the conscience in the inner man, but who can successfully deny its constant presence in our lives?

If there is no God, humans are simply a product of chance and accident. They do not know where they came from, why they are here, or if there is any life after death (Ecclesiastes 3:20-22; 6:12). If there is no God, there is no one who can tell you why you are alive, why you are conscious, and why you and I can communicate to each other. When your conscience says you have sinned, you have no answer to your guilt. If there is no God, you have no one to forgive you. When your loved ones die, you have no confidence of seeing them again. When you face a crisis, you have no God to Whom to pray. You have no one to thank for your blessings. If there is no God, you are alone without a purpose, a hope, or a future.

Uncaused things don’t happen, and the world is filled with intelligent design that only a highly powerful Being could conceive and create. These facts point to God. The naturalist opposes the existence of God but cannot explain with any confidence how the universe came to be. Peter Stimes explains the dilemma of denying the supernatural.

The naturalist position, as opposed to the Christian, or super-naturalist, position, is that miracles cannot happen. Nothing can happen that does not happen naturally, but here is the difficulty: in this worldview, anything can happen and consequently nothing should surprise us. After all, if a universe can just spring into existence (although we cannot explain the cause), or complicated, orderly life forms evolve out of simple inorganic elements against all apparent evidence of information theory and thermodynamics (although we cannot explain the cause), there is no reason that a 1st Century Jewish rabbi cannot spring spontaneously back to life after being dead for three days. With the rabbi, we also do not know the cause, but we cannot say that it is impossible. In a completely naturalistic system, there is thus no basis to say by theory or pure reasoning what is and is not possible (Stimes, 11).

It takes more faith to believe the naturalist position that the universe simply popped into existence apart from any explanation than it does to believe Jesus arose from the dead on the third day as He predicted.

Empiricism is useless when it comes to replicating historical events. It cannot replicate the beginning of the universe, nor can it replicate the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Empiricism cannot answer all the questions people ask. They can sometimes tell us what happened, but they can only theorize with guesses as to the how. If we become super-naturalists, believing God exists, the dilemma of the existence of the universe as opposed to the resurrection disappears. The God who created the universe can surely raise the dead.

The naturalist skeptic likes to accuse the Christian of being biased. Obviously, everyone who takes a point of view tends to seek evidence that supports his view. But this is as true of the

skeptic and atheist as it is the believer. Skeptics have their own biases, prejudices, and worldview. Dick Sztanyo in his book, *Graceful Reason: Studies in Christian Apologetics*, examines philosophical perspectives. He notes his own arguments as a believer:

No one is suggesting that a person approaches any subject completely free from all presuppositions. But neither do we suggest that a person cannot be convinced by the strength of the evidence to change his position, in spite of his prejudices. It follows, therefore, that personal biases and prejudices cannot constitute good evidence against the possibility of certainty in matters of history (Sztanyo, 258).

As examples of those who changed their minds biased against Jesus, one merely needs to look at the conversions of James, the other brothers of Jesus, and Paul. “If testimony is dismissed because it comes from an interested party, most of our historical sources would have to be rejected, since the author wrote about the events because he or she has an interest in the subject” (Habermas and Licona, 232).

Recognizing the bias of an author does not automatically merit the conclusion that the author has distorted the facts. Jewish historians who write about the Holocaust have reason to report what happened. This understanding works in favor of historical accuracy. Calling Christians biased and prejudiced is often an *ad hominem* fallacy, attacking the source rather than the argument. Habermas and Licona warn, “The skeptic must be careful not to commit the genetic fallacy. We must recognize the difference between understanding why something is true verses understanding why something is believed or how one came to believe that it is true” (125). One may unfairly be shifting the issue onto why one may have initially believed that Jesus rose rather than the truth of that belief. When one does this, one is not answering the evidence.

Background Evidence for Miracles

Jesus of Nazareth lived in a time when people were seeking the Messiah. This traveling preacher, who called the people to repent because the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 4:17), was widely known throughout Israel. He had not done his works in a corner (Acts 26:26); they had been the talk of all Israel for some time. When Peter approached the people on the day of Pentecost, he could remind the people of what Jesus was:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:22-24).

Richard Swinburne in his book, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*, argues with great force on the value of “background evidence.” We see background evidence in character witnesses who testify that a person is not the kind of person who could commit a certain crime or who testify that one’s past behavior suggests a pattern predicting more criminal behavior. He explains, “Background evidence supporting a theory that something either is or is not likely to happen can naturally be construed as evidence supporting a theory that a certain kind of event is or is not likely to happen under certain circumstances” (Swinburne, 26). If Jesus’ patterns of behavior revealed that He was able to work miracles, then His resurrection from the dead should not be surprising to us.

The eyewitness Peter, along with eleven other eyewitnesses, described Jesus as a man attested to the Jews by God with miracles and wonders and signs (Acts 2:22). He wanted the people at Pentecost to recall what they themselves knew about Jesus. Jesus performed many miracles in the presence of multitudes of people. He showed what He was and proved himself by His works. Miracles are works of power that go beyond what is natural, supernatural works only God could do. Wonders emphasize how people marvel at what they saw or experienced. It was a matter of wonder and awe that Jesus could walk on water, still a storm, or heal a man born blind. Signs are acts of God for a divine purpose. Jesus worked miracles to show the Jews He was indeed the Son of God. He wouldn't turn stones into bread for selfish reasons. He worked signs to point to God and His purposes.

Jesus remarked to the apostles in John 14:11, "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves." Only one who could work undeniable miracles could make such a claim.

We should not imagine that the resurrection was the only miracle people ever saw. The Lord Jesus performed many miracles in the presence of multitudes.

"Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan" (Matthew 4:23-25).

In Matthew 9:1-8, Jesus healed a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing the faith of those who carried him to the house, Jesus said to the paralytic, “Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven.” This made the scribes and Pharisees to think evil of Jesus. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your bed and go home.” And he got up and went home. Matthew 9:8 says, “But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.” If you had seen this miracle, you too would be awestruck and would glorify God.

On another occasion Jesus went along by the Sea of Galilee and went up into a mountain.

“And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them. So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel” (Matthew 15:30-31).

The miracles of Jesus were undeniable. The word “crippled” here speaks of people who were maimed, missing some part of their bodies. They were visibly impaired. Matthew 18:8 speaks of the crippled as people missing a hand or a foot. Large crowds witnessed these healings.

On some occasions the miracles Jesus performed were more private and personal, but they were nonetheless convincing.

When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the tax?” He said, “Yes.” And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do

kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?” And when he said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself” (Matthew 17:24-27).

Not many people find a coin in a fish’s mouth, but Peter did! The coin was just enough to pay the tax for them both. Now, imagine: what would Peter think of Jesus if he pulled in his first fish and did not find the coin? Wouldn’t he consider Jesus a fraud? Finding that coin gave one more proof in Peter’s heart that Jesus was really God’s Son. Matthew tells this story, not Peter. Clearly, the others knew about this wondrous miracle.

Jesus fed the 5,000 men besides the women and children from five loaves of barley bread and two fish (Matthew 14:17-21). They watched Him bless the food and break the loaves to give to the crowds. They were outside of the villages with no source of food but the lad’s loaves and fishes; but Jesus fed this multitude miraculously. The thousands of people ate as much as they wanted. Afterward they picked up the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. “Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’” (John 6:14). They were convinced of His power. They knew Jesus was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies John 6:14 about the coming Messiah. Verse 15 reveals they were intending to come by force and make Him king, but He withdrew into the mountain alone.

Matthew 15:32-39 tells how Jesus, feeling compassion for the people, fed the four thousand men besides the women and children. The disciples wondered how they would get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a “large crowd.” They had only seven loaves

and a few small fish, but the Lord Jesus fed them all until they were satisfied. They took up the leftovers and filled seven large baskets. The people saw and knew His power from God.

Jesus later raised Lazarus from the dead, though he had been in the grave four days. This was not only an amazing miracle but one that caught the attention of His enemies.

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” (John 11:45-48).

The enemies of Jesus knew and admitted His miracles and signs were real. They knew the evidence was so convincing everyone would “believe in Him.” They feared what the Romans would do if they let Jesus continue preaching and working miracles. The enemies of Jesus never denied His miracles; instead, they conspired to kill Him because His miracles were real. If Jesus were a fraud, he wouldn’t have posed a threat to them.

After Lazarus’ resurrection, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany. “The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus” (John 12:9-11). Not only did the priests want to kill Jesus, but they also even wanted to kill Lazarus in order to stop the people from believing in Jesus.

In Acts 3 Peter and John healed the lame beggar. This man “had been lame from his mother’s womb.” He “was being carried along” and “set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful. Peter by the power of God healed the man. “With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him” (Acts 3:8-10). They knew God through Peter and John healed this man. After Peter preached to the people, the temple guards put them in jail.

The next day the chief priest and the other temple officials wanted to know how this man was made well. Peter answered, “let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health” (Acts 4:10). The Council then convened in private saying, “What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it” (Acts 4:16).

When the Romans were trying Paul before Governor Festus and King Agrippa, he defended himself by speaking of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul argued in his defense,

“that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.” While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.” But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these

matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner” (Acts 26:23-26).

Jesus was indeed a man attested to the people by God with many miracles and wonders and signs. Both His disciples and His enemies knew what power He had shown for years. To preach God had raised Him from the dead was not strange to those who knew Him or to anyone in Palestine in His day.

One might say, “I know the Bible says Jesus worked miracles, but I’ve never seen anyone walk on water or raise the dead. I don’t know anyone else who has seen miracles. How can you be so sure the miracles of Jesus happened?” My faith rests in the testimony of apostles, who could speak of His miracles and say, “just as you yourselves know.” For years, Jesus Christ had been performing miracles before large crowds. There was no doubt among the people He could work miracles. They were awestruck! If you could talk to them face to face, they would tell you what they saw and heard. If we had lived in those days and witnessed these things for ourselves, we’d think it strange for anyone to deny His miracles.

Multitudes were witnesses Jesus’ miracles, and hundreds could verify His resurrection. The twelve apostles boldly risked their lives to testify that God raised Him from the dead. They believed. The writings found in the New Testament are the most studied, copied, and attested books of all time. If the resurrection of Jesus Christ were a fantasy, the first century church would never have existed. The fact His disciples died proclaiming the Lord’s miracles proves they were more than myths and legends.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written (John 21:25).

Resurrections Recorded in Scripture

In the Old Testament, three are recorded:

- Elijah raised the son of Zarephath's widow (1 Kings 17: 17– 24).
- Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4: 35).
- A dead man comes back to life when his body touches Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13: 21).

In the New Testament, the following people are recorded as being raised:

- Jesus raises the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7: 13– 15).
- Jesus raises Jairus' daughter (Matt. 9: 25; Mark 5: 42; Luke 8: 55).
- Jesus raises his friend Lazarus (Luke 11: 43, 44).
- Jesus is raised from the dead (Matthew 28:5-6; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1-11; John 20:1– 10).
- Peter raises Tabitha (Acts 9: 36– 42).
- Paul raises Eutychus (Acts 20: 9– 12).

- Dead saints come out of the graves after Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 27: 52, 53).

The Meaning of Resurrection

Two Greek verbs are used to describe the resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament:

egeiro: “to awaken” from sleep. The Bible often uses “sleep” as a euphemism for death.

The idea here is a dead person reawakening to life. Louw and Nida 23:94 define *egeiro*: “to cause someone to live again after having once died—to raise to life, to make live again” (262).

anistemi: “of the dead raise up, bring to life” (Arndt and Danker, 83).

Both verbs mean to raise upright and in the context of the passages to raise up a body to new life. The context speaks of a dead man in the tomb who wakes up and is raised to life. This implies that the grave would be made empty. Resurrection in the context of Jesus' death and burial implies a resurrected body. Craig explains:

The Jews at that time believed that at the end of the world, God would raise the bones of the people from the tombs and clothe them again with flesh and give them new life. Therefore, they were very careful to preserve the bones of their dead, collecting them in jars. When the Jews looked forward to the resurrection at the end of history, they were looking forward to a physical resurrection. The idea that there can be a resurrection while the body is still smoldering in the grave is a subtlety of modern theology (2000, 68).

Resurrection made the tomb unneeded, so resurrection that did not empty the grave would be meaningless.

The Minimal Facts Approach

Because the skeptic does not regard the Bible as reliable history, Gary Habermas and Michael R. Licona adopted “the minimal facts approach.” “This approach considers only those data that are so strongly attested historically that they are granted by nearly every scholar who studies the subject, even the rather skeptical ones.” Habermas and Licona presented the case using the “lowest common denominator” of agreed-upon facts so that they could present a strong argument that is both supportable and compelling (44).

Habermas and Licona wanted to keep the main thing the main thing. They also wanted to establish that Jesus arose from the dead without appealing to the reliability or inspiration of the Bible. They regarded those two things as separate issues. While we regard the minimal facts approach as valuable, we feel there is credibility in arguing for the reliability and inspiration of the Scriptures. Their point was not to avoid using the New Testament, which is still the most credible witness to the resurrection, but to treat the New Testament as they would any other book in antiquity.

The minimal facts approach considers only data that meet two criteria: 1) The data are strongly evidenced. 2) The data are granted by virtually all scholars on the subject, even the skeptical ones. Licona told Lee Strobel in *The Case for the Real Jesus*:

Habermas has compiled a list of more than 2,200 sources in French, German, and English in which experts have written on the resurrection from 1975 to the present. He has identified minimal facts that are strongly evidenced and which are regarded as historical

by the large majority of scholars, including skeptics. We try to come up with the best historical explanation to account for these facts (Strobel 2007, 112).

Habermas and Licona argue:

A skeptic ought not to be allowed to merely cite apparent contradictions in the Bible and say that the Resurrection has been disproved. The minimal facts approach builds a case using facts with a high degree of certainty, facts that any skeptic probably accepts. These facts need to be addressed. If a skeptic takes a position that even the majority of skeptical scholars reject, we can argue individually for the minimal facts that we are using. So if a skeptic prefers to take another position, that's okay. In doing so, the believer now has an opportunity to present much more data in support of the argument for Jesus' resurrection. The skeptic will need to respond.

Habermas and Licona provide five facts that meet their criteria.

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Jesus' disciples claimed and believed that he rose and appeared to them.
3. The church persecutor Paul was suddenly changed.
4. The skeptic James, brother of Jesus, was suddenly changed.
5. The tomb was empty.

Alan Anderson, reviewing the Minimal Facts argument of Habermas and Licona states.

These are the facts that a majority of New Testament scholars consider to be historically accurate. As stated before, these scholars are not solely believers of Christianity but also include skeptics who aggressively question the notion that the resurrection actually happened. However, their skepticism of Jesus' resurrection does not prevent them from

acknowledging that there are certain facts that can be known regarding the life, ministry, crucifixion, and post-death happenings of Jesus (Anderson, “Minimal Facts Argument”).

In their book Habermas and Licona provide more than ample evidence of the widespread acceptance of these fundamental facts found in the New Testament, secular historians, early church fathers, and creeds (48-77). They conclude:

We have presented evidence for Jesus’ resurrection using a “minimal facts” approach, which considers only those data that are so strongly attested historically that even the majority of nonbelieving scholars accept them as facts. We have not appealed to or even suggested the inspiration or inerrancy of the Bible in order to support our case. Therefore, one cannot object to Jesus’ resurrection simply because he or she rejects that the Bible is divinely inspired (75).

We believe the “minimal facts” approach has great value for the apologist who is meeting the skeptic in discussion about the resurrection. It is a helpful start in any conversation on this matter.

Historical Records Acknowledged by the Minimal Approach Method

Fact #1: Jesus Died by Crucifixion (Habermas and Licona 2004, 48-49)

This is a summary of their facts.

Josephus, who was a Jewish historian, wrote concerning Jesus, “When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified” (*Antiquities* 18.64).

Tacitus (56 AD – 117 AD), a senator and historian for the Roman Empire, who writes, “Nero fastened the guilt [of the burning of Rome] and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate” (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44).

Lucian of Samosata (125 AD – 180 AD), a Greek satirist and a skeptic of the Christian faith, who writes, “The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.”

Mara Bar-Serapion, who wrote to his son in 73 AD from prison with the following comments, “Or [what advantage came to] the Jews by the murder of their Wise King, seeing that from the very time their kingdom was driven away from them?” (Donaldson, Roberts and Coxe 1935-1952). Mara does not specifically reference the crucifixion; however it makes a specific reference to the “murder” of their “Wise King.”

Fact #2 Jesus’ Disciples Believed that He Rose and Appeared to them. (Habermas and Licona, 49-62).

The Gospel accounts themselves. “No matter how skeptical the critic might be concerning the Gospels, it is well-accepted that all four gospels were written during the first century” (Habermas and Licona, 53). Acts is the sequel to the Gospel According to Luke.

Clement of Rome (c. 30-100): “Having therefore received their orders and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and full of faith in the Word of God, they

went forth with the firm assurance that the Holy Spirit gives, preaching the good news that the kingdom of God was about to come” (*1 Clement* 42:3).

Polycarp (c. 69- c. 155) was martyred for his faith in Smyrna at the age of 86. He wrote a letter to the Philippian church in 110 A.D. speaking of the faithfulness of Paul and the apostles: “For they did not love the present age, but him who died for our benefit and for our sake was raised by God” (*To the Philippians* 9:2). In fact Polycarp mentions the resurrection of Jesus five times in the letter to the church in Philippi (1:2; 2:1-2; 9:2; 12:2).

Ignatius (c. 100): “And when [Jesus] came to those with Peter, he said to them: ‘Take, handle me and see that I am not a bodiless demon.’ And immediately they handled him and believed, having known his flesh and blood. Because of this they also despised death; but beyond death they were found” (*To the Smyrnaeans* 3:2; cf. 3:3).

Tertullian (prior to 200 A.D.) reported the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul by Nero, “who stained with blood the rising faith” (*Scorpiace*, 15).

Origen (c. 185-c. 254): The disciples’ devotion to the teachings of Jesus “was attended with danger to hum life.” Later Origen writes, “Jesus, who has both once risen Himself, and led His disciples to believe in His resurrection, and so thoroughly persuaded them of its truth, that they show to all men by their sufferings how they are able to laugh at all the troubles of life, beholding the life eternal and the resurrection clearly demonstrated to them both in word and deed” (*Contra Celsum* 2.56 and 2:77).

Eusebius (c. 263 – c. 339) called the first church historian wrote of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, citing Dionysius of Corinth (170 A.D.), Tertullian, and Origen (*Ecclesiastical*

History 2.25.8; 3:1). He cites Josephus (c. 95 A.D.), Hegesippus (c. 165-175), and Clement of Alexandria (c. 200) on the martyrdom of James the brother of Jesus (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.23).

A skeptic might object that followers of other religions have willingly suffered and died for their beliefs. Habermas and Licona acknowledge:

Extreme acts do not validate the truth of their beliefs, but willingness to die indicates that they regarded their beliefs as true. Moreover, there is an important difference between the apostle martyrs and those who die for their beliefs today. Modern martyrs act solely out of their trust in beliefs that others have taught them. The apostles died for holding to their own testimony that they had personally seen the risen Jesus. Contemporary martyrs die for they believe to be true. The disciples of Jesus died for what they knew to be either true or false (Habermas and Licona, 59).

They remark that there is no evidence the early disciples ever recanted their faith in Christ and His resurrection. “Instead, all the reports testify to steadfast courage during suffering. If the news spread that several of the original disciples had recanted, we would expect that Christianity would have been dealt a severe blow...And yet we find early Christians willingly suffering and dying for their beliefs” (60).

Since the original disciples were making the claim that Jesus arose from the dead, his resurrection was not the result of myth making. His life story was not embellished over time if the facts can be traced to the original witnesses. Moreover, if the direct witnesses really believed that he rose from the dead, we can dismiss contentions that they stole the body and made up the story. In fact, virtually all scholars agree on that point, whatever their own theological positions (60-62).

Fact #3: The church persecutor Paul was suddenly changed (Habermas and Licona 64-65).

The story of Paul's conversion can be found in Acts 9, 22, and 26. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the apostle Paul is well documented.

His belief that he had witnessed the risen Christ was so strong that he, like the original disciples, was willing to suffer continuously for the sake of the gospel, even to the point of martyrdom [Acts 21:13]. This point is well documented, reported by Paul himself, as well as Luke, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, and Origen. Therefore, we have early, multiple, and firsthand testimony that Paul converted from being a staunch Opponent of Christianity to one of its greatest proponents (Habermas and Licona, 65).

Today we might believe that Jesus rose from the dead based on secondary evidence, trusting Paul and the disciples who saw the risen Jesus. But for Paul, his experience can from primary evidence: the risen Jesus appeared directly to him. He did not merely believe based on testimony of someone else (65). For most, belief is based on secondary sources. And even when religious belief is based on primary grounds, no other founder of a major religion is believed to have been raised from the dead, let alone have provided any evidence for such an event. (Habermas 1989, 167-177). The disciples, Paul, and James...believed on primary evidence (Habermas and Licona, 65).

Fact #4: The skeptic James, brother of Jesus, was suddenly changed. (Habermas and Licona, 67-69)

The Gospel accounts name Jesus' four brothers who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah or the message of his ministry: James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. Jesus also had sisters

(Mark 3:21; 6:3-4; John 7:5). However, Acts 1:14-15 reveals that after the resurrection, “Mary the mother of Jesus...with His brothers” gathered with the apostles in the group of one hundred twenty persons. 1 Corinthians 15:7 says that Jesus appeared to James.

James, the brother of Jesus, is identified as a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:12-21; Galatians 1:19). Most scholars regard the book of James to be penned by the James who is the brother of Jesus. Josephus, Hegesippus, and Clement of Alexandria are sources for the martyrdom of James. Clement’s account of James’ martyrdom are recorded by Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History 2.23). Josephus reports that James was executed as a lawbreaker (*Antiquities* 20.200). We have reports of James’ death from both Christian and non-Christian sources.

Fact # 5: The Tomb Was Empty. (Habermas and Licona, 69-74)

Habermas and Licona recognize that not every scholar believes the tomb was empty, but there is strong evidence for it, and it is accepted as fact of history by an impressive majority (75%) of 2,200 critical scholars. They provide three arguments for the empty tomb:

The Jerusalem Factor

Jesus was publicly executed in Jerusalem. His first appearances were in Jerusalem. It would have been impossible for Christianity to get off the ground in Jerusalem if the body had still been in the tomb. His Jewish and Roman enemies would only have had to exhume the corpse and publicly display it for the hoax to be shattered. There is no record of a display of a corpse happening.

Some suggest they did not display the corpse because it would have been unrecognizable after approximately fifty days. Considering, however, the arid climate in Jerusalem, a corpse’s

hair, stature, and distinctive wounds would have been identifiable, even after fifty days. The enemies would benefit from displaying even a barely recognizable body. The enemies had every reason to display the corpse, but there is no evidence but complete silence about a revealed corpse. If there were a report, Celsus, the second-century critic of Christianity would have written against Jesus' resurrection. Anything but an empty tomb would have been devastating to the Resurrection account.

Enemy Attestation

If one's enemies admits a matter, one can have a stronger reason to believe what is being asserted, since there is no potential bias. The empty tomb is attested not only by Christian sources, Jesus' enemies admitted it as well, albeit indirectly. Rather than point to an occupied tomb, the enemies of Jesus accused the disciples of stealing the body (Matthew 28:12-13).

Justin Martyr (Trypho 108) and **Tertullian** (De Spectaculis 30) also speak of this false charge.

There would have been no need for an attempt to account for a missing body, if the body had still been in the tomb. The theory that the disciples stole the body is the only opposing theory we know of that was offered by Jesus' enemies.

The Testimony of the Women

People do not knowingly invent a story to deceive others with data that could hurt the credibility of their story. When liars invent a story, they normally make up stories of heroism in the military or getting an education that boost themselves. However, it is not normal to invent and spread a story about oneself as a thief or habitual liar. In all four gospel accounts, women are listed as the first and primary witnesses (Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-10; John

20:1-8). This would be an odd invention, since in both Jewish and Roman cultures, women were lowly esteemed and their testimony was regarded as questionable, certainly not as credible as a man's.

“Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women” (Talmud, *Sotah* 19a).

“The world cannot exist without males and without females – happy is he whose children are males, and woe to him whose children are females” (Talmud, *Kiddushin* 82b).

“But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex, nor let servants be admitted to give testimony on account of the ignobility of their soul; since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or ear of punishment” (Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.8.15).

“Any evidence with a woman [gives] is not valid (to offer), also they are not valid to offer. This is equivalent to saying that one who is Rabinically accounted a robber is qualified to give the same evidence as a woman” (Talmud, *Rosh Hashannah* 1.8).

“Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them” (Luke 24:10-11). Since women were regarded as lowly and untrustworthy, that would mean placing words in the mouths of those who would not be believed by many would seem unlikely. If the Gospel writers had originated the story of the empty tomb, it seems far more likely that would have depicted men discovering the empty tomb.

By itself, the empty tomb proves little. There must also be credible accounts of His appearances. If the tomb is empty because Jesus arose, then God exists; and eternal life is both possible and available.

Conclusion to Minimal Facts:

After reviewing the minimal facts approach to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Alan Anderson makes these observations:

Those that reject the resurrection hypothesis do so on an ideological basis, not an evidential one. The basis for which we evaluate this evidence is not always empirical, but oftentimes circumstantial. Skeptics often reject circumstantial evidence, but they fail to realize that circumstantial evidence is the primary type of evidence that convicts murders and other types of criminals in a court of law. It seems as though circumstantial evidence is our greatest asset in almost every other investigation, but somehow it is denied as untenable by the skeptic in this case. Or is it a mere failure to overcome ideologies that will not allow for supernatural possibilities? For skeptics who remain skeptical after thoroughly researching the evidence for Jesus' resurrection, there is a massive amount of reconciling the historical evidence to formulate a merely naturalistic conclusion. Naturalism simply does not simultaneously explain all of the known facts. The resurrection hypothesis best explains all five established facts better than any other naturalistic hypothesis anyone has ever come up with (Anderson, "Minimal Facts Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ").

Chapter Two

Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

William Lane Craig in his excellent book, *The Son Rises*, gave several things to be considered in trying to determine whether the resurrection actually happened.

“If it can be shown that the tomb of Jesus was found empty, that He did appear to His disciples and others after His death, and that the origin of the Christian faith cannot be explained adequately apart from His historical resurrection, then if there is no plausible natural explanation for these facts, one is amply justified in concluding Jesus really did rise from the dead” (Craig, 45).

Men who were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection wrote the Scripture. No other source of evidence can be considered as authoritative as these witnesses. For this reason, we want to investigate the positive evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. Jesus Predicted His Suffering and Resurrection

“From that time on Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matthew 16:21).

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up” (Matthew 20:18-19).

So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken (John 2:18-22).

See also Matt 17:9, 22-23; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34; Luke 9:22; John 10:17-18.

To predict you will die is not uncommon, but to predict you will rise again and predict on which day is beyond bold. If Jesus failed to rise again when He said He would, Jesus would be a false prophet. Moses revealed the test of a prophet:

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’ And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

Jesus clearly states the words He speaks came from the Father and are the words of eternal life (John 12:49-50). Bible scholar Wilbur Smith remarked about Jesus:

“When He said that He himself would rise again from the dead, the third day after He was crucified, He said something that only a fool would dare say, if He expected longer the devotion of any disciples—unless He was sure He was going to rise. No founder of any world religion known to men ever dared say a thing like that” (Smith, 10-11).

The prediction and fulfillment of the death of Christ is significant in proving the truthfulness of the Lord Jesus. Wilbur M. Smith observes:

“If our Lord said, frequently, with great definiteness and detail, that after He went up to Jerusalem He would be put to death, but on the third day He would rise again from the grave, and this prediction came to pass, then it has always seemed to me that everything else that our Lord ever said must also be true” (Smith, 419).

Three days?

The Lord Jesus, answering the scribes and Pharisees desire to see a sign, said that an evil and adulterous generation seeks signs. He told them He would not give them any sign except the sign of the prophet Jonah. “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).

Jesus is to spend "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," yet he remains buried only about 37 hours from Friday afternoon to Sunday at sunrise (not a full 72 hours). The apparent discrepancy is solved when one recognizes that in Jewish thought, any part of a day is counted as if it were a whole day. First-century Jews understood the calendar day to begin at sunset rather than midnight. This follows the account in Genesis: “And there was evening and there was morning, the first day” (Genesis 1:3; cf. 1:6, 13, 19, 23, 31). In accordance with Jesus’ predictions, He remained buried for parts of three calendar days: the last hours of Friday ending at sunset, all of Saturday (the Sabbath), and about twelve hours of Sunday (from sunset to sunrise).

Craig asked the question, “Why did the early Christian saying use “on the third day” instead of “on the first day of the week?” He explains:

In the Old Testament we find that God sometimes acted on the third day to resolve a crisis or deliver His people or perform a mighty act (Genesis 22:4; Exodus 19:11, 16; 1 Samuel 30:1-2; 2 Kings 20:5, 8; Esther 5:1; Hosea 6:2). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the phrase “on the third day” is translated by a rather awkward expression. The Christian say uses exactly the same awkward expression. This suggests that the saying is using the language of the Old Testament to emphasize that the resurrection was also an act of God’s deliverance and might (Craig 2000, 71).

The later expression “the first day of the week” describing the time of the actual event instead of the prophetic “on the third day” reveals that the empty tomb account is historical not legendary. The use of both details means the early Christians recognized something divine (“on the third day”) and something new and significant (“the first day of the week”).

2. The Suffering of Jesus Shows He Actually Died.

But Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!" Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified. The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. After they

had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him (Mark 15:14-20).

Scourging was often enough punishment to kill a person. The purpose of the scourging was to leave the victim so badly beaten and wounded he would not have enough strength to fight back at the crucifixion. Scourging was a severe form of corporal punishment involving whipping and beating, usually was done with the victim tied to a post or bench and administered by a servant of the synagogue (if for religious reasons), or by a slave or soldier. Pilate wanted to “punish” Him and release Him; but the crowd insisted on His crucifixion, sentencing Him to death. Those crucified would receive harsher punishment than a simple flogging.

Under the Roman system of scourging, the culprit was stripped and tied in a bending posture to a pillar, or stretched on a frame (*divaricatio*), and the punishment was inflicted with a scourge made of leathern thongs weighted with sharp pieces of bone or lead. This is what Horace calls the horrible flagellum. Jesus was scourged with it by order of Pilate before being led away to be crucified (Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1).

(Strachan, 419).

One could understand, then, how very weak Jesus would be having to carry a wooden cross beam from Pilate’s house to Golgotha on a back lacerated and bleeding. They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross. Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take (Mark 15:21-24; cf. Luke 23:26).

After numerous beatings and the scourging would leave Jesus in such a shape that he would be hard to recognize, fulfilling the prophecy about the suffering servant who would be the Messiah. “As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind” (Isaiah 52:14).

The *New Bible Dictionary* discusses the process of scourging and crucifixion common in the Roman Empire in the days of Jesus Christ.

After a criminal’s condemnation, it was the custom for a victim to be scourged with the flagellum, a whip with leather thongs, which in our Lord’s case doubtless greatly weakened him and hastened eventual death. He was then made to carry the cross-beam (*patibulum*) like a slave to the scene of his torture and death, always outside the city, while a herald carried in front of him the ‘title’, the written accusation. It was this *patibulum*, not the whole cross, which Jesus was too weak to carry, and which was borne by Simon the Cyrenian.

The condemned man was stripped naked, laid on the ground with the cross-beam under his shoulders, and his arms or his hands tied or nailed (Jn. 20:25) to it. This cross-bar was then lifted and secured to the upright post, so that the victim’s feet, which were then tied or nailed, were just clear of the ground, not high up as so often depicted. The main weight of the body was usually borne by a projecting peg (*sedile*), astride which the victim sat. There the condemned man was left to die of hunger and exhaustion. Death was sometimes hastened by the *crurifragium*, breaking of the legs, as in the case of the two thieves, but not done in our Lord’s case, because he was already dead. However, a spear was thrust into his side to make sure of death, so that the body could be removed, as the Jews demanded, before the Sabbath (Jn. 19:31ff.) (Torrance, 245-246).

The very use of the word “excruciating” to describe an incredibly painful and exhausting form of death is derived from the word “crucify.”

The Jews considered crucified people as cursed for hanging on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). Such a person was not allowed to hang all night on the tree but was to be buried on the same day. This cursed condition and stigma explains why “the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). The experienced Roman soldiers found Jesus to be dead already when they came to break the legs of the crucified men to hasten their death.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced” (John 19:31-37).

The soldiers who were expert executioners saw “that he was already dead,” so they did not break His bones but “pierced his side with a spear.” Apparently to make doubly sure of death, the soldier drove his spear between the ribs, upward through the pericardium and into the heart. Immediately there came out blood and water. This is conclusive post-mortem evidence

that Jesus died, not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation, but by heart failure due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium.

Joseph of Arimathea came to Pilate asking for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised Jesus was already dead and summoned the centurion to be certain. When Pilate learned Jesus was dead, “he granted the corpse to Joseph” (Mark 15:42-45). Joseph took away his body to a nearby tomb, and they laid Jesus there.

Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid (John 19:39-41).

If Jesus were not dead the burial procedures of wrapping the body in linen cloths and the mixture of myrrh and aloes would have suffocated him. There can be no doubt Jesus was dead. Joseph and Nicodemus would not have wrapped His body in the linen cloths and used 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes, if Jesus were alive. The moisture of the spices and the linen wrappings, which formed a cocoon, sealing the body would have suffocated a living body. One who considers all that Jesus endured could not possibly come away thinking Jesus survived the scourging, crucifixion, spear, and wrapping with the myrrh and aloe.

The Romans were masters at executing criminals and rebels, but the practice of crucifixion as a method of lethal punishment began long before the beginning of the Roman Empire.

Probably originating with the Assyrians and Babylonians, crucifixion was first used systematically by the Persians. . . . In the 4th century B. C. Alexander the Great adopted crucifixion and brought it to the Mediterranean shores where his successors introduced it inter alia to Egypt, Syria, Phoenicia and Carthage. During the Punic Wars the Romans learnt the technique and proceeded to become the principle utilizers of crucifixion for more than five centuries (Cilliers and Retief, 938-941).

David's prophecy in Psalm 22:16, "They pierced my hands and my feet," was written a thousand years before the time of Jesus, long before the Assyrians and Babylonians first practiced it. While the Romans did not invent the idea of crucifixion, they did perfect it and crucified thousands of slaves and rebels. They knew how to do this task and knew its consequences. They were experts at making sure a person was dead. Since the Romans reserved crucifixion only for the worst of people, there was indeed a stigma attached to it.

The Jewish request for a guard and Pilate's official sealing of the tomb in Matthew 27:62-66

"makes it clear that Jesus' enemies knew He was dead, for only if He were dead did it make any sense for them to set out so thoroughly to prevent any possible rumors of His resurrection. Jesus' enemies made a very thorough attempt, before the fact, to disprove His resurrection. However, unbeknown to them, God was preparing them to be the unwilling proof of Jesus' resurrection. The claim that Jesus rose is thus a certainty, for it is made in the face of thorough efforts to prevent any untruthful claims being made" (Mills, no page).

Modern doctors and pathologists would also have considered Jesus as dead. Writing in the March 21, 1986, edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, three medical doctors, including a pathologist from the Mayo Clinic, concluded:

Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right rib, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge (Edwards, Gabel, and Hosmer, 1463).

3. The Tomb Was Empty

By itself, that the tomb was empty proves little or nothing; but if you ask how the tomb became empty, considering all the prevention of the Jews and Romans against any tampering, then the question becomes significant. That the tomb was empty three days after the death of the Lord is not questioned by most critical scholars. What circumstances led to the emptying, however, is the most significant question of all. Peter on Pentecost contrasts the tomb of King David, which was still with them and the fact Jesus did not remain in His tomb.

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:29-32).

Peter revealed they were eyewitnesses of the fulfillment of David's prophecy in Psalm 16:8-11.

Archaeologists have discovered three types of rock tombs used in Jesus' time (Craig 2000, 55).

- *Kokim* tombs, in which tunnels about six feet deep were bored into the walls of the tomb, three in each wall, into which the bodies were inserted headfirst.
- *Acrosolia* tombs, which had semicircular niches in the walls about two and one-half feet above the floor and two to three feet deep containing either a shelf or trough for the body.
- Bench tombs, in which a bench went around the inner walls of the tomb and served as a resting place for the body.

Looking at the biblical record of Jesus' tomb from the gospel accounts, it is evident that Jesus' tomb was either an *acrosolia* or bench tomb with a roll-stone for the door. John states that the tomb was located in a garden (John 19:41). The tombs were sealed with a stone slab to keep out animals. They also used the tombs as family resting places, where several individuals might be buried. The stones were movable but moving them required several men. Craig notes:

In a very expensive tomb, a round, disc-shaped stone could be rolled down a slanted groove and across the door of the tomb. Although it would be easy to close the tomb, it would require several men to roll the stone back up the groove to open it. Only a few tombs with such disc-shaped stones have been discovered in Palestine, but they all date from Jesus' day (2000, 56).

“And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away” (Matthew 27:59-60; cf. Luke 23:53; John 19:41).

The fact that this was a new tomb and unused is significant. The body of a condemned criminal could not be placed in an occupied tomb without defiling the bodies of the family members placed there. Joseph placed Jesus in the tomb he had prepared for himself. This is probable because he owned the tomb and because he would not be able to put the body of a criminal in just anybody's rock tomb (Craig 2000, 56). The weaving of these details assures us that the gospel accounts of the Lord's burial contains an impressive amount of historical credibility. When Christians go to see Christ's tomb in Jerusalem today (whether the traditional site or Gordon's Calvary), they know they will see an empty tomb. Let's consider the details:

The Jews' Request

The fact that Jesus' enemies asked for a guard showed that they took his prediction seriously. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the enemies of Jesus admitted the miraculous powers of Jesus and sought to kill Him. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (John 11:47-48).

They ultimately condemned Jesus for blasphemy. They did not condemn Him, because He was a fraud or powerless. They condemned Him, because He was authentically able to work miracles and became a threat to their power. Once He was dead, they did not want anything to challenge them from beyond the grave. They thought by turning Him over to be crucified and

keeping Him in the tomb, they could triumph and the threat of His being the Messiah would go away. They took extraordinary measures to end any support to the One who claimed to be the Son of God. They wanted to demoralize the disciples; but they failed.

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” “Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.’ So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone, and setting the guard” (Matthew 27:62-66).

The enemies, knowing the power of Jesus to raise the dead in the case of Lazarus just days before, took His prophecy to rise again seriously enough to act officially with the support of the governor to make sure Jesus did not come out of the tomb on the third day. They were afraid of His resurrection, proving He came from God, and condemning them for His execution.

The Stone was Rolled Away

All four gospel accounts make it clear the stone was no longer closing the entrance to the tomb:

And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it (Matthew 28:2).

Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large (Mark 16:4).

And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus (Luke 24:2-3).

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb (John 20:1).

While the three synoptic gospels say the stone was “rolled away from” (*apokulise apo*), John describes the stone as “taken away” (*airo ek*). Louw and Nida define *apokulise*, “to cause to roll away from a particular point (210). Louw and Nida define *airo*, “to lift up and carry (away)—‘to carry (away), to carry off, to remove, to take (away)’” (206). Whether the angel simply rolled the stone up the grooved path or lifted the stone out of the groove frightened the guards. “The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men” (Matthew 28:1).

The Seal of the Governor

To break the seal was a criminal offense against Rome, carrying harsh penalty. They sealed the stones in the presence of the Roman guards who were left in charge. They sealed the tomb to prevent anyone from tampering with the contents. The guards would inspect the tomb, roll the heavy stone into place, and stretch a cord across the stone. They fastened the cord at either end with sealing clay and stamped both packs with the official signet of the Roman government. This is similar to the sealing of the lion’s den in Daniel 6:17. The seal was just an added precaution, since a guard was also present. Craig Keener notes, “Sealing the stone (27:66) made it impossible for anyone to enter the tomb while the guards slept and then replace the stone” (Keener, 696). Any unauthorized persons who broke the seal defied the authority of Rome and could be punished by death.

4. The Guards at the Tomb

The guards were there specifically to keep anyone from disturbing the grave. The guard at the tomb and the seal of the governor is strong evidence. The location of the tomb would have been evident to all, because of the guard and the Pilate's seal. We should not imagine the guards were weak or incompetent. Since they knew His prophecies about rising on the third day, they only needed to protect the tomb until that day. H. Leo Boles explained the reasoning of the Jews:

It would be worse for the people to think that he was the Messiah because he had risen from the dead than it would be to believe him to be the Messiah because of his teaching. They could more easily pervert, contradict, and refute his teachings, so they thought, than to deny his resurrection. Note that these chief priests and Pharisees said to Pilate "after three days" that Jesus had said he would rise again; hence they asked for a guard "until the third day," that is, until the third day had passed; again they understood "after three days" and "until the third day" to mean the same and that they would need the guard no longer (Boles, commentary on Matthew 27:62-66).

The soldiers, at the prompting of the Jewish leaders, claimed they were asleep. But the penalty for sleeping while on duty was very severe. This is why the bribe from the Jews and the promise to appease the governor would permit them to admit such a failure. This willingness to appease the governor and the fact that Roman soldiers crucified Jesus suggests the guards were Roman soldiers. If the Jewish leaders had wanted to use their own Temple guards, they would not have asked Pilate's help. The Roman governor's seal would have Roman soldiers to back up the governor's authority. The word "soldiers" (Matthew 28:12) would more likely refer to the Roman soldiers than it would to the Jewish Temple police.

Pilate said, “make it as secure as you know how” (Matthew 27:65), suggesting the number of guards would have been strong enough to stop any threat from the disciples. They wanted maximum security and a guarantee nothing would disturb the tomb. We know there was a plurality of soldiers and that “some” of the soldiers went into the city to tell the chief priests (Matthew 28:11). Pilate granted their request, giving them permission to set a strong Roman guard upon a dead man’s grave. In answer to the chief priests’ request, Pilate likely allowed them to have from ten to thirty guards under their direction. Albert Roper in *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?* tells what this guard must have meant:

Commanding the guard was a centurion designated by Pilate, presumably one in which he had full confidence, whose name according to tradition was Petronius. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that these representatives of the Emperor could have been trusted to perform their duty to guard a tomb quite as strictly and as faithfully as they had executed a crucifixion. They had not the slightest interest in the task to which they were assigned. Their sole purpose and obligation was rigidly to perform their duty as soldiers of the empire of Rome to which they had dedicated their allegiance. The Roman seal affixed to the stone before Joseph’s tomb was far more sacred to them than all the philosophy of Israel or the sanctity of her ancient creed. Soldiers coldblooded enough to gamble over a dying victim’s cloak are not the kind of men to be hoodwinked by timid Galileans or to jeopardize their Roman necks by sleeping on their post (Roper, 33).

A normal Roman guard was made up of sixteen soldiers. Roman soldiers were well-known for their discipline. The penalty for negligence while on duty (falling asleep or abandoning their post) was execution. These men were not going to let any band of disciples take the body of Jesus (Weber, comment on Matthew 27:65). Making the tomb secure would prove

beneficial to both the Jews and the Romans. Of course, no matter how many precautions they took to stop a theft, they could not stop Jesus from rising from the dead.

5. The presence of the angel(s).

And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. “He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. “Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you” (Matthew 28:2-7).

Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you’ (Mark 16:5-7).

While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? “He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (Luke 24:4-7).

But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him” (John 20:11-13).

At the tomb we have the presence of an angel of the Lord who moved the stone and sat upon it. While Matthew and Mark mention only one angel or “young man” wearing a white robe, Luke and John mention two men or angels in dazzling white clothing. The guards shook for fear because of the appearance and might of the angel, who could move the stone. They were not asleep when the stone was moved, they were shaking with fear.

The angels apparently moved during the occasion and remained at the tomb for a while. Mary first saw the angel of the Lord sitting on the stone, but on a later visit she found two angels in white sitting in the tomb itself. The angels, however, did not appear to Peter and John as they entered the tomb to find the linen wrappings.

In Matthew and Luke, the angels spoke to Mary and the women that Jesus was not in the tomb but had risen from the dead. They urge them to tell the apostles to go to Galilee, where they will see Jesus. In Mark the angels show where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus laid Jesus and urge her to tell the disciples that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee. They mention the promise that Jesus would rise again. In John, Mary sees the two angels at the head and foot of where Jesus was laid at his burial. She is weeping because His body is absent and doesn’t know where they laid Him. The angels wonder why she is weeping. Ultimately she turns and sees the Lord Jesus, who speaks to her (John 20:14-18).

The presence of the angel(s) in all four accounts provides multiple witnesses, who did not collude with each other in presenting the details. This reveals a credible historical account.

6. The False Report of the Jews

That the guards slept and allowed the theft of the body is hardly possible. If they had let the disciples (or anyone else) break the governor's seal and steal the body, they would have to face the punishment of death, brutally enforced. This story was invented to prevent the truth from being known. The guard at the tomb had the opportunity to observe the resurrection and told the Jews all they had seen.

And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men (Matthew 28:2-4).

While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day (Matthew 28:11-15).

We have no record the Jewish authorities questioned the soldiers' report of the empty tomb. The soldiers told them all that happened. They likely spoke of the angel moving the stone, the words to the women, and the declaration of His resurrection. The Jews knew the unbelieving,

Roman soldiers would not have come to them with such a story unless it was true! They may have examined the tomb for themselves to verify the soldiers' story. When they realized the tomb was empty, they took action to stop the exposure of the truth and to invent their own version. The soldiers may well have heard the words of the angel to the women who had come to the tomb that morning to anoint His body.

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you" (Matthew 28:5-7).

The soldiers witnessed the angel rolling the stone and likely saw the angel showing the women that Jesus was not in His tomb. They were so frightened by the angel, they "trembled and became like dead men." They knew they could not stop the angel from breaking of the seal and rolling back the stone. They feared for their lives. Thomas Thorburn explains, "Here the soldiers would have practically no other alternative than to trust the good offices of the priests. The body (we will suppose) was gone, and their negligence in any case would be punishable by death" (Thorburn, 179).

This makes the rumor that the body was stolen unbelievable. If the body were stolen, all that would be necessary to disprove the resurrection is to find and produce the body. The disciples of Jesus could not and would not come up with such a story to support their reason for serving Jesus. It must have come from the Jewish authorities to discredit the idea of a resurrection.

When the crowds with swords and clubs came to arrest Jesus, His disciples scattered, as the Lord predicted on the Mount of Olives.

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (Matthew 26:30-31).

At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled (Matthew 26:55-56).

Even after the resurrection John speaks of the disciples hiding with the doors locked “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). Is it possible these frightened, untrained Jews could overpower the trained, hardened Roman soldiers and steal the body? If there had been a scuffle with the Romans, the Romans could have shown their bruises and wounds rather than claiming to be asleep and suffering no wounds.

Because there is strong evidence for the tomb being empty, an impressive number of critical scholars accept it as a fact of history. Gary Habermas discovered that roughly “75 percent of scholars on the subject accept the empty tomb as historical fact” (Habermas and Licona, 70). William Wand, a former Oxford University church historian said, “All the strictly historical evidence we have is in favor of [the empty tomb], and those scholars who reject it ought to recognize that they do so on some other ground than that of scientific history” (Wand, 93-94). D. H. Van Daalen pointed out, “It is extremely difficult to object to the empty tomb on historical grounds; those who deny it do so on the basis of theological or philosophical assumptions (like

the assumption that miracles are impossible” (Van Daalen, 41). Van Daalen argued that no natural hypothesis can furnish a plausible explanation. This alone would justify our accepting the resurrection as the simplest, most probable explanation of the empty tomb.

7. The Primary Testimony of the Women

All four gospel accounts list women as the primary witnesses of the empty tomb. The Scriptures list male witnesses of the empty tomb later in only two of the accounts (Luke 24:12, 24; John 20:3-8). If this story were fraudulent, this would have been an odd way to introduce and substantiate it. Both the Roman and Jewish cultures questioned the credibility of the testimony of women. They did not regard it as credible as a man’s testimony. Among the writings of the Jews are these statements from the Talmud revealing the way they regarded women.

Any evidence which a woman [gives] is not valid (to offer), also they are not valid to offer. This is equivalent to saying that one who is Rabbinically accounted a robber is qualified to give the same evidence as a woman (Rosh Hashannah 1.8).

Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women (Sotah, 19a).

The historian Josephus also gave in the first century an eye-opening account of low esteem Jewish men regarded the testimony of women:

But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex, nor let servants be admitted to give testimony on account of their ignobility of their soul; since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment (*Antiquities* 4.8.15).

This attitude provides the context for the way the disciples received the testimony of the women that Jesus had risen from the dead. “But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them” (Luke 24:11).

Given this low view of women by both Jew and Gentile, one can see how the authors of the gospel accounts would not have chosen to use the testimony of the women as their source, if they were inventing a hoax to fool the public into believing Jesus had raised from the dead. All four accounts would only cite the women as credible, if their story was true. If the authors of the gospel accounts had fraudulently originated the story of the empty tomb, they would likely have chosen men discovering the tomb was empty and being the first to see the risen Jesus. They would have avoided the questionable and perhaps chosen highly esteemed men like Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus.

If the gospel story were invented, Jewish men would not have given the role of first witness to a woman, since in that day a woman’s testimony had little or no credibility. This fact, out of place with the culture, reveals how historically accurate the gospel accounts are. This fits well with the principle of embarrassment that historians use to determine the veracity of the account.

True to Life Details

In a world that spins narratives and rewrites history to fit the design of the author, it is refreshing to see the gospel story told clearly and factually. The apostles and authors of the gospel accounts simply wanted to tell the truth. Herbert C. Casteel was a judge who took the time to render a verdict on the case for the Christian faith in his book, *Beyond a Reasonable*

Doubt. As a seasoned judge he was determined to find the truth of what really happened based on the testimony of the eyewitnesses. He noted:

Still another mark of the truth of the Gospel accounts are the numerous “true to life” details that a forger would not have thought of. John outrunning Peter to the tomb, but Peter going in first; John recognizing Jesus from the boat, but Peter jumping in and swimming to shore; the head cloth lying by itself; the two men returning from Emmaus at night; Mary Magdalene asserting that she would carry the body away (John 20:15); the angel instructing the women to tell the disciples ‘and Peter’ (Mark 16:7). All these are evidence of eyewitness accounts that were truthfully reported (Casteel, 214).

Casteel noted that sometimes the story of a witness is so artless, so straightforward, so natural, and there is such an entire absence of any attempt at coloring or effect, that his testimony bears weight independently of anything we may know of the character or previous history of the witness. Casteel could say, “This man is telling the truth.”

The weight of this kind of evidence is greatly increased and reaches practical certainty when we have several independent witnesses of this sort, all bearing testimony to the same essential facts, but with varieties of detail, one omitting what another tells, and the third unconsciously reconciling apparent discrepancies between the two. This is the precise case with the four Gospel narratives of the resurrection of Christ. The Gospel writers do not seem to have reflected at all upon the meaning or bearing of many of the facts which they relate. They simply tell right out what they saw in all simplicity and straight forwardness, leaving the philosophizing to others (Casteel, 214-215).

8. The Claim as Eyewitnesses

The claim in the gospel accounts that the writers were eyewitnesses or appealed to eyewitness testimony:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).

But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe (John 19:33-35)

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.” Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but

these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:24-31).

As apostles both Matthew and John were eyewitnesses of the ministry, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They wrote lengthy accounts of what they had seen and heard. Papias (140 AD) quoted an earlier source as saying Mark was a close associate of Peter, from whom he received the tradition of the things Jesus did. The material for the book came from the preaching of Peter, and Mark was careful not to omit anything. It is thought that Mark preserved the words of Peter shortly before his death in Rome.

The claim the apostles and disciples were eyewitnesses occurs in the book of Acts:

“This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32).

“But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15).

And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:18-20).

“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. “And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:30-32).

“We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. “God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead” (Acts 10:39-41).

The writers of the epistles claim in the epistles they were eyewitnesses:

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (Paul here names 14 people who were eyewitnesses and 500 others who witnessed the appearance of Jesus after His resurrection.)

After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will (Hebrews 2:3-4).

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed (1 Peter 5:1).

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty (2 Peter 1:16).

Edward Andrews noted that the very idea that the early eyewitnesses were fabricating tales about Jesus' resurrection collapses under scrutiny. Andrews presents three facts about the early Christians that reveal their integrity as truthful witnesses (Andrews, "*Integrity of the Eyewitnesses*"):

Motive for Deception: The early Christians had no apparent gain – neither wealth nor political power – from spreading the message of the resurrection. Instead, they faced persecution and death.

Uniform Proclamation: Despite facing intense persecution, they never retracted their testimony or provided alternate versions of the story.

Willingness to Die: Many of the apostles and early believers were martyred for their faith. People might die for what they believe to be true, but few, if any, would die for what they know to be a lie.

9. The Appearances of Jesus after His Resurrection

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them for forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). Luke uses the word *tekmerion* to describe many convincing proofs. That word describes "demonstrable proof." In a number of languages 'convincing proof' is rendered as 'that which causes one to know for sure' or 'with certainty.' (Louw and Nida, 340).

The New Testament provides several appearances of the risen Lord Jesus. The Gospel accounts, Acts, and 1 Corinthians speak of these appearances. Some are to individuals and others to groups, some within walls and others outdoors, some to people who readily accepted it and others to skeptical doubters. People touched Jesus and ate with Him, physical actions of a person.

The appearances over a forty-day period between His resurrection and the Day of Pentecost along with many proofs convinced the disciples of the resurrection as a fact. The testimony about these appearances led the disciples to be credible witnesses who would stand against all opposition.

Mary Magdalene and the Women

And they (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary) left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me” (Matthew 28:8-10).

Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons (Mark 16:9).

But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have

not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and that He had said these things to her (John 20:11-18).

Matthew records that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were the first persons to see the Lord after His resurrection. Mark records that Mary Magdalene was accompanied by Mary the mother of James, and Salome. Luke 24:10 names Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James. This means four women went to the tomb, if we consider the “other Mary” as “Mary the mother of James.” “And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him” (Matthew 28:9). Jesus did not refuse to be touched.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? “He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” And they remembered His words, and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest (Luke 24:1-9).

The women, bringing spices to anoint the body of Jesus, found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. This caused them great anxiety and at a loss to explain why the guards were there and the stone was rolled away. The two men or angels terrified them to the point they fell to the

ground. They announce that “He has risen!” Then they reminded them of the prophecy of Jesus that He would be crucified and “the third day rise again.” The women remembered His, the Lord’s, words and reported them to the eleven and to all the rest. “But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them” (Luke 24:11).

Later, after Peter and John visited the tomb, she saw Him alone. She supposed him to be the gardener, but Jesus clearly reveals Himself to her. John records a short conversation with Jesus. Apparently, Mary realizing He was the Teacher, who had died and was buried, was filled with love and joy and grabbed hold of Him. Jesus was not refusing to let Mary touch her; He told her not to detain Him. He wanted her to go and tell the brethren that He was to ascend to the Father. She announced that she had seen the Lord. She also told them to leave for Galilee. These appearances then have not only visual sightings, they also include conversations and touching the Lord Jesus.

Peter

The men on the road to Emmaus reported to the eleven, “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon” (Luke 24:34). Paul noted, “He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:5). Simon, Cephas, and Peter are all the same person. We do not have much detail about this appearance, but this was just a few days from the time Peter had denied knowing the Lord three times. This appearance was mentioned in Paul’s list and must have been quite early. Before Paul wrote how the Lord appeared to Peter in 1 Corinthians (54 or 55 A.D.), he wrote in Galatians 1:15-18,

But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him

among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.

Paul had opportunity to hear from Peter firsthand about the appearance of Jesus to him. There can be no doubt that Paul knew of this appearance. This could not be a legend.

Emmaus disciples

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?” And they stood still, looking sad. One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?” And He said to them, “What things?” And they said to Him, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. “But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive.

“Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.”

And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. But they urged Him, saying, “Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over.” So He went in to stay with them. When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. They said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:13-32).

This appearance has two important pictures. The first is the dependency of the disciples over the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus. They were hoping He was the Messiah who is going to redeem Israel. Their despondency comes in spite of the report of the women and some of those who went to the empty tomb. The second picture is one of Jesus explaining to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. When He took bread and blessed it, they recognized Jesus. Though He vanished from their sight, their hearts were burning while He was explaining the Scriptures.

Jesus calls them foolish (24:25). What does He mean? Lawrence O. Richards reveals what Jesus meant. The word Jesus used of the two on the Emmaus road is *anoetos*. In five of its six New Testament occurrences it is used of believers. Unlike the “fool” of the Old Testament,

whose problem is moral, this word describes an individual who sees things from a distorted perspective. He or she has not adopted the divine viewpoint (Richards, 674).

Emmaus was a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. There have been many suppositions as to which of the two disciples are mentioned here; it has been supposed that these two were on the way to Galilee. The evidence seems to be clear that these two were not of the apostles, for it is said that these two disciples “returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together.” (Boles 1991, 469).

Apostles without Thomas

The second appearance listed in 1 Corinthians 15 is an appearance to the Twelve. There are two independent accounts of this appearance in the gospel accounts:

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be to you.” But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them (Luke 24:36-43).

So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” And when He had said this, He showed them both

His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord (John 20:19-20).

Both Luke and John place the time of this meeting in the evening of the first day of the week, the very day Jesus arose from the dead and the tomb was discovered empty (notice Luke 24:1, 7, 13, 21). It is remarkable that John in referring to that day is using Roman time not Jewish. It is also remarkable that Jesus showed His disciples His hands, feet, and side. Jesus invited them to touch Him; He had flesh and bones and was not a spirit or ghost. He ate some broiled fish in their presence.

This must have been a startling to the Jews to see Him alive. They could not believe it because of their amazement and joy. Accepting His resurrection after His gruesome suffering and crucifixion would not be easy, even though the women had reminded them of the prophecy that he would rise again. Craig observed how it was “equally unlikely the early believers would have made up a story of the disciples’ hiding in cowardice, while women boldly observed the crucifixion and burial and visited the tomb” (Craig 2000, 77).

The early believers had no motive for embarrassing their leaders by showing their fear and making women their heroes. It is very probable the disciples really would hide for fear of the Jews, since they remained in Jerusalem.

Jesus miraculously entered the room, although the door was locked out of fear of the Jews. His appearance likely startled them. His voice greeting them, “Peace be with you,” would have been easily recognized; and His message would have calmed them and reassured them that what they heard from the women and the prophecy was indeed true.

Apostles with Thomas

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed” (John 20:24-29).

This remarkable appearance occurred a week later, again on the first day of the week. Though Thomas vehemently denied belief in Jesus unless he was able to touch his hands and side, the Lord Jesus invited him to use his finger to touch His hands and side. The Lord Jesus did not want Thomas or any of His disciples to doubt that He had truly risen from the dead, that He was the crucified One.

Seven Disciples at the Sea of Galilee

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We

will also come with you.” They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing (John 21:1-3).

But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, “Children, you do not have any fish, do you?” They answered Him, “No.” And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.” So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish (21:4-8).

Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead (21:12-14).

In John 21:2, Peter took six other disciples on a fishing trip in the Sea of Tiberia, which is the Sea of Galilee. Jesus and the angels told the disciples to go to Galilee after he had already risen from the dead. After they caught nothing, Jesus appeared and told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. When they did, they caught 153 fish (John 21:3–14). This event reminded them of the earlier catch of fish (Luke 5:4-11). Jesus knew they did not have any fish and urged them to let down their nets on the right-hand side of the boat. Jesus knew where the fish were.

Incidentals such as the right-hand side of the boat, Peter's stripping off his outer garment, John's recognition of the Lord, Peter's swimming to shore, the catch of 153 fish, the untorn net, the charcoal fire (21:9), the fish and bread, and Jesus' serving breakfast make it clear only an eyewitness could have been present. This occasion at the Sea of Galilee, unlike the first appearance to Peter, contains a number of details about the appearance of Jesus.

More than 500 Believers

After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 5:6). This is the only mention of this appearance. Apparently, it took place where a crowd of people could see and hear Him. They could easily have their doubts answered by this appearance and could confess their eyewitness status. Each of them could have corroborated the evidence of the Lord's resurrection. Although the appearance of Jesus to the five hundred is not mentioned in the gospel accounts, this appearance dares to invite the reader to question these witnesses. One could ask any one of these witnesses to find out the truth. Though some had died, many were still available and willing to substantiate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

James

"Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:7). This is likely the brother of Jesus rather than the son of Zebedee, since James the brother of John was put to death by a sword (Acts 12:2). Paul, however, met the brother of the Lord three years after his conversion (Galatians 1:19) and probably heard from James himself the fact of the Lord's appearance.

The radical change in James, the Lord's brother, causes one to ask, "What caused James to change?" None of Jesus' brothers believed in Jesus during His ministry (Mark 3:21, 31-35; John 7:1-10). They thought He was out of His mind. John tells of Jesus' brothers trying to get Him to show Himself in Judea. Jesus knew the Jews in Judea were seeking to kill Him. They said, "For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." For not even His brothers were believing in Him (John 7:4-5). Jesus refused to go, because it was not His time.

But James and the other brothers were found in fellowship in Jerusalem with the believers after the resurrection (Acts 1:14). Acts 12:17 reveals how Peter wanted James to know of his deliverance from prison. James was considered as prominent as the apostles in Galatians 1:19, and it was James through the Holy Spirit who decided how pagan converts should be treated (Acts 15:13). When Paul came to Jerusalem to bring the offerings of the Gentiles, Acts 21:18 says he went "to James, and all the elders." Church tradition says that James, brother of Jesus, wrote the book of James in the New Testament. James is also mentioned by Josephus in his massive work *Jewish Antiquities*.

Eusebius said, "(Ananus) assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned" (20:9). Hegesippus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius identify "James the Just" as James, the brother of Jesus, and claim he died by being thrown from the pinnacle of the temple (*Ecclesiastical History* 2:23.1-25).

The answer to James' radical change can only come from the personal appearance of his brother Jesus. Nothing else could have convinced him of the resurrection and that Jesus was truly the

Son of God. James identifies himself in James 1:1, “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Eleven in Galilee

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:16-20).

This brief appearance took place in Galilee on a mountain and not in Jerusalem. Matthew, an apostle and eyewitness, is the only one to record this particular appearance. Judas was dead and no longer numbered with them. Some still doubted and would need more persuading by the “many convincing proofs” (Acts 1:3). John Nolland in the commentary on this passage notes:

In some sense what had taken place in Jesus’ ministry is to begin afresh and on a new level in the ministry of the disciples now. ‘To the mountain to which Jesus had directed them’ is quite unprepared for. It is best to see Matthew’s intention here as to give more detail about what Jesus is understood to have said to the women during the encounter at 28:10 (Nolland, 1261).

The Lord here presents what is commonly called the Great Commission. Matthew ends his book here, making note of the task the apostles and the church was to perform until the end of time.

A Return Appearance in Jerusalem

Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. “You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:44-49).

To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:3-8).

This appearance must have taken place after they returned from Galilee. They are back in Jerusalem to stay when this message was given. Apparently this was given in Jerusalem just prior to the Ascension. Jesus again gives them the task of being His witnesses to Judea, Samaria,

and the remotest part of the earth. Before they do this, they will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and receive power. Acts 2 reveals the fulfillment of this promise.

The Lord Jesus is once again giving them proof of His suffering and resurrection from the prophecies of the Old Testament, and proclaiming to them that they are “witnesses of these things.” He is opening their minds to understand. This must have made an impact on these Jews who had studied the Scriptures all their lives. Jesus apparently cited passages from the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms to bolster their faith in His fulfillment of these passages. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (or Writings) would have included all 22 books of Hebrew Bible (which includes all 39 books of our Old Testament).

The Ascension

And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.

While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God (Luke 24:50-53).

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud carried Him up and received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away (Acts 1:9-12).

The ascension, Jesus' rise into heaven, took place on Mount Olivet. Luke records His blessing the apostles and His being received by a cloud. Two angels explain that His return (John 14:1-3) will be "just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." The number of different places where Jesus appeared is remarkable.

Stephen

But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56).

They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:59-60).

This vision of Stephen, seeing Jesus at the right hand of God, reveals the heart of this servant Stephen. The Lord was reassuring Stephen, the first Christian martyr, as the multitude turned against him and stoned him. As they continued to stone him, Stephen cried out two things similar to Jesus' prayer while He was crucified: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" and "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"

Paul

As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do" (Acts 9:3-6).

“In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me’” (Acts 26:12-18).

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (1 Corinthians 15:8)

The Impact of the Appearances

Lee Strobel, interviewing Gary Habermas, put the number of witnesses to the resurrection appearances into perspective in his book, *The Case for Christ*.

Without question, the amount of testimony and corroboration of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances is staggering. To put it into perspective, if you were to call each one of the witnesses into a court of law to be cross-examined for just fifteen minutes each, and you went around the clock without a break, it would take you from breakfast on Monday until dinner on Friday to hear them all. After listening to 129 straight hours of eyewitness testimony, who could possibly walk away unconvinced? (Strobel, 256).

One may wonder why Paul had such a brief mention of the large group of 500 people, most of whom are now alive, all seeing at the same time the resurrected Jesus Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:6. William Lane Craig responds:

The great New Testament scholar of Cambridge University, C. H. Dodd, replies, “There can hardly be any purpose in mentioning the fact that the most of the 500 are still alive, unless Paul is saying, in effect, ‘The witnesses are there to be questioned’” (Dodd, 128). Paul would not have said this if the event had not occurred. He wouldn’t have challenged people to talk to the eyewitnesses if the event had never taken place and there were no eyewitnesses. But evidently there were witnesses to this event, and Paul knew that some of them had died in the interim. Therefore, the event must have taken place” (Craig, Kindle locations 547-554).

10. The Resurrection of the Body

A physical death occurs when the spirit separates from the body (James 2:26). Resurrection occurs when the spirit returns to the body giving it new life. Jesus promised, “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29). Jesus’ prophecies about His death and resurrection included explicit references to His body. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body (John 2:19-21). When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, they removed the stone over the cave; and Lazarus came out of his tomb, “his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth” (John 11:43-44). They released his body from the linen wrappings. When Jesus was raised from the dead, He was

raised bodily. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11).

When Jesus revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene who was weeping outside the tomb, she first thought He was the gardener. She was weeping, because she did not know where they have laid him (that is, his body).

Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:16-17).

The King James Version translates this, “Touch me not,” which has led some to think that Jesus had some form of spiritual body that couldn’t be touched. This is not the case; Jesus had a human body. His caution to her was not that he could not be touched, but to stop clinging to Him. He had a task for her to perform. He wanted her to go to the disciples and tell them.

When Jesus appeared to His disciples, He showed them His hands and feet and described Himself as One who had “flesh and bones.”

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to

them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them (Luke 24:39-43).

The apostles took opportunity to see, hear, and touch Jesus. They saw His hands and feet, where the nails had pierced Him. Jesus was more than willing to prove to them that He was once again alive in the body. In John 21:11-15 Jesus again eats with His disciples at the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

When Thomas, the Twin, learned that Jesus had risen from the dead and they had seen Him, he demanded physical proof. He would not be satisfied until he saw and touched the Lord for himself. He said, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (John 20:25). Eight days later Jesus responded to Thomas’ request.

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:27-29).

Jesus did not avoid Thomas’ challenges. He wanted the disciples to be fully convinced of His resurrection and of His deity. If Jesus had not presented a living, active body to the disciples, He could not have convinced them He was indeed raised from the dead. Jesus “presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

The apostle John in his first epistle speaks clearly about “the word of life,” which he proclaimed and examined.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:1-4).

John's clear testimony is that "we" heard, saw with our eyes, looked upon, and touched with our hands "that which was from the beginning," a definite reference to Jesus Christ (John 1:1-4, 14). Touching the risen Son of God is what gave John and the others assurance of eternal life.

William Lane Craig argued that every appearance of Jesus Christ was physical and could be empirically verified by those who were eyewitnesses:

Every resurrection appearance narrated in the gospels is a physical, bodily appearance. The unanimity of the gospels on that score is very impressive when one remembers the appearance stories were originally more or less separate, independent stories, which the different gospel writers collected and arranged in order. All their separate sources of information agree that Jesus appeared physically and bodily to the disciples and other witnesses. There is no trace of nonphysical appearances in the sources, a remarkable fact if all the appearances were really visionary, as some of the critics would have us believe. That strongly suggests that the appearances were not in fact visions, but actual, bodily appearances. The fact that all the separate gospel stories agree on that point, and that no trace of visionary "appearances" is to be found, weighs strongly in favor of the gospels' historical credibility in this matter (Craig, 116-117).

11. The Removal of the Stone

Joseph of Arimathea “took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away” (Matthew 27:59-60). Mary Magdalene was present at the grave when this happened. Mark reveals that Joseph was a member of the Council (Mark 15:43). Mark adds, “Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb” (Mark 15:46). Luke calls Joseph “a good and righteous man” and adds that “he had not consented to their plan and action” to condemn Jesus (Luke 23:50-51). Luke calls it “a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid” (Luke 23:53).

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you” (Matthew 28:1-7).

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from

the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you” (Mark 16:2-7).

And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise” (Luke 24:2-7).

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb (John 20:1).

A great earthquake happened, and an angel moved the “extremely large” (Mark 16:4), heavy stone covering the grave. Matthew said the angel rolled “back” the stone. William Lane Craig noted in *Assessing the New Testament Evidence*, “Although it would be easy to close the tomb, it would take several men to roll the stone back up away from the door.” (Craig, 186-187).

Frank Morison spoke of the difficulty the women would have had in moving the stone.

The question as to how they were to remove the stone must of necessity have been a source of considerable perplexity to the women. Two of them at least had witnessed the interment and knew roughly how things stood. The stone which is known to have been large and of considerable weight, was their great difficulty. When, therefore, we find in the earliest record, the Gospel of Mark, the words, “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb?” we can hardly avoid feeling that this preoccupation of the women with the question of the stone is not only a psychological necessity of the problem, but a definitely historical element in the situation right up to the moment of their arrival at the grave (Morison, 76).

Mark refers to the stone covering the tomb in two places in his account: once in the scene of the burial (Mark 15:46) and again in the scene on the morning of the first day (Mark 16:3). The burial is described: “Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.” The verb “rolled” in Greek is *proskulisas*. This is a combination of *pros* (meaning “toward”) and the past participle of *kulio* (meaning “to roll or roll along”). On the morning of the resurrection, “the women said to themselves, ‘Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb?’ And looking up, they saw the stone was rolled away; for it was extremely large.” The Greek here for “roll away” is *apekulisen*. This is a combination of *ap’* (meaning “away”) and ... yes, *kulio* (meaning “to roll”). From these words, it appears the stone was round and capable of being rolled.

Gordon’s Calvary has an entrance designed for a stone to be rolled against the entrance. Ray Vander Laan described the Garden Tomb:

John 19:41-42 describes a new tomb hewn in the rock. John 20:3-9 says the disciples had to look in to see the clothes where the body had been laid, and the tomb was large enough for more than one person to enter. The small window lets light into the burial chamber, but it may have been added later. At some point, the entrance to this tomb was enlarged and later blocked in, so the opening was originally much taller.

The channel for the stone is found in front of the entrance to the tomb. It is likely that a large tombstone, round like a disc and probably about five feet high and 12 inches thick, rolled in a channel to seal the tomb. Since families continued to use tombs over the several generations (storing the bones in ossuaries), they had to be able to open and close the burial site. Some of the wealthy, who could afford this luxury had tombs carved out of the rock. A disc-shaped stone was cut, which rolled in a trench in front of the entrance. A small depression made the stone stop exactly where it closed the tomb. A rolling stone would usually weigh more than two tons (Mark 16:1-3). There is no way to know if this was Jesus' tomb, but it not really important. This stone can help us understand how Jesus' tomb was sealed (Vander Laan, <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/the-garden-tomb>).

While we do not suggest the Gordon's Calvary is the place where Jesus was buried and rose again, we do find that it is perhaps very like the site mentioned in Scripture. Seeing an angel take away the stone, the Roman guards trembled "for fear of him and became like dead men." They felt the earthquake and saw what the angel did that morning. They knew something extraordinary had happened.

Some suggest Jesus did not die in the tomb but revived. How could a weakened Jesus (if he had not died) have been able to move the heavy stone? The soldiers, at the urging of the

Jewish authorities, fabricated the rumor that the disciples stole the body while they were asleep. How did “several men” evade the guards at the tomb? Moving such an extremely large stone would not have been an easy or quiet matter. Why was there no fighting between the disciples and the soldiers at the tomb? Why was there no report of any injury or death?

12. The Grave Clothes

So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead (John 20:3-9).

When Peter and John entered the tomb they found the grave clothes left orderly. If Jesus were dead, the grave clothes would have been left on him. If the body were stolen, they would not have taken the time to undress the body and leave the grave clothes. If Jesus revived in the tomb, one may ask, “How did Jesus get out of the grave clothes in his weakened condition?” Lazarus was unable to remove his grave clothes; other had to unbind him (John 11:43-44).

Had robbers stolen the body (a rare practice) they would have taken it in the linen wrappings. Had they left the wrappings, they would have left them in disarray, since they were hurrying to escape the soldiers. Whoever left them, left the clothes neatly folded. The face cloth separate from the linen is not merely “folded up” but “rolled up” (NASB,), which could be an

indication of neatness, or that it was still rolled the way it had been when it was wrapped around Jesus' head—that his body had risen straight out of the wrappings and cloth (Keener, Commentary on John 20:6).

What kind of faith did Peter and John have after they investigated the grave? They had faith based on evidence. They could see the grave clothes lying neatly in the tomb; they knew the body of Jesus was no longer there. Peter looked closely at the grave clothes; John entered the tomb, saw, and believed (John 20:3-8). After stooping and looking in the tomb, Peter went home “marveling at what had happened” (Luke 24:12). Though we cannot examine for ourselves the grave clothes today, we do have the eyewitness account in the Word of God, and this historical record is true (John 19:35; 21:24). We can study the Word and come to faith (John 20:30-31; Romans 10:17). Peter pointed to the Word of God, not personal experiences, for the basis of our faith (1 Peter 1:12–21).

The skeptic's proposal that Jesus had only swooned and then recovered in a weakened condition after His scourging and crucifixion cannot explain several details. It would not explain how he could have loosed the strips tied around him, moved the very large stone, breaking the seal, and passed the guards untouched. It also ignores the nature of the brutal crucifixion. Josephus had three of his friends taken down alive from a cross, but two of them died despite medical attention because their bodies had been so weakened from the crucifixion.

13. No Evidence of a Dead Body Was Found After the Resurrection

If the body of Christ could have been produced, the enemies of Christ would have done so and exposed the disciples as false witnesses. We may be sure that no stone was left unturned in the many efforts to disprove the resurrection and stop Christianity. Producing a body would

have ended all reason to believe in Jesus either as a prophet or as Lord and Christ. There never would have been a church, if Jesus had not resurrected.

William Lane Craig argued clearly the faith of the early Christians was bolstered by their faith that the tomb was empty. The empty tomb gave them three reasons to proclaim Jesus had risen from the dead.

In the first place, the disciples themselves could never have believed in the resurrections of Jesus when faced with a tomb containing a corpse. In the second place, no one would have believed them, even if they had claimed that He was risen, since it would have been stupid (in fact, impossible) for anyone to believe a man had been raised from the dead when His body was still in the grave. And in the third place, the disciples' opponents would have exposed the whole affair as a sham by displaying the body of Jesus, perhaps even parading it through the streets of Jerusalem, thus bringing the Christian heresy to a sudden and grisly end (William Lane Craig, 2000, 46).

The Jews without a doubt would have searched every corner to find the body of Jesus, if it were possible. Jesus predicted, "Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come" (John 7:33-34). Jesus ultimately ascended bodily to the Father, and the next sighting of Him at the Father's side comes at the death of Stephen (Acts 7:55-60).

14. The Amazing Prophecy about Going to Galilee

If you knew you had less than 24 hours to live, would you prophesy you were going to do something just days after you came back to life? Jesus made such an unlikely prophecy, looking

with confidence that future . If that prophecy did not come to pass, Jesus would have been judged a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

The Lord Jesus made an amazing prophecy on the night He was betrayed: “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee” (Matthew 26:31-32; cf. Mark 14:28). H. Leo Boles commented

“In his deep distress and in the foreboding evils that await him, Jesus thinks tenderly of his disciples; he desires to comfort and console them; but how slow they are to believe him; they understood him not, though he had told them time and again of his death and resurrection” (Boles, Matthew 26:31-35).

Not only did Jesus proclaim He would go into Galilee. The angel at the tomb told the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you” (Matthew 28:5-7; Mark 16:7). The Lord Jesus also told the women, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me” (28:10).

The apostles did in fact go to Galilee, just as Jesus had commanded. “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted” (Matthew 28:16-17; cf. Mark 16:14). John also tells about the events that took place on the Sea of Tiberias (or Galilee), the great catch of fish, feeding the disciples, and the discussion with Peter—all in Galilee (John 21).

15. The Remarkable Change in the Disciples.

Virtually all critical scholars recognize an unmistakable change in the disciples after Jesus “presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). L. L. Morris noted their conviction and understanding of the bodily resurrection of Jesus was the primary focus of their preaching.

The most startling characteristic of the first Christian preaching is its emphasis on the resurrection. The first preachers were sure that Christ had risen, and sure, in consequence, that believers would in due course rise also. This set them off from all the other teachers of the ancient world (Morris, 1010).

One cannot mistake the change that took place in the attitude and courage of the apostles once they believed and knew God had raised Jesus from the dead.

Before the Appearances

“But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it” (Mark 16:11).

“But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:10-11).

And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and

when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see” (Luke 24:19-24).

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19).

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (John 20:24-25).

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted” (Matthew 28:16-17).

After the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and before presenting convincing proofs of His resurrection, the early disciples at first had a tough time digesting what had happened. The disciples apparently did not take Jesus’ prophecy of His death, burial, and resurrection seriously, even though He constantly warned them about what would happen. At first, Peter could not accept the death of Jesus as a real possibility (Matthew 16:21-23). Daniel King explains:

Apparently, the whole thing seemed too much for them to digest. Crucifixion was so unthinkable! Who would willingly submit to such a gruesome procedure? And why? It is obvious they had given up their hope of the Messianic Age (often referred to by the rabbis as “the world to come.” To their way of thinking before the cross, Jesus was to be

the Messianic King, after the fashion of King David in the Hebrew Scriptures, and their hopes for that were dashed by His humiliation and death. All of this was so utterly unexpected and startling that they could not seem to recover from their disappointment. ...Lingering doubts and seemingly unanswered questions plagued them to the point where He had to sternly rebuke their “lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen” (Mark 16:14). (King, 68-69).

After Forty Days of Appearances and Convincing Proofs

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:22-24). The twelve claimed to be witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 2:32).

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus (Acts 3:13).

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:18-20).

But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison (Acts 5:17-18). God released them and sent them to teach in the temple (5:20-21).

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them” (Acts 5:27-33).

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

The Council reacted to Stephen’s sermon about Jesus and their responsibility for his death. “Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him” (Acts 7:54). “But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his

knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:57-60).

And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison (Acts 8:1-4).

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:1-3).

The apostle Paul faced anger, punishment, imprisonment and stoning during his ministry and apostleship. He suffered “afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger” (2 Corinthians 6:4-5). He tells the Corinthians of his sacrifices:

“Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And,

apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Paul faced serious a death threat from more than forty who made an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12-15).

Norval Geldenhuys in his commentary on Luke made note of how important the resurrection appearances and proofs were to the disciples' faith and commitment.

It is impossible that [the disciples] would have sacrificed their possessions and their blood in the service of Christ if their announcement of His resurrection had been based upon deceit. How could the ineradicable joy, certainty and power have come into their lives after His crucifixion if their whole faith were a gigantic lie? Everything points to the fact that there is only one explanation for the empty sepulcher: Jesus' claim to be the Son of God was true, and no bonds of death and darkness could keep Him confined to the grave. He did arise, and He lives (629).

J. N. D. Anderson wrote in an article on the resurrection in Christianity Today,

“Think of the psychological absurdity of picturing a little band of defeated cowards cowering in an upper room one day and a few days later transformed into a company that no persecution could silence—and then attempting to attribute this dramatic change to nothing more convincing than a miserable fabrication. ... That simply wouldn't make sense” (12).

Chuck Colson, who was involved in the Watergate scandal, pointed out the difficulty of several people maintaining a lie for an extended period of time. He said in an

“I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, and then they proclaimed that truth for

40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible" (*The Paradox of Power*).

Another leading scholar on the resurrection, philosopher William Lane Craig, argues that the faith of the disciples remain as evidence of His resurrection:

It is quite clear that without the belief in the resurrection the Christian faith could not have come into being. The disciples would have remained crushed and defeated men. Even had they continued to remember Jesus as their believed teacher, His crucifixion would have forever silenced any hopes of His being the Messiah. The cross could have remained the sad and shameful end to His career. The origin of Christianity therefore hinges on the belief of the early disciples that God had raised Jesus from the dead (*The Son Rises*, 128).

Craig argued that the change in the disciples reveals they could not have invented the story of the resurrection:

"The change in the disciples shows they had not invented the resurrection. After the crucifixion the disciples were confused, defeated, fearful, and burdened with sorrow. Suddenly they changed, becoming fearless preachers of Jesus' resurrection. They suffered bravely and confidently for this fact. They went from the depths of despair to the boldest certainty. This incredible change in the disciples showed that they were not merely lying, but were absolutely convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead" (27).

It is clear and undeniable that the apostles and early Christians (those who were in the best position as eyewitnesses) voluntarily submitted to torture and death rather than renounce or deny their faith.

Gary Habermas and Michael Licona describe what the convictions disciples displayed after the resurrection of Jesus:

The disciples of Jesus claimed to have seen the risen Jesus because they really believed that they had seen him. Shortly after Jesus' crucifixion, their lives were radically transformed to the point that they were willing to endure imprisonment, sufferings, and even martyrdom. This indicates that their claim of seeing the risen Jesus was the result of a strong and sincere belief they truly had seen him. In all the political scandals that occurred over recent generations, one or more of the guilty party was often willing to tell the truth rather than face a lengthy prison term. The disciples of Jesus, on the other hand, boldly proclaimed the risen Christ in the face of severe persecution and death. They faced dungeons, torture, and brutal executions— not the white-collar prisons that hold today's corrupt politicians (93-94).

This steadfast commitment to their testimony arises out of the fact they knew it to be true. No one would suffer as they did for what they knew was fraudulent. These men, disciples of Jesus, were men of character who understood lying to be sinful. They had no reason to conspire a fraudulent narrative about Jesus. Such a narrative would offer them no advantage. People are willing to suffer for the truth, even if it offers no such advantage.

The Martyrdom of the Early Disciples

Much of our knowledge about the martyrdom and suffering of apostles and other leaders in the early church comes to us through church tradition. Though ancient tradition may be unreliable in some details, it usually provides true pictures of what happened in larger accounts. Grant R. Jeffries in *The Signature of God* (173-175, Adapted by Phil Sanders) provides this account of martyrdom of the apostles:

- Matthew suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound.
- Mark died in Alexandria, Egypt, after being dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.
- Luke was hanged in Greece as a result of his tremendous preaching to the lost.
- John faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.
- Peter was crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross, according to church tradition because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died.
- James the Just, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death.

with a fuller's club. This was the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the Temptation.

- James the Greater, a son of Zebedee, was ultimately beheaded at Jerusalem.
- Bartholomew, also known as Nathanal, was martyred for his preaching in Armenia when he was believed to have been flayed to death by a whip. He may have also been crucified.
- Andrew was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony.
- Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church in the subcontinent.
- Jude, the brother of Jesus, was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.
- Matthias, Matthias was chosen by the Apostles to replace Judas Iscariot. Information is vague and contradictory. One tradition maintains that Matthias was stoned at Jerusalem by the Jews, and then beheaded.
- Barnabas, who wrote the Epistle of Barnabas, preached throughout Italy and Cyprus and was stoned to death at Salonica.
- Philip was crucified, according to the plaque in the church of the Holy Apostles.
- Paul was believed to have been tortured and then beheaded by Emperor Nero just outside of Rome in A.D. 67.

The fact that these men remained faithful and committed to preaching the gospel to the end cannot be dismissed. One must attribute the unquestionable loyal to their commitment to the truth they preached. Though they lived for decades after the resurrection of Christ, they continued steadfast in their conviction. Paul expressed his conviction:

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

Then Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18).

16. The Conversion of James, the brother of Jesus

Since more than one James is mentioned in the leadership of the church, one might ask, “Which James is Paul speaking about in 1 Corinthians 15?” Since there are no surnames, one might question whether it is James, the son of Zebedee; James, the brother of Jesus; or James, the son of Alphaeus. However, the context makes it clear, since James the brother of Zebedee and James, the son of Alphaeus, would have been included in the twelve.

Jesus had at least four brothers, James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon and some unnamed sisters. The first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, mentions the stoning of “the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, whose name was James” (*Antiquities*, 20:9). Jesus’ brothers were unbelievers during His ministry (Mark 3:21, 31; 6:3-4; John 7:5). 1 Corinthians 15:7 mentions

Christ's appearance to James, though no details are given; Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians is part of the earliest records available to us today. Luke records how Mary and the brothers of Jesus were of one mind with the apostles and devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14). This reveals that though he was skeptic early on, James was indeed a disciple at this time. It is evident the appearance of the Christ to James, like the appearance to Paul, led him to have a strong conviction from that time forward. His martyrdom is described by Josephus, Hegessippus, and Clement of Alexandria.

When Paul and Barnabas faced the problem of the Jewish Christians who were demanding the circumcision of the Gentiles who converted, Peter and James spoke clearly as guided by the Holy Spirit to settle the issue (Acts 15:1, 12-29; cf. Galatians 1:19).

17. The Existence of the Church.

The church did not just happen, it was caused by the power of God. Jesus predicted that the gates of Hades would not prevent his building his church (Matt. 16:18). The early church turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). The only adequate cause for this event is the resurrection.

The church's practice of baptism and the Lord's Supper presuppose the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. From the earliest days of the church, these practices were used to teach new converts the gospel story. The Scriptures clearly portray baptism in water as the means of uniting with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-7; Colossians 2:12-13). Just as one is united with Christ in His death, in baptism one is united with Him in His resurrection, giving the convert newness of life.

The Scriptures reveal when the early church observed the Lord's Supper. "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them,

intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7). This is the clearest verse in the New Testament which indicates that Sunday was the normal meeting day of the apostolic church. Paul stayed in Troas for seven days (verse 6) and the church met on the first day of the week. Luke’s method of counting days here was not Jewish, which measures from sundown to sundown, but Roman, which counted from midnight to midnight. This can be stated dogmatically because “daylight” (v. 11) was the next day (v. 7).

While the Lord’s Supper is a memorial of the body and blood sacrificed by Christ and is represented with unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26), it is to be observed “until He comes.” This is a clear reference to the second coming of the Lord Jesus (John 14:1-3), when He will raise the dead on the last day (John 5:28-29; 6:40). The hope Christians have is the resurrection of the dead at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). This hope goes back to the last appearance of Jesus to the apostles on the Mount of Olives, when Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-11; cf. Luke 24:50-51). The angels said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

One very telling event that substantiates faith in Christ’s resurrection is the early church’s practice of worshiping on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2) rather than following the Jewish practice of observing the Sabbath. Jesus Christ arose from the dead on the first day of the week (Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1, 7, 13, 20-22; John 20:1, 19). These verses are sometimes held to contradict Matthew 28:1, which in some versions use the phrase, “late on the Sabbath.” The word “late” (*opse*) should be translated “after” when it is used as a preposition (as it is in Matthew 28:1, NASB95). “Late” here does not mean late as opposed to early, but late as

in tardy or later. Some scholars regard this word as a technical term referring to that period of time between sundown (the official end of the Sabbath) and sunrise of the first day of the week. This would remove any possible disagreement between the gospels or as to when Jesus arose from the dead.

From the day of Pentecost, which occurred on the first day of the week fifty days after the Passover and death of Christ, the early church regarded the first day of the week as the day they would meet for worshipping. Pentecost always came on the first day of the week (Leviticus 23:15-16). All the events of Pentecost (after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) happened on the first day of the week (Acts 2): (a) the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles; (b) the first preaching of the gospel in fulfillment of Isaiah 2:2-4; and (c) the beginning of the church (Acts 11:15).

The word “Lord’s” referring to the “Lord’s” Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20) and the “Lord’s” Day (Revelation 1:20) is found only in these two passages. It is no coincidence that early Christians observed the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, since the term is only used of these two matters.

Early Christian writers after the New Testament indicate that worship on the Lord’s Day, (the first day of the week) was standard Christian practice, precisely because it was the day Jesus arose from the dead.

The *Didache* (approx. A.D. 95) - But every Lord’s day. . . gather yourselves together & break bread, & give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.

Ignatius of Antioch (AD 110) - If therefore those who lived according to the old practices (i.e., Jews) have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him & by His death. . . Let us therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner . . . let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen & chief of all days of the week (Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians).

Justin Martyr (*First Apology*, AD 140) And on the day called Sunday there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in a city or rural district. . . But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.

“The Lord's Supper was a constant feature of the Sunday service. There is no second-century evidence for the celebration of a daily Eucharist. The Eucharist was the climax of the Christian worship service and that which distinguished it from the Jewish synagogue service” (Ferguson, 96).

The Lord's Day reminds us of our deliverance from sin in the breaking of bread. It is the source of our hope and a reminder of the future joys that await us. If the early church had not been convinced of Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week, they would not have chosen that day for worship. This choice would have gone against the standard practice of the Jews to remember the Sabbath day. Only something as momentous as the resurrection would have led the Jewish Christians to change their day of worship.

The importance of Sunday to first-century Christians is also demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. Paul gave instructions about a special relief offering for the needy saints in Jerusalem, Paul suggested the Corinthians should set aside their weekly contributions on the first day of the week. Paul likely mentioned this day because his readers routinely assembled on that day for worship and that would be the logical time for them to set aside their offering.

The Cambridge University professor, C. F. D. Moule, said nothing could account for the belief the church possessed except their confident belief in the resurrection. Large numbers held firmly to this belief, and the book of Acts regularly records how quickly the church grew. Of course, when they converted the Pharisees and Jews put them out of the synagogues. The origin of their faith must have come from the resurrection.

If the coming into existence of the Nazarenes, a phenomenon undeniably attested by the New Testament, rips a great hole in history, a hole the size and shape of the Resurrection, what does the secular historian propose to stop it up with? ...the birth and the rapid rise of the Christian church...remain an unsolved enigma for any historian who refuses to take seriously the only explanation offered by the Church itself (Moule, 3, 13).

18. The Conversion of the Apostle Paul

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this

reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life (1 Timothy 1:12-16).

The sudden change of the persecutor Saul of Tarsus into the apostle Paul begins with the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. Saul was present and in hearty agreement with stoning Stephen to death (Acts 7:58; 8:3). Saul had ravaged the church, “entering house after house, and dragging off men and women,” putting them into prison (Acts 8:3; 22:4). Saul breathed “threats and murder” against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1). Saul thought to himself:

“I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities” (Acts 26:9-11).

Paul even acknowledged his practice of persecuting the church was well known.

“For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions” (Galatians 1:13-14).

Saul of Tarsus spent three days in blindness, not eating or drinking (Acts 9:9) but constantly praying (Acts 9:11). Ananias came to him, and he was healed immediately of his blindness. Ananias told him, “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the

Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:14-16). After his baptism Saul was a changed man.

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 9:19-22).

In Acts 13:9 Saul of Tarsus is also called Paul. His written testimony in 1 Corinthians 15:3-9 is the earliest documentary evidence we have of the resurrection. Paul's conversion and subsequent life cannot be satisfactorily explained except in the way he himself explained it—he had seen the risen Christ.

Habermas and Licona argue that nothing short of seeing a resurrected Lord Jesus would be sufficient to convince Saul of Tarsus to leave Judaism and become a Christian. They said “a mere story propagated by the disciples would not have convinced Paul, who was an enemy of the church. . . . Instead of rejecting the claims of Jesus’ resurrection as fraud, Paul was convinced by what he described as the risen Jesus appearing to him” (95). The two historians observed that Paul’s subsequent conversion following an appearance of Christ is well documented, reported by Paul himself, as well as Luke, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, and Origen. Therefore, we have early, multiple, and firsthand testimony that Paul converted from being a staunch opponent of Christianity to one of its greatest proponents.

Chapter Three

Alternative Theories Answered

Sherlock Holmes said, “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.” After more than four decades of serious study of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, I have not found the alternate theories denying the resurrection to have credibility. While they focus on certain aspects of the resurrection account, they lose sight of other testimony from the eyewitnesses. One can hardly imagine that theorists many centuries after the fact with no proof should be trusted over those who lived in the first century and witnessed the events first-hand.

I. THE SWOON THEORY

Theory: Christ did not really die but fainted from exhaustion. When he was laid in the tomb he revived and later showed himself to the disciples. The idea that Jesus survived the crucifixion was first put forth by a deist, Peter Annet in 1768. In recent years Hugh Schonfield in *The Passover Plot* “theorized that Jesus, believing Himself to be the Messiah, plotted to feign His own ‘death,’ intending, after the dramatic event, to sweep triumphantly into power” (Kyle Butt and Eric Lyons, 138).

Mary Baker Eddy taught in *Science and Health* that Jesus did not really die. His death was only apparent.

“Our Master fully and finally demonstrated divine Science in his victory over death and the grave . . . Jesus’ students, not sufficiently advanced to understand fully their Master’s triumph, did not perform many wonderful works until they saw Him after His crucifixion and learned that He did not die” (*Science and Health* 45:350-351).

Christian Science takes it further by saying “Jesus did not really die on the cross. He was not God in flesh. He made no atonement in shedding His blood” (Science and Health 25:6).

Habermas quotes Hugh Schonfield in *The Passover Plot* giving a different wrinkle to this conspiracy theory. Schonfield suggests:

“Jesus was a deceiver who carefully plotted His career as Israel’s Messiah. Working closely with accomplices Lazarus and Joseph of Arimathea, He planned His survival of the cross. While on the cross, Joseph arranged to have Jesus given a drink to appear dead. On Saturday, Jesus was then removed from the grave and revived” (Habermas 1996, 70-71).

Answer:

Nearly all historians and medical doctors who have researched the evidence of the New Testament agree that Jesus Christ died as a result of a brutal, Roman crucifixion. The belief that Jesus survived the crucifixion is a convenient myth, while His death on the cross finds solid footing among those who have searched for an answer from the eyewitnesses and from the historical records.

Jesus was in a weakened condition from a loss of blood due to the scourging before He was crucified. He suffered six hours upon the cross. When the soldier pierced His side, blood and water came from the wound (John 19:34), a sure sign that He did actually die. The Roman soldiers were experts in executing and knew when a man was dead. Pilate, surprised at the news of his death, had a centurion to reassure him of the death. The Romans practiced crucifixion to kill. They were expert, well-practiced executioners. They knew how to use this form of torture and they made sure it killed their victims.

Some have suggested Jesus took a drug that caused Him to lose consciousness, but this would not account for the flow of blood and water from having side pierced. It would not account for how He survived alone in the tomb. Jesus' body had gone through preparations for burial. Jesus' body was wrapped in about a hundred pounds of cloth and spices, and placed in a sealed tomb until the third day (John 19:39-40; Matt. 27: 60). If Jesus had not died from his previous torture, he would have died in the tomb from lack of food, water, and medical treatment.

If Jesus awoke in the tomb, how did Jesus remove the burial wrappings if he were alive and in such a weakened condition? How could Jesus alone have moved the huge stone in his weakened condition, considering it would take several men to move it? How did He move it unnoticed by the guards?

After the 40 days of appearances, how did Jesus disguise himself as a fit Conqueror of Death and keep up the hoax for the rest of his life? One who was so brutally beaten and crucified on a Friday would not appear well enough to do much of anything on the following Sunday.

If Jesus' resurrection was a hoax, why didn't the disciples disavow him? Why did they suffer and die for their faith in the resurrection?

When asked if Jesus could have survived the cross in the cool of the tomb, Dr. Alexander Metherell told Lee Strobel, "Again, there's just no way he could have survived the cross." He elaborated:

"But if he had, how could he walk around after nails had been driven through his feet?

How could he have appeared on the road to Emmaus just a short time later, strolling for long distances? How could he have used his arms after they were stretched and pulled

from their joints? Remember, he also had massive wounds on his back and a spear wound to his chest” (*The Case for Christ*, 217).

David wrote of the resurrection, “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me” (Psalm 22:14). Do you think a wounded and weakened Jesus who had only revived in the tomb and who suffered great blood loss and scars from head to toe, would have inspired His disciples after such a short time to acknowledge Him as Lord and Christ? They would have wanted to nurse Him back to health, if possible; but appearing in such an awful state would not be convincing. Jesus healed and made people whole immediately, and only a miracle could account for the state of Christ after the scourging and crucifixion. A miraculous reviving, which would have been necessary to restore Jesus’ health, is still a miracle. Substituting one miracle for another is hardly helpful to the theorist’s suggestion.

The swoon theory suggests that we should believe those who lived many centuries after the event rather than believe the eyewitnesses who were present to see what happened. They suggest they know more than the eyewitnesses, whom they say are unreliable. Rather than accept the facts, this theory must rewrite what they suppose happened. Gaalyah Cornfield, a modernist writer observed, “The swoon theory is very ingenious, but it rides roughshod over all evidence from the Christian sources so much so that there was no hint of this theory by any of the early opponents of Christianity” (Cornfield, 139). Conspiracy theories are often selective of the evidence they wish to accept while ignoring the rest of the truth. They conveniently emphasize only what supports their suggested answer to the investigation.

Mary Baker Eddy said Jesus only apparently died, and His blood would not be efficacious to save anyone from sin. This is a clear denial of what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 and the eyewitness testimony of the apostle John (John 21:24). We wonder why we should

believe a 19th century, who did not witness the resurrection more than those who were alive in the first century. Eddy, holding to a form of the swoon theory, cannot answer many of the questions brought to mind by the testimony from eyewitness. Many of these are listed above.

It would have been out of character for Jesus to be a deceiver, plotting a great deception. If Jesus had gone through with this, one wonders how Jesus could walk after having nails driven through His feet. One might also wonder how Jesus could have appeared within a locked room. Jesus had raised Lazarus only days before His own crucifixion; how could Jesus have convinced and prepared Lazarus in such a short time? Why would Joseph of Arimathea, who put 100 pounds (75 adroit pounds) of myrrh and aloe on Jesus, sealing Him in cocoon-like linen strips come back later to revive Him? Schonfield has presumed much and proven nothing.

II. THE VISION/HALLUCINATION THEORY

Theory: Christ appeared to His disciples but only in (a) spiritual visions or (b) hallucinations. Since the disciples were expecting to see Jesus, it would seem only natural for them to think that they did. The vision took the form of a bodily appearance.

A more detailed statement of the hallucination hypothesis was popularized in the 19th century by theologian David Strauss. He did not believe it was possible for a person to revive after being dead for three days and therefore proposed that the disciples, and later Paul, experienced “hallucinations” or “subjective visions” (Strauss, 414-31, 440).

Strauss concluded, “Thus the faith in Jesus as the Messiah, which by his violent death had received a fatal shock, was subjectively restored, by the instrumentality of the mind, the power of imagination, and nervous excitement.” But the facts do not support Strauss’ theory. In fact the Scriptures reveal the truth.

Answer:

A vision is a miraculous event; it is an encounter with God. This theory merely substitutes one miracle for another and does not help the theorist's case. Where is the evidence from the eyewitnesses that it was only a vision? In Acts 10:10 Peter fell into a trance, which is called a vision (10:19). The early disciples clearly knew the difference between an eyewitness account of a real event (John 21:24; 2 Peter 1:16) and a vision.

Why did the disciples testify they witnessed a physical body, if it were only a vision? Jesus in his appearances could speak, hear, eat, touch and be touched (1 John 1:1-4; Luke 24:.. Jesus proved himself alive by "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). How did the same vision occur to more than 500 people at one time?

The vision theory does not explain what happened at the tomb. What happened to the body of Jesus? What frightened the guards? Who rolled away the stone? Why were the linen wrappings left behind? While this theory sounds intriguing, it falls far short of explaining all the other evidence for the resurrection.

The disciples did not expect to see Jesus prior to His appearances. In spite of His prophecies, the crucifixion and burial of Jesus caused the disciples to be skeptical, doubtful, hopeless, and unbelieving. A vision alone would not have given the disciples sufficient reason to accept the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. It would not have led them to the full commitment they made to His cause.

If the disciples only saw a vision, why did they testify they experienced far more physically (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:24-28; 1 John 1:1-4)? Why did the visions only last 40

days? Why did the disciples agree to announce a lie about the bodily resurrection, when they only saw a spirit? Why would they continue to lie until they were all killed? The disciples not only saw Jesus, they also touched him and ate with Him.

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them (Luke 24:36-43).

Lee Strobel quotes psychologist Gary Collins, former president of the American Association of Christian Counselors, was asked about the possibility that hallucinations were behind the disciples' radically changed behavior. Collins remarked, "Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature, only one person can see a given hallucination at a time. They certainly aren't something which can be seen by a group of people" (The Case for Christ, 238).

Hallucination is not even a remote possibility, according to psychologist Thomas J. Thornburn. "It is absolutely inconceivable that...five hundred persons, of average soundness of mind...should experience all kinds of sensuous impressions—visual, auditory, tactual—and that all these...experiences should rest entirely upon...hallucination" (Thornburn, 158-159).

The Ludemann Hypothesis

Michael Licona in *The Resurrection of Jesus* provides another wrinkle in the hallucination by referring to guilt and ecstatic experiences found in the works of Gerd Ludemann (The Resurrection of Christ, 2004). Licona summarizes Ludemann's hypothesis (Licona, 504-505):

- Peter experienced a hallucination of the risen Jesus in order to cope with his mental anguish brought about by his profound sorrow and guilt.
- Peter shared his experience with the other disciples, who were experiencing guilt over deserting Jesus. These then had experiences of the risen Jesus that may be called "shared hallucinatory fantasies" and were similar to Marian apparitions, grief hallucinations and ecstatic experiences.
- The appearance to the more than five hundred resulted from mass ecstasy that started with one or two others.
- Hearing reports of what was occurring, the brothers of Jesus went to Jerusalem and were caught up in the group experiences. James may have been one of the more than five hundred who partook of the ecstatic experience and/or had a private experience that occurred afterward.
- Paul was disenchanted with the God of Judaism and attracted to the Christian God in Christ. Given his need for acceptance and self-importance, he subconsciously resolved his mental tension with a hallucination and seized an opportunity to assume the role of leading apostle to the Gentiles.

- Although all of the appearances were subjective visions, the strong influence of Jewish views led those who experienced them to interpret Jesus' resurrection as bodily in nature.
- A very short while later, more sophisticated Christians reinterpreted the claim that Jesus had been symbolically raised. Other believers who could only think in terms of bodily resurrection created supporting narratives, some unconsciously while others as a deliberate response to those who denied bodily resurrection.
- Jesus' resurrection was one of several interconnected beliefs that made up the foundation of Christianity. Another was his imminent and glorious return. Since that did not and still has not occurred, it is dubious that any of the other foundational beliefs are true.

Answer:

Ludemann's hypothesis rests upon the manufactured hallucination arising from Peter's guilt, which spread among the guilty apostles who deserted the Lord. It doesn't consider the eyewitness testimony of how Peter repented or how Jesus dealt with Peter's guilt. Once Ludemann lays his foundation on Peter's hallucination out of guilt, he must presume a mass, ecstatic experience among the crowds to explain their belief and the contrived narratives. Ludemann hangs a mountain upon a misunderstood thread.

Jesus did indeed help Peter deal with his guilt. Peter denied knowing Jesus three times (Luke 22:54-62), fulfilling the prophecy Jesus had made. "But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." (Luke 22:33-34). The Lord

Jesus knew what Peter and the others would do during His suffering. The Lord also knew Peter would repent and return to faith and could strengthen his brothers. The Lord Jesus called Peter by his secular name, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32).

When Jesus confronted Peter at the Sea of Galilee, He did not confront him with rebukes and condemnation. Instead, the Lord asked Peter if he loved Him and challenged him to show it.

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep” (John 21:15-17).

The false charge that the disciples contrived and dreamed up the narrative of a bodily resurrection to respond to those who denied the resurrection is itself a postmodern, humanly manufactured hypothesis. It characteristically dismisses the early eyewitness testimony in order to put forward unproven and illogical conjectures. Ludemann’s hypothesis is born of a methodical skepticism and seems to say, “As long as I can offer a naturalistic proposal that has an ounce of plausibility, I do not need to consider a supernatural one” (Licona, 505). Those who make such a proposal must defend it. Ludemann cannot defend his proposal on the basis of eyewitness history; he must form an alternative conjecture out of touch with the early testimony

of the eyewitnesses. When you begin with a denial of what happened according to the testimony, you must in your own mind conjecture what you think might have happened. Like the false prophets of old, “They speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord...I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied” (Jeremiah 23:16, 21). Peter assures us, “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32). “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

Peter’s hallucination cannot and does not explain Paul’s conversion. Paul was never a party to the early ecstatic experiences and hallucinations. Paul said, “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12). Paul could say to the church at Thessalonica,

“For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews” (1 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

Hallucinating and contriving narratives cannot explain the convictions and willingness of the early disciples in Jerusalem to suffer for their faith. People do not die to sustain a falsehood; they do not sacrifice themselves for a theory they know is untrue. Jesus “presented Himself alive

after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days” (Acts 1:3). Hallucinations do not explain all the other proofs of his bodily resurrection.

III. THE MYTH/LEGEND THEORY

Theory:

Legends developed in Palestine some years after Christ's career that he rose from the dead. The resurrection was one of the legends.

Answer:

The Bible claims that the resurrection story was based on eyewitness accounts. Matthew and John were apostles and eyewitnesses of the resurrection. The apostle Peter denies the very thing this theory suggests. Peter claims two things affected his and prophetic statements orally and in written form:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:16-21).

The apostle John in his first epistle claims firsthand, empirical knowledge of the Lord Jesus, including His ability to offer eternal life.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:1-4).

It is impossible to suppose that the early church did not know its own history; the very fact of the early church of the Bible account is evidence of its truth. Peter and the eleven took their stand as eyewitnesses of the resurrection on the day of Pentecost. When one considers there was but 49 days between the resurrection day and Pentecost, and that Jesus was appearing to them with many convincing proofs of His resurrection for forty days, this leaves only nine days for the apostles to develop their testimony. Legends do not form in nine days!

Of course, the biblical account states Peter and the eleven spoke “as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (Act 2:4). The Lord Jesus had promised that when they stood before others, their message would be given to them (Matthew 10:19-20; Luke 12:11-12).

If the apostles had contrived a fraudulent message, the Jews could have shown the accounts to be false. But if the gospel story of the death, burial, and resurrection was true, the Jews would not be able to refute it, any more than they could refute the raising of Lazarus (John 11:43-48) and the healing of the 40-year-old lame man (Acts 4:16-17). Would a fraudulent

legend cause the scholarly and zealous Saul of Tarsus to forsake Judaism and embrace the Lord Jesus? Would a fraudulent legend convince James, the brother of Jesus?

The evidence demonstrates that all the New Testament was written within 70 years of the time of Jesus. Most of it was written within 40 years. This is not enough time for stories to develop into legends. Legends usually take centuries to develop.

Habermas and Lincon argue,

“Since the original disciples were making the claim that Jesus rose from the dead, his resurrection was not the result of myth making. His life story was not embellished over time if the facts can be traced to the original witnesses. Moreover, if the direct witnesses really believed that he rose from the dead, we can dismiss contentions that they stole the body and made up the story” (Habermas and Licon, 61-62).

William Lane Craig argued that the controlling presence of the living eyewitnesses would prevent the significant arising of a legend. These firsthand witnesses would act as a safeguard against unhistorical legends.

Legends do not arise significantly until the generation of eyewitnesses dies off. Hence, legends are given no ground for growth as long as witnesses are alive who remember the facts. In the case of the resurrection narratives, the continued presence of the twelve disciples, the women, and the others who saw Jesus alive from the dead would prevent legend from significantly accruing (Craig 2000, 107).

IV. THE STOLEN BODY THEORY

Theory:

The high priests and Roman soldiers were correct in their response to the Christian claim. This was formerly known as the conspiracy theory takes from Matthew 28.

“And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, 'You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day” (Matthew 28:12-15).

Answer:

“And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men” (Matthew 28:2-4).

While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day (Matthew 28:11-15).

The guards witnessed the resurrection and the angel taking away the stone, but they were bribed to lie that the disciples stole the body. They shook with fear at the angels and became as dead men.

Stealing the body in order to produce a fraudulent narrative is certainly out of character for the timid, fearful, unbelieving, and hiding disciples. To go up against the trained and armed Roman soldiers at the tomb to steal his body would be most difficult. They were hiding because they feared jail for themselves (John 20:19). This small band of Jews would not have frightened the Roman soldiers, who were under punishment of death if they failed in their duty to protect the tomb. What could a few, poor fishermen do against disciplined and well-armed soldiers? If there had been an altercation. Why did no one report that someone was wounded or killed in the attempt to steal the body?

It is impossible to believe that all the guards fell asleep at the same time. The Jews were permitted to make the tomb as secure as they knew how (Matt. 27:65). There were probably several soldiers at the tomb.

If the disciples stole the body, how could they have enough time to roll the stone away, take off the grave clothes, and leave undetected? Why would they undress the body? Why did they leave the grave clothes? Why did they leave the clothes orderly? What did they do with the body?

The soldiers were either awake or asleep. If they were asleep, how did the soldiers know the disciples stole the body? If they were awake, why would they allow the body to be taken? H. Leo Boles made this observation,

Their story was so extraordinary that it lived a long time; it was an unheard-of thing for Roman soldiers to sleep while on duty. If they were asleep, how did they know what took place; or if they only supposed as to what took place, how could the disciples have rolled away the stone without awakening them? This bribe would have made any soldier under such circumstances remain silent. The "Jews" and the Christians at the time Matthew wrote had different interests and this report was common among the Jews (Boles, Matthew 28:13).

The Jews had convinced the soldiers to confess sleeping, a behavior demanding punishment, whether they were Jews or Romans. Thomas Thorburn tells us that the guards who had kept the watch were in dire straits. After the stone had been rolled away and the seal broken, they were as good as court-martialed. Thorburn writes: "The soldiers cannot have alleged they were asleep, for they well knew that the penalty of sleeping upon a watch was death— always rigorously enforced."

He continues, "Here the soldiers would have practically no other alternative than to trust the good offices of the priests. The body (we will suppose) was gone, and their negligence in any case would (under ordinary circumstances) be punishable by death" (Thorburn, 179, 181). When the guards lost Peter, Herod ordered "that they should be put to death" (Acts 12: 19). When the "great earthquake" freed Paul and Silas in the inner prison at Philippi, the Philippian jailer "drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped" (Acts 16:26-27). For a guard to intentionally sleep on the job was most serious. The Jewish leaders, however, felt it necessary to maintain a false narrative in order to preserve their power and status over the Jewish people.

If the Jews really believed the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, they would have pursued them from the time the tomb was empty for this crime. If they wished to thwart the preaching of the apostles, why didn't the Sanhedrin apprehend the apostles on Pentecost and imprison them until they confessed to this theft (Acts 2:22-32; Matthew 27:63)?

What possible motive would the disciples have for risking their lives to steal the body? It is not the character of a follower of Jesus to be deceptive. The conspiracy theory was refuted by the early church historian Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Demonstratio evangelica* 3.4-5 (314-318). Eusebius argues that it would be inconsistent to hold that the disciples were on one hand followers of Jesus with His high moral teaching and yet on the other hand such base liars as to invent all these miraculous stories about Jesus. "It makes no sense to say that the men who learned and then taught the ethics of Jesus would themselves be deceivers" (Craig, *The Son Rises*, 24).

One must also wonder how all the disciples could keep affirming such a conspiracy and not one break, admitting the story was invented. If the story were not true, the disciples would have escaped persecution and death by merely admitting a fabrication; but they did not do so. They endured suffering repeatedly, because they knew their gospel message was true! William Lane Craig observes, "I cannot emphasize strongly enough that no modern biblical scholar would for a moment entertain the theory that the disciples conspired together to steal the corpse and then lie about the resurrection appearances" (36).

The idea that the disciples would somehow summon the courage to come out of hiding, confront an armed guard, steal the body of their leader, concoct a story of a resurrection, and then base an entire movement on his resurrection and celebrate him as a risen Lord, conqueror of death, is extremely farfetched. Ironically, this theory has one

surprise benefit: the Jewish leaders tacitly acknowledged that the tomb was both known and was empty. Otherwise, why make up a story? (Josh and Sean McDowell, 286-87).

V. THE WRONG TOMB THEORY

Theory: This theory, propounded by Kirsopp Lake, assumes that the women who reported that the body was missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb.

Answer:

If this is so, then the disciples who went to check up on the women's statement must have also gone to the wrong tomb. We may be certain, however, that Jewish authorities, who asked for a Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb to prevent Jesus' body from being stolen, would not have been mistaken about the location. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were there! If the resurrection-claim was merely because of a geographical mistake, the Jewish authorities would have lost no time in producing the body from the proper tomb, thus effectively quenching for all time any rumor resurrection.

The guards were there at the tomb in the sight of all, when the women went to the tomb. The women who visited the tomb knew where the guards were. The guards may well have heard what the angel said to the women. Since the tomb was in the garden adjoining Golgotha, and the women stayed with His body as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus dressed the body, they surely knew the exact location of the tomb and were not mistaken.

Norman Geisler noted that this objection, like the others, offers no explanation at all of what happened. He notes about the women going to the wrong tomb:

This is too simplistic. If it was so dark, why did Mary think Jesus was the gardener? (John 20:15) Why did Peter and John make the same mistake in broad daylight? (v. 6) And especially, why didn't the authorities just go to the right tomb and show the body? That would have easily disproved all claims to a resurrection. This theory offers no explanation of the physical appearances of Jesus in the same material body of flesh and bones that had been crucified (Geisler and Brooks, 125).

VI. THE APPEARANCES WERE MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

Theory: One naturalistic theory made more visible by Schonfield's *The Passover Plot* is that the post-death appearances that were the heart of the disciples' belief in the resurrection were all cases of mistaken identity. This is allegedly reinforced by the fact that the disciples themselves even believed at first that the person appearing was not Jesus. Mary thought she saw a gardener (John 20). The two disciples thought it was a stranger traveling in Jerusalem (Luke 24), and later they supposed they saw a spirit (Luke 24:38–39). Mark even admits the appearance was in “a different form” (Mark 16:12). According to Schonfield, the disciples mistook Jesus for different people at different times (Schonfield, 170–73, quoted by Geisler 1999, 646).

Answer:

This theory has many problems. First, after viewing the context of the supposed identifications, Schonfield fails to report that the disciple who went away from these occasions had no doubt in their minds that this was actually the same Jesus they had known intimately. Their doubts were only initial and temporary. Jesus had fully convinced them with his scars, eating food, allowing himself to be touched, his voice, causing a great catch of fish, and by passing through closed doors.

Second, the mistaken identity hypothesis does not account for the permanently empty tomb or the grave clothes found therein. If the disciples were mistaken, all the Jews had to do was produce the body in the real tomb to refute their claim. They knew the body of Jesus, and they could not be fooled.

Third, the mistaken identity hypothesis does not account for the transformation of the disciples from unbelief and hardness of heart to firm conviction of the Lord's resurrection.

Fourth, since a multitude of more than 500 people saw Jesus, it is hard to believe they were all mistaken.

Fifth, a mistaken identity by the early disciples does not explain the conversion of skeptics such as James the brother of Jesus and Saul of Tarsus.

Can We Trust the Gospel Narratives?

The Bible is a unique book, unlike any other book in all history. It is the best-selling book of all time. It has made more impact on cultures around the world than any other book. But, can we believe the Bible's claims about Jesus the Savior? Did He resurrect from the dead? Is He Lord and will He judge us at the end of time? If we believe this book, the answer is yes, so this question is most serious.

The Historical Value of the New Testament

It is certainly unwarranted to suggest the New Testament documents are unreliable. Such claims are unknown among those who are scholars of the history of the New Testament. We suggest the historical value of the gospel story is undeniable.

First, **there are more manuscripts of the New Testament than any book from the ancient world.** While many classic works from the ancient Greek and Roman world have only a handful of manuscripts, the New Testament is supported by more than 5800 manuscripts. While scholars of other ancient literature suffer from a lack of data, those who work with New Testament manuscripts suffer from “an embarrassment of riches.”

Second, **the New Testament manuscripts are earlier than those of other books from the ancient world.** The time gap between the composition and the first copies of other books from the ancient world is about a thousand years. The first copies of the New Testament, however, come from only a hundred years after the end of the first century. This brief period was insufficient for claims of spurious material and myths to have changed the original. If changes were made, they would have been detected quickly and challenged by other Christians who would have known the truth. The early date also reveals how close the manuscripts are to the lifetime of the eyewitnesses.

Third, **the accuracy of the copies of the New Testament is better than that of other books from the ancient world.** New Testament specialist Daniel B. Wallace said, “The best estimate is that there are between 300,000 and 400,000 textual variants among the manuscripts. Yet there are only about 140,000 words in the NT. That means that there is an average of between two and three variants for every word in the Greek NT” (Wallace, 26). This might perplex some, but raw statistics do not always tell the whole story. Wallace noted,

“If this were the only piece of data, it would discourage anyone from attempting to recover the wording of the original. But there is more to this story.” While the original NT does indeed contain only about 140,000 Greek words, we must multiply this, many in part, and some in whole, by the number of manuscripts. Currently, we possess 5,814

manuscripts of the Greek NT! Wallace reports that the average Greek NT MS is over 450 pages long. “Altogether there are more than 2.6 million pages of texts, leaving hundreds of witnesses for every book of the NT” (Wallace, 28).

Seen this way, that means there would only be at most only one variant for every six and a half pages. Let’s remember at this point that all the Greek NT Manuscripts were copied by hand, predating Gutenberg’s press (1439 A.D.).

Fourth, **the number of different writers of the New Testament is greater than those of other events of antiquity.** The gospel accounts have four writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and at least four other individuals wrote the letters and epistles (Paul, James, Peter, and Jude). The harmony and consistency of their testimony confirms the narrative’s authenticity. Six of these authors agree and consistently affirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21; Acts 1; 1 Cor. 15). One can establish a credible report with only two or three witnesses (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15).

Is Jesus Historical Outside the New Testament?

Occasionally someone says that we don’t know whether Jesus Christ ever really lived or not. When I hear someone say that, I wonder if they are merely repeating what they have heard or if they have examined the evidence for themselves. If Jesus were not historical, the New Testament is certainly an untrustworthy book; but since other sources corroborate the facts we know about Jesus, the Bible has credibility. Gary Habermas, a recognized university professor and historian, in his book *The Historical Jesus* recorded and examined 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus outside the New Testament. Some were Christian but many were non-Christian, and

some were archaeological. He found 129 reported facts revealing the life, person, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Dr. Habermas concluded,

“While some believe that we know almost nothing about Jesus from ancient, non-New Testament sources, this is plainly not the case. Not only are there many such sources, but Jesus is one of the persons of ancient history concerning whom we have a significant amount of quality data. His is one of the most mentioned and most substantiated lives in ancient times” (Habermas 1996, 251).

Yes, Jesus really lived, and when you add the books of the New Testament and the books of the early church fathers, we see how Jesus has changed the world!

The New Testament clearly tells about Jesus, His teaching, His kind acts, His miracles, His death, and His resurrection. You may ask, “Did that really happen? We weren’t there and we didn’t see those things for ourselves; we can only rely on the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses. Did Jesus really rise from the dead?” What we’re asking now is whether the New Testament documents written by eyewitnesses and people who investigated told the truth about Jesus.

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

Norman Geisler argued clearly that we can trust the Gospel records as being true and authentic:

There is overwhelming positive evidence that the Gospel records are authentic. There are a greater number of manuscripts for the New Testament than for any other book from the ancient world. Indeed, even taking the criteria for credibility of the great skeptic, David Hume, the New Testament passes with flying colors. There is no reason, then, to reject the authenticity of the New Testament accounts based on their alleged disorder. Given the fact that there are five major accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21; Acts 9; 1 Cor. 15) filled with eyewitness accounts, there is no reasonable doubt about the reality of his resurrection (Geisler 1999, 649).

History Put to the Test

The historical body of evidence for Christianity is unlike other religious beliefs; it is testable! Christianity provides a rich treasure of knowledge from times in which it took place. It proves accurate in so many details that one can feel confident to count upon it. Jeremiah J. Johnston in his book, *Body of Proof*, described the gospel accounts of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in these words: “Unlike any other religion, Christianity puts itself to the historical test through explicit interaction with history in the Roman Empire of the first century. Many often miss the point: No other religion comes close to Christianity in that you can test it against history” (Johnston, 27). Johnston gives specific dates for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the first century.

Dating based between Caiaphas's removal from office as high priest (AD 36), Pilate's governorship (AD 26-36), as well as on the annual Jewish Passover (Jewish month of Nisan) provides a solid evidential basis to peg the crucifixion and resurrection on April 7-9, AD 30 (April 3-5, AD 33, are alternate dates). The Jewish calendar was based on lunar months, and the astronomical calculations provide only two options for Nisan 14 between AD 26 and AD 36 (Johnston, 27-28).

Johnston further noted, "Jesus' death by Roman crucifixion is the best established fact of the ancient world. If we can't believe Jesus of Nazareth died by Roman crucifixion, we can't believe anything about the ancient world" (28). The apostles did not receive the gospel secondhand but "were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (Luke 1:2). The word "eyewitnesses" is from the Greek word *autoptes* and means: "one who has personally seen an event and thus has personal knowledge and can be expected to attest to the occurrence of such an event" (Louw and Nida, 281).

The apostles describe and defend their eyewitness role:

"And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe" (John 19:35).

"For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (2 Peter 1:16-18).

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-3).

Undesigned Coincidences

Anyone who has seriously studied the four gospel accounts recognizes similarities and differences that raise questions of authenticity and source. A. D. Baum in the Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels (911) describes this problem, “The Synoptic Problem deals with the interrelationship of the Synoptic Gospels and addresses a foundational question: What is the best explanation for the textual similarities and differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke?” Baum lists numerous theories and hypotheses as to the origin of these accounts, detailing why they are similar and why they are different.

Lydia McGrew revealed numerous undesigned coincidences that strongly support the view that the gospel accounts, Acts, and the epistles of Paul are reliable accounts of what happened in the first century. She provides a broad definition of an undesigned coincidence: “An undesigned coincidence is a notable connection between two or more accounts or texts that doesn’t seem to have been planned by the person or people giving the accounts. Despite their apparent independence, the items fit together like pieces of a puzzle” (McGrew 12). An undersigned coincidence “provides reason to believe that both (all) of the statements that

contribute to it are truthful” (13). These coincidences appear “undesigned because the details are mentioned casually in a way that would be unlikely if they were colluding.”

Chapter Four

The Credibility of the Testimony

Dr. Harvey W. Everest in his classic textbook, *The Divine Demonstration*, lists seven criteria used to test historical evidence. Everest served as president of Southern Illinois and Butler University. He also served for a time as president of Hiram University, following James A Garfield. He notes that we can judge testimony to be the truth when it meets these criteria:

First, **the evidence is credible when the witnesses are honest, competent and have the opportunity to know**. Accounts written shortly after an event are usually more reliable than accounts written hundreds of years later. We want to know the truth from those who were present and heard it firsthand. We cannot trust guesses or opinions. Someone has said opinions are merely guesses in the absence of evidence.

The apostle Peter, who was an eyewitness of Jesus Christ from his baptism to His resurrection said,

“For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well- pleased”— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain” (2 Peter 1:16-18).

The Father wanted Peter to listen to Jesus, and He wants the same from us. We must hear the message Jesus brings.

Though Luke came on the scene later, he revealed the sources he used to write his account of the gospel. Luke apparently spent many days researching the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus. He explained the reason for writing to Theophilus.

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1-4).

If Peter or Luke or any other writer of the New Testament had written something untrue, hundreds of brothers and sisters would have challenged their writings from the beginning. Instead, the early church from the earliest times regarded the four gospel accounts, Acts, and the epistles as trustworthy records of what really happened in their day. J. Warner Wallace, who is an expert in examining eyewitness testimony observed,

It’s important for people to see that the writers [of the New Testament] identified themselves as eyewitnesses. They weren’t writing moral fiction. They were recording what they saw with their own eyes, heard with their own ears, and touched with their own hands. Let’s recognize the importance of biblical reliability and help our skeptical friends recognize the nature of personal, reliable eyewitness testimony (Wallace, 86).

Biblical historian and scholar Craig Blomberg spoke of the credibility of both Mark and Matthew to Lee Strobel:

“Again, the oldest and probably most significant testimony come from Papias, who in about AD 125 specifically affirmed that Mark had carefully and accurately recorded Peter’s eyewitness observations. In fact, he said Mark ‘made no mistake’ and did not include ‘any false statement.’ And Papias said Matthew had preserved the teachings of Jesus as well” (Strobel, 25).

The four gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were well known by the end of the first century and frequently quoted by early church writers. The frequent grouping together of all four documents into a codex (one book) and the frequent quotations suggests the early church unanimously regarded them as trustworthy witnesses of the Christ. The four gospel accounts assure us that they contained direct eyewitness (Matthew and John) and indirect eyewitness (Mark through Peter, and John through oral and written accounts) testimony from the earliest sources that had the best opportunity to know the truth.

Second, **evidence is credible when the witnesses agree in the general statement**, although they may differ on minor points. What some say are contradictions in Scripture are not really contradictions but different perspectives of the same event. Investigators of crime scenes will frequently find witnesses who appear to disagree with each other but are actually speaking the truth. In fact, though they may emphasize and focus on different points, they actually add important facts in their reports of the events, facts that do not really contradict one another but rather provide their perspective.

In some cases, similar passages are actually talking about different events. Matthew 5 provides a list of beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount that differ from Luke’s version. In Matthew 5, Jesus was sitting on a mountain; but Luke 6:17 says Jesus stood on a level place. These were different occasions, even though the material sounds similar.

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, the apostles stood together in proclaiming the facts as eyewitnesses of the Lord's death and resurrection. When Paul defended himself before Agrippa, he noted in Acts 26:26 that the things Jesus did were well known and "not done in a corner."

Simon Greenleaf (AD 1783-1853) served as a professor of law at Harvard University from 1833-1848. His three-volume work, *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, is considered a classic of American jurisprudence and forms the basis for his study, *The Testimony of the Evangelists*. He concluded, "Let [the Gospel's] testimony be sifted, as it were given in a court of justice on the side of the adverse party, the witness being subjected to a rigorous cross-examination. The result, it is confidently believed, will be an undoubting conviction of their integrity, ability, and truth." Greenleaf notes,

"The genuineness of these writings really admits of as little doubt, and is susceptible of as ready proof, as that of any ancient writings whatever. The rule of municipal law on this subject is familiar, and applies with equal force to all ancient writings, whether documentary or otherwise; and as it comes first in order, in the prosecution of these inquiries, it may for the sake of mere convenience, be designated as our first rule: "Every document, apparently ancient coming from the proper repository or custody, and bearing on its face no evident marks of forgery, the law presumes to be genuine, and devolves on the opposing party the burden of proving it to be otherwise" (Greenleaf, 16).

Some have objected that we cannot trust the New Testament, since we do not have the original manuscripts written by the eyewitnesses and indirect witnesses. Greenleaf responds,

"If it be objected that the originals are lost, and that copies alone are now produced, the principles of the municipal law here also afford a satisfactory answer. For the

multiplication of copies was a public fact, in the faithfulness of which all the Christian community had an interest; and it is a rule of law that: In matters of public and general interest, all persons must be presumed to be conversant, on the principle that individuals are presumed to be conversant with their own affairs” (17).

Sometimes people have an aversion to believing in the resurrection because they see that the New Testament narratives do not match each other 100 percent. They conclude, therefore, that these “discrepancies” indicate that these reports of what happened are largely made-up stories. But as the scholar, Douglas Groothuis, points out, we can trust the gospel accounts:

Some might be troubled that the resurrection accounts in the Gospels do not seem to agree perfectly. At the extreme, Michael Martin argues that this provides strong evidence that they are fictional, not factual. But this does not follow logically. With a little patience and some careful reconstruction, the events narrated in the Gospels can be harmonized with one another. The accounts of virtually any multiply attested event of secular history display discrepancies as great or greater than those in the Gospel narratives. For example, Greek historian Polybius and the Roman historian Livy seem to disagree in their description of Hannibal’s route in crossing the Alps in Italy during the second Punic War. Yet ancient historians do not question whether Hannibal made this trek (Groothuis, 561).

Some minor differences in the telling of this story actually indicate authenticity, not error or contradiction. When each account is exactly like the others, this could suggest collusion rather than factual accounts.

Retired Los Angeles Police Department and cold-case detective J. Warner Wallace in his book, *Cold-Case Christianity* in a chapter dealing with witnesses (74-82) noted:

If there's one thing my experience as a detective has revealed, however, it's that witnesses often make conflicting and inconsistent statements when describing what they saw at a crime scene. They frequently disagree with one another and either fail to see something obvious or describe the same event in a number of conflicting ways. The more witnesses involved in the case, the more likely there will be points of disagreement."

He notes that the four gospel accounts are written from a different perspective and contain unique details that are specific to the eyewitnesses. He says these "pieces" can be fit together to get a complete picture of what occurred (74-82). He said, "I knew from my experience as a detective that the best eyewitness accounts contained points of disagreement and that this did not automatically invalidate their reliability."

Third, **evidence is credible when there is no known motive for imposture or faking.** The apostles and preachers of the first century did not become rich or honored by men because of their testimony. Peter, you'll remember, told the man he healed at the gate of the temple, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" (Acts 3:6). When they healed this lame man, they did not do it for money or personal advantage. They did it as a kindness and to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ.

While Simon the Sorcerer made his living, claiming to be the "Great Power of God" through practicing his magical arts, he saw true miracles and wanted to buy the power to do so. The fraudulent illusionist knew the difference between his act and a true miracle.

Fourth, **the testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are strongly against the well-being or interest of the narrator.** The books of Acts records the persecution of the church and those who suffered for their faith. It records the opposition from the leading Jews. The

apostles and early Christians were beaten, imprisoned, and some killed; but they never denied their Lord. They lived difficult lives in order to preach Jesus as the Christ and risen Lord. History records numerous persecutions by the Romans for centuries, but Christianity survived and grew. In the second century, it was commonly said, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the kingdom.” One may question many things, but there can be no doubt the apostles and early Christians were true believers!

Fifth, **the testimony is reliable when such witnesses are numerous.** Jesus made several appearances in the forty days after his resurrection and demonstrated himself to be the Son of God by many convincing proofs (Acts 1:1-3). The New Testament records at least fifteen appearances of Jesus to various people. Paul said that Jesus appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time (1 Cor. 15:6). He knew what he wrote could be tested by others to be true. Norman Geisler speaking of the New Testament noted, “Multiple, independent eyewitnesses confirm that the events really occurred (they are not fiction) and provide additional details that a single source might miss” (Geisler and Turek, 231).

Sixth, **the testimony is reliable when the recorded facts and the existing facts are related as cause and effect.** The places, people, culture and circumstances recorded by the authors of the New Testament accurately represented the way things really were. The New Testament is not filled with nameless, mythical people, who could never have lived. Rather, archaeology and secular historical records support the facts found in the New Testament. The dates of the New Testament match historical and geographical realities in the world of that era.

Seventh, **the testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are sustained by existing monuments, coins, games or other public institutions.** The fact that the church itself exists is a marvelous testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and to the truth of the apostles' teaching.

There would never have been a church had the apostles not believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fact that churches after twenty centuries still meet on the first day of the week to take the Lord's Supper is a testimony to the fact that the events of the New Testament are real. The practice of baptizing penitent adults in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins also testify to the baptism commanded at the first gospel sermon at the beginning of the church (Acts 2:38-41).

Some suggest the New Testament writers were biased, since they were converted to Christ. David Hume, the skeptic, said witnesses should be unbiased if we are to consider them credible. However, having a conviction does not necessarily mean one has lied or exaggerated. The writers of the New Testament would not take such a strong and costly stand unless they were converted and convicted. When one objects that they were biased, they fail "to ask the most important question: Why were they converted?" (Geisler and Turek, 233). Why did these writers suddenly abandon their livelihoods and treasured religious traditions for these new beliefs? Why did they suddenly leave Judaism to follow a new Lord they knew was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead?

Some have responded that converted people cannot be objective; but people can be objective even if they have strong feelings. Objective doesn't mean they have to be neutral. The fact is, all people have some preconceived notions. The story found in the New Testament is that before the resurrection, the disciples were doubting and fearful. They had to be convinced by the evidence. This is the context of the eyewitnesses and early disciples. One must also explain whether doubting Thomas, skeptic James, and persecutor Paul were not objective in their being converted. Geisler reminds us,

“[S]ane, sober, eyewitnesses who refuse to recant their testimony even under the threat of death, would convict anyone of anything in a court of law (even without the additional lines of corroborating evidence that support the New Testament story). Such eyewitness testimony yields a verdict that is certain beyond a reasonable doubt. Unless you saw the event yourself, you can’t be any more certain that those historical events actually occurred” (Geisler and Turek, 273).

For the earliest disciples, the Lord’s resurrection was not a leap in the dark; there were too many witnesses who knew the truth. True Christianity is never some leap in the dark or wishful thinking. The “one faith” is built on historical evidence from eyewitness testimony that would stand up in a court of law.

Some might ask, “What about the conflict in the testimony of the four gospel accounts?” Geisler responded,

The fact that various accounts do not fit together with perfect ease is to be expected of independent authentic testimony. Indeed, were the accounts perfectly harmonious on the surface, we would have to suspect collusion. But the fact that the many events and general order are clear is exactly what we should expect of a credible account (verified by great legal minds who have scrutinized the Gospel accounts and pronounced them so). Simon Greenleaf, the famous Harvard lawyer who wrote a textbook on legal evidence, was converted to Christianity based on his careful examination of the Gospel witnesses from a legal perspective. He concluded that “Copies which had been as universally received and acted upon as the Four Gospels, would have been received in evidence in any court of justice, without the slightest hesitation” (Greenleaf, 9–10 Quoted in Geisler, 1999, 649).

Since Jesus Arose from the Dead

Christianity is based on the historical evidence concerning the claims and life of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scripture explicitly stakes its validity and its hope on the historical fact of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The Apostle Paul stated:

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

If Christ is not raised from the dead, there will be no general resurrection, our preaching is vain, our faith is vain, we are false witnesses to preach it, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, the dead in Christ have perished, our hope in Christ is for this life only, and we are of all men most to be pitied. If the resurrection account of Jesus is not true, then Christianity would be founded upon a lie.

But God did raise Jesus from the dead! There will be a general resurrection. Our preaching and our faith is not in vain. We are not false witnesses to preach it. Our faith is precious and priceless. We are saved from sin. The dead in Christ are now with the Lord. Our

hope extends beyond this life. And we are of all men most to be congratulated and thankful for our blessings and inheritance in Christ. Theologian R. C. Sproul points to the uniqueness of Jesus as the One resurrected:

“The claim of resurrection is vital to Christianity. If Christ has been raised from the dead by God, then He has the credentials and certification that no other religious leader possesses. Buddha is dead. Mohammad is dead. Moses is dead. Confucius is dead. But, according to...Christianity, Christ is alive” (Sproul, 44).

Since Jesus did rise from the dead then He alone would have the answers to where we came from, why we are here, what life is about, and what is facing us after we die. We can believe what He said about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31.

William Lane Craig spoke clearly of the significance to the early disciples, a significance that should make a difference in our lives:

So it’s difficult to exaggerate, therefore, what a catastrophe Jesus’ crucifixion would have been for the disciples. It wasn’t just that their beloved teacher was gone; rather, Jesus’ death on the cross meant the crushing defeat of any hopes they had entertained that he was the Messiah. How is it, then, that the Jesus movement continued? The disciples suddenly and sincerely came to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus reversed the catastrophe of the crucifixion. Since God had raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus was seen to be Messiah after all (Craig 2019, Kindle Location 800).

Jesus Is Lord

Since Jesus arose, we can exalt Him as the risen Lord. In the first gospel sermon Peter preached,

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” ’ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:29-36).

As Lord, He Speaks with Authority.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7:24-27).

He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Matthew 17:5).

“The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day” (John 12:48).

He will Judge All People on the Last Day.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

“And to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

His Promises Are True.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory (2 Corinthians 1:18-20).

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5).

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:11-12).

One Day the Lord Jesus Will Raise the Dead

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29).

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is

swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:50-57).

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:13-14).

“For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40).

“Knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you” (2 Corinthians 4:14).

The Lord’s Challenge

The Lord Jesus said in John 7:17, “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.” If we’ll listen to God, hear His Word, and obey it, our lives will change! We’ll know God speaks the truth. We need to believe, to repent of our sins, and to be united with the Lord in baptism, so that we may rise to walk in newness of life and be freed from sin (Romans 6:3-7). Let’s turn to the Lord for answers. Perhaps we have great problems because we’ve tuned out the Bible, God’s Holy Word, and listened to our desires. The world will tell you what you want to hear, but only the Lord will tell you what you need to enjoy eternal life. Read the Bible, meditate on it, memorize it, love it, obey it, and share it! It can change your life.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-5).

Set your heart upon the Lord, who loved you enough to die for you. Accept by faith the gospel you have heard and take your stand on it. Hold fast to God’s Word, and do not believe in vain. It is not enough merely to say you believe or to pray a simple prayer. Saul of Tarsus prayed for three days (Acts 9:11); but he did not have his sins washed away until he was baptized calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21 NASB, ESV).

Should you realize Jesus is everything He claimed to be, take a long look at what He did on the cross. He died for your sins, because He loved you (Romans 5:6-8). In fact, no one will ever love you like the Lord Jesus; He loved you enough to bear the penalty of death for your sins

on the cross. We have already examined how brutal and cruel the scourging and cross was for Him. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). No one could free you from sin or bring you to God but Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

Since Jesus is risen from the dead, since Jesus is Lord, since Jesus speaks with authority, since Jesus will be your judge at the end of time, since heaven and hell are real, since His promises are true, and since He is coming again one day, should you not take the Lord seriously and turn your heart and soul to Him. No matter what your past has been, you can come to Christ for salvation.

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:16-18).

Take up the Lord’s challenge: “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself” (John 7:17). Trust Him, love Him, serve Him, turn from sin to Him, confess His name, and be baptized in His name. Give yourself fully to the Lord for the rest of your life!

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