

Why Defend the New Testament with Proof?
A Study of How Historical Evidence May Serve the Great Commission

I. Overview

If we are saved by faith alone,¹ why seek historical proof for the New Testament? Knowing the facts supporting the New Testament may serve many purposes, including:

- Responding to skeptics who call the New Testament a work of fiction;
- Witnessing to those who have doubts or are non-believers;
- Strengthening the faith of all believers.

For this study, we will first address the case for why we must be ready with historical and factual defenses for the New Testament. For many centuries, such defenses have been called an apologia or apologetics (Greek-Late Latin terms for a formal defense). For later courses, we will review the factual defenses supporting the cornerstones of Christianity, including:

- Jesus Christ's Existence. Multiple independent sources tell His story.
- Comparative Proof. No ancient record matches the New Testament's reliability.
- Strongest Proof. Eyewitnesses testify to the New Testament's historical truth.
- Resurrection. The earliest records and eyewitnesses confirm the Resurrection.
- Miracles. Jesus' record of miracles is virtually undisputed by critical scholars.
- Jesus' Divinity. The earliest historical sources recognize Jesus as the Son of God.
- Book of Acts. Historians accept Acts as a highly reliable factual source.

For today's course, we need to address what the skeptics are saying and understand why we have a duty to defend the New Testament.

- Do We Have a Duty to Defend Our Faith?
- Should We Use Proof in Defending Our Faith?
- Does Proof Work in Making Disciples?

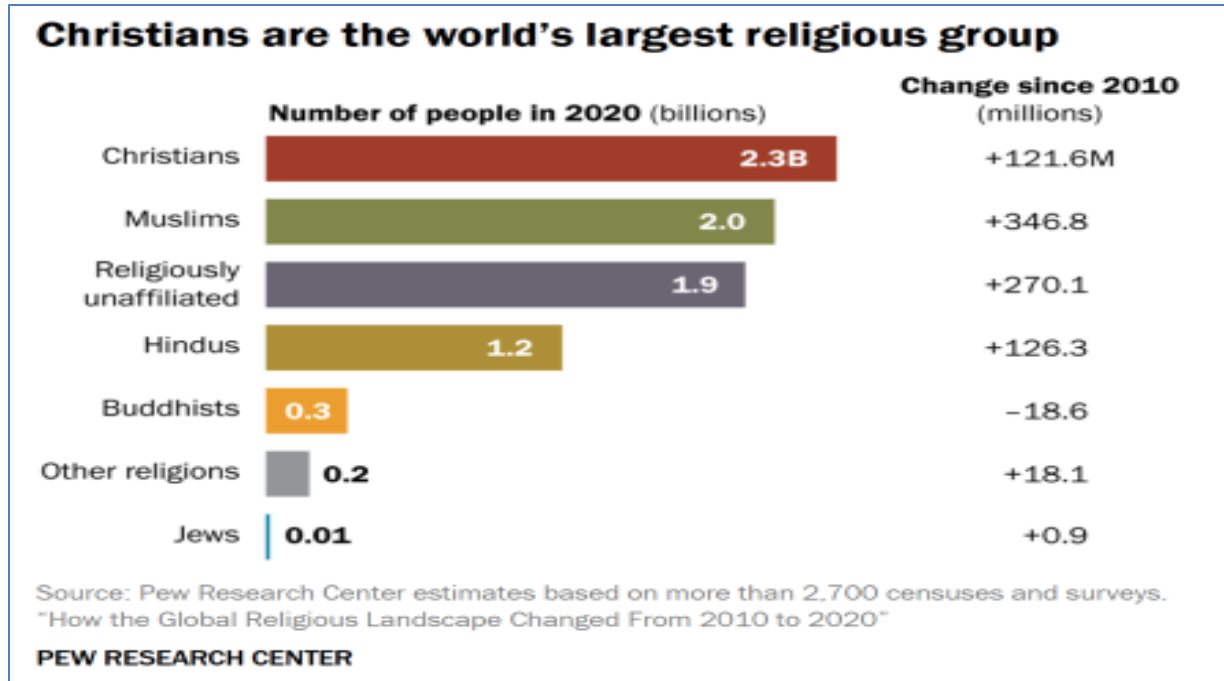
As discussed below, our defense of the New Testament not only follows the path of Jesus' ministry and New Testament Scriptures, but also may convince non-believers to believe.

¹ Ephesians 2:8 ("by grace you have been saved through faith").

II. Do We Have a Duty to Defend Our Faith?

As skepticism spreads in the modern world, Christians have a duty to set the record straight about the historical truth and authenticity of the New Testament.

Worldwide, approximately 1.9 billion people are **unaffiliated** – meaning that they are non-believers: atheists, agnostics, or people not identifying with any religion.²



Furthermore, this “religiously unaffiliated” group has grown by over 270 million people (16% growth rate) in 10 years. More alarmingly, the fastest growth occurred in North America – a whopping rate of **92%**!³

These many unaffiliated non-believers present both a great opportunity and a daunting challenge: (1) a **great opportunity** because we have such a large group with whom to witness and share the Gospel; but (2) a **daunting challenge** because many of these non-believers reject even basic historical facts about Jesus Christ and the New Testament.

As discussed below, we not only have duties to share the Gospel with this large (and growing) pool of non-believers, but we also must be ready to defend against challenges to historical evidence for basic facts like New Testament reliability and Jesus Christ’s ministry, miracles, crucifixion, and Resurrection.

² Pew Research Center, *How Global Religious Landscape Changed from 2010 to 2020* (June 9, 2025) <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/how-the-global-religious-landscape-changed-from-2010-to-2020/>.

³ Pew Research Center, *Religiously Unaffiliated Population Change* (June 9, 2025) <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/religiously-unaffiliated-population-change/>.

A. We Have a Scriptural Duty to Defend Our Faith

We must defend against skepticism for many reasons, including: (1) the apostles did; and (2) such defenses may serve the Great Commission by bringing others to faith.

Apostles' Defense. Faced with stout opposition to sharing his faith, Paul consistently and boldly preached in “**defense**” of the Gospel: “I am appointed for the **defense** of the gospel.”⁴ Similarly, both Peter and Jude called for believers to “make a defense” and “contend earnestly” for the gospel message:

Peter. “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, **always being ready to make a defense to anyone who asks** you to give an account of the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” [1 Peter 3:15 (NASB) (emphasis added)].

Jude. “I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you **contend earnestly** for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” [Jude 3 (NASB) (emphasis added)].⁵

Great Commission. Making disciples (Great Commission) and defending faith (apologetics) go hand-in-hand, as defending faith may clear the path to sharing the Word.

Evangelism and apologetics are closely related. Both have a common general goal: encouraging commitment to Jesus Christ. In fact, in certain theological circles, apologetics has been labeled pre-evangelism. On this understanding, **apologetics clears the ground for evangelism**; it makes evangelism more effective by preemptively **addressing impediments to the gospel**.⁶

The New Testament is based on historical facts, such as the miracles, crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. For those who dispute these facts, we need to be ready with historical proof to defend such facts. As discussed below, many have followed the historical evidence on their way to faith. See Section IV below. Thus, making the historical case for Jesus and the New Testament may also serve the Great Commission’s call to “make disciples of all the nations.” Matthew 28:19-20.

⁴ Philippians 1:16 (NASB) (bold added) (“defense” is “apologian” in Greek); see Acts 21:1 (after being seized in the temple, Paul said “Brethren and fathers, hear my **defense** which I now *offer* to you”) (NASB) (italics in original; bold added)); Acts 25:16, 18 (after being brought to trial, Paul asked for “an opportunity to make his **defense** against charges” by his accusers who complained that he preached about “a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive”) (NASB) (bold added); Philippians 1:7 (while imprisoned, Paul spoke “in the **defense** and confirmation of the gospels”) (NASB) (bold added); see Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. xxxii (2017) (list of citations).

⁵ See also Norman Geisler & Paul Hoffman, eds., *Why I Am a Christian*, p. 7 (2006) (“Indeed, we are instructed by three different apostles to defend attacks on the faith”).

⁶ James Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics*, p. 32 (2011) quoted in Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. xxxv (2017) (bold added).

B. We Have a Practical Need for Defending Faith

From atheists to radical Christian scholars, many have challenged the most basic facts underpinning Christianity – including Jesus’ existence, miracles, and Resurrection, as well as the reliability of the New Testament. If such allegations remain unrebutted, how do we prevent others from falling into unbelief?

- Christ-Myth Skeptics. “[I]t is quite likely there never was any historical Jesus.”⁷
- Resurrection Deniers. “I do not think anyone, anywhere, at any time brings dead people back to life.”⁸
- Pagan Beliefs. “[T]here is no more evidence to justify a belief in the literal existence of Yahweh and Satan than there was to keep Zeus perched upon his mountain throne or Poseidon churning the seas.”⁹
- College Skeptics. “Every year, countless university students around the world are taught that only a small percentage of the New Testament accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth reflect what he really said and did.”¹⁰
- Jesus Seminar. This seminar described the Gospels as “folklore” where history has been “obscured by myth and legend,” meaning that over 80% of the words and deeds of the historical Jesus never happened.¹¹

Similarly, more than 100 books and essays “in the past two hundred years have fervently denied the very existence of Jesus.”¹²

We must defend Jesus and the New Testament against these unfounded allegations. In today’s world, one theologian explained: “False ideas are the **greatest obstacles** to the reception of the Gospel.”¹³ To make disciples, we must be ready to clear these obstacles with the truth.

⁷ Robert Price, “Jesus at the Vanishing Point,” *quoted in* James Beilby & Paul Eddy, eds., *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, p. 55 (2009).

⁸ John Dominic Crossan *quoted in* Richard Ostling (AP), “Opposing Views on Jesus’ Resurrection,” *The Spokesman-Review* (Apr. 15, 2006).

⁹ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, p. 16 (2004).

¹⁰ Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, p. 15 (2007).

¹¹ Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus*, pp. 1-2, 5-6 (1998); *see also* Robert Funk, Roy Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, p. 4 (1993) *cited in* Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, & Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, pp. 21, 29 (2006); Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, p. 16 (2007) *citing* Funk, Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *Five Gospels*; and Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *Acts of Jesus*.

¹² Robert Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, p. 6 (2000).

¹³ J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul’s Religion*, p. 7 (1921) (bold added) *quoted in* Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. xxxvi (2017).

We cannot witness effectively if we ignore such allegations. In short, we need to be ready to defend the historical facts as set forth in the New Testament.

An intelligent Christian ought to be able to point up the flaws in a non-Christian position and to **present facts and arguments** which tell in favor of the gospel. If our apologetic [*i.e.*, our defense] prevents us from explaining the gospel to any person, it is an inadequate apologetic.¹⁴

For example, Nabeel Qureshi became a Christian after investigating the factual bases for Christianity and Islam, ultimately accepting Christianity as historically true.¹⁵ For additional examples, *see* Section IV below.

III. Should We Use Proof in Defending Our Faith?

Attacks on Jesus Christ and the New Testament must be answered with truth and facts. Otherwise, some believers may be led astray, and disbelievers may never know the truth and historical facts. Jesus paved the way for using proof to aid in ministry. Following the example of Jesus, we should also turn to proof as a way to defend the New Testament as true.

A. Jesus Used Proof in His Ministry

Some believed in Jesus based simply upon what He said and preached (*i.e.*, His Word). For others who still doubted, Jesus used both “convincing proofs” and His “works.”

- Convincing Proofs. “To these [apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by **many convincing proofs**. . .” Acts 1:3 (NASB) (bold added).
- Works. “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the **works** themselves.” John 14:11 (NASB) (bold added).
- Physical Proof. For Thomas’ doubt, Jesus gave physical proof: “Reach here with your finger, and **see** My hands; and **reach here with your hand** and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” John 20:27 (NASB) (bold added).¹⁶

Jesus understood that everyone has fears and doubts – even those who walked with Him during His entire ministry. Thus, Jesus Himself taught us about the power of proof in ministry.

¹⁴ Clark Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case*, p. 7 (1967); *see also* C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, p. 50 (1949) *quoted in* Geisler & Paul Hoffman, eds., *Why I Am a Christian*, p. 7 (2006).

¹⁵ Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One* (2016); *see also* Gary Habermas, *The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ Among the Major World Religions* (2016) <https://www.garyhabermas.com/Evidence2/>

¹⁶ *See also* Luke 24:39 (NASB) (Jesus said: “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.”).

B. Believers Use Proof in Today's World

The Resurrection's historical foundation has been tested in head-to-head debate between the world's leading atheist at the time (Anthony Flew) and one of the top experts on the Resurrection (Gary Habermas). With a five-judge panel, the debate specially addressed the Resurrection: "Did Jesus rise from the dead?"

Anthony Flew, one of the leading philosophical atheists in the world, . . . tangled with [Gary] Habermas in a major debate on the topic, 'Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?' The results were decidedly one-sided. Of the five independent philosophers from various colleges and universities who served as judges of the debate's content, four concluded that Habermas had won. One called the contest a draw. None cast a ballot for Flew.¹⁷

Not only did Gary Habermas' defense of the Resurrection prevail overwhelmingly, but the "strong evidence for God's existence" led Anthony Flew to become a theist.¹⁸ As this example shows, everyone seeking to "make disciples of all the nations" needs to be ready to defend both the **theological** and **factual** truth of Jesus Christ and the New Testament.

IV. Does Proof Work in Making Disciples?

In both ancient times and today, proof works. In fact, such proof has overcome doubts and disbelief, leading many to accept Jesus Christ.

A. Proof Works: Jesus' Ministry with Proof

During His ministry, Jesus used proof not only to convince Thomas, but also the other apostles.

1. Thomas: From Doubt to Belief

Without seeing proof of Jesus' wounds, Thomas expressly refused to believe until Jesus showed him. Then he believed and preached until his martyrdom.

- Doubt. Thomas said to the other disciples, "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.**" John 20:25 (NASB) (bold added).

¹⁷ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Easter*, p. 61 (2003).

¹⁸ See Anthony Flew, *There is A God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, (2007); see also Anthony Flew & Gary Habermas, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: A Discussion between Antony Flew and Gary Habermas," *Philosophia Christi* 6, pp. 200-202, 210-11 (2004) cited in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 20-21, n. 28 (2024) (Flew attributing his "conversion" to "his having to go along with the evidence" and the "strong evidence for God's existence").

- Eyewitness Proof. Jesus brought the very proof that Thomas sought, inviting him to “Reach here with your finger, and **see** My hands; and **reach here with your hand** and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” John 20:27 (NASB) (bold added).
- Belief. “Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” John 20:28 (NASB).¹⁹
- Martyrdom. After his eyewitness encounter, Thomas became a powerful witness to the Resurrection, preaching through persecution and even until martyrdom.²⁰

2. The Apostles: From Doubt and Fear to Bold Preaching

To drive away their fears and doubts after the crucifixion, Jesus presented “many convincing proofs” to the apostles after His Resurrection.

- Fears. Despite hearing from Mary Magdalene that Jesus had risen, the disciples hid in “fear” behind closed doors. John 20:19 (NASB).
- Doubts. Even after Jesus appeared to them, some disciples remained “doubtful” (Matthew 28:17), as Jesus asked them: “why do doubts arise in your hearts?” Luke 24:38 (NASB).
- Convincing Proofs. “To these [apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by **many convincing proofs**. . .” Acts 1:3 (NASB) (bold added).²¹

Backed by the force of the Holy Spirit, Jesus empowered the apostles with eyewitness evidence, thus propelling their ministry to vast multitudes across the known ancient world.

From Few to Many. Coupled with the power of the Holy Spirit, these “convincing proofs” led the apostles to preach boldly, starting with a small band of 120 (Acts 1:15), then saving “about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41), followed by “about five thousand” who believed. Acts 4:4 (NASB). Even “a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” Acts 6:7 (NASB). As the historic evidence of the earliest devotion to Jesus shows, the

¹⁹ Jesus contrasted how Thomas only believed after eyewitness proof, compared with others who believed without seeing Jesus: “Because you have **seen** Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not **see**, and yet believed.” John 20:29 (NASB) (bold added); *see also* Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, p.158 (2008) (“The Gospel of John makes it clear that Thomas *personally* saw Jesus after his death and believed that he was the Lord.”) (italics in original).

²⁰ Acts 5:17-25 (apostles jailed for preaching about Jesus and the Resurrection); Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, pp.172-73 (2008) (later Christian leaders and records reported that Thomas died as a martyr while preaching about Jesus and the Resurrection in India).

²¹ *See also* Luke 24:39 (NASB) (Jesus said: “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.”).

rise of Christianity is “a more explosively quick phenomenon, a religious development that was more like a **volcanic eruption**.”²²

From Jerusalem to the World. Christianity soon spread over 1,500 miles to Rome and the rest of the empire, as confirmed by both the Scriptures and even non-Christian sources.²³

- AD 64 (34 years after Resurrection). Roman historian Tacitus (a hostile source to Christians) recorded that, of “the crowd called ‘Christians,’” a “vast multitude” already resided in Rome and had been “condemned” by Nero.²⁴
- AD 112 (82 years after Resurrection). Roman administrator Pliny the Younger observed “that the Christian influence was so strong in his area [Bithynia in Asia Minor] that the pagan temples had been nearly deserted, attendance at pagan festivals severely decreased, and few purchased sacrificial animals.”²⁵

Proof Works. Thus, within 100 years after the Resurrection, Christianity “triumphed over a number of competing ideologies and eventually overwhelmed the entire Roman empire.”²⁶ When coupled with the force of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of Jesus and the apostles demonstrates as a historical fact the power of eyewitness proof.

B. Proof Works in Today’s World

Proof works today. In fact, atheists and other nonbelievers have accepted Christianity after investigating the evidence for Jesus Christ and the Resurrection.

Former homicide detective Warner Wallace explained how “following evidence” paved his path from atheism to Christian faith and salvation:

Isn’t true faith *blind*? Can someone come to a “saving faith” by following *evidence*? . . . But this book *is* my “salvation story.” It

²² Larry Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* p. 25 (2005) (bold added); see also J. P. Moreland quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 272 (2016) (“But five weeks after [Jesus is] crucified, over ten thousand Jews are following him and claiming that he is the initiator of a new religion”); Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, pp. 218-19 (1997) (explaining these numbers of Christian conversions were reasonable, given the flood of Jews into Jerusalem during Pentecost).

²³ Romans 1:8 (“your faith is being proclaimed through the whole world”); Acts 28:16-25 (Paul in Rome); Philippians 4:22 (“All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household”) (NASB); Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 219 (1997) (Christianity spread to “Rome 1,500 miles away” from Jerusalem).

²⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* xv, 44, quoted in Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 219 (1997); see also Robert Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, pp. 41-42 (2000) (“large multitude”).

²⁵ Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, translated by William Melmoth, rev. W. M. L. Hutchinson, Loeb Classical Library, pp. 2:401-5 cited in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 184 (2024).

²⁶ J. P. Moreland quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 276 (2016); see also Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 219 (1997) (“For [Christianity] to spread this far, this fast in the ancient world is absolutely unparalleled”).

describes the **evidential journey** I took to become a follower of Jesus.²⁷

Others have followed a similar path, investigating the evidence on the way to becoming Christians.

- Lee Strobel (crime journalist & leading author): Spent more than a year investigating and trying to disprove Christianity before he became a leading popular author and advocate defending Christianity.²⁸
- Nabeel Qureshi (leading author): Sought to convert his friend to Islam, but the evidence instead led him to Christianity.²⁹
- Frank Morison (advertising agent & author): Believed Jesus' Resurrection was a "primitive mythology" until he thoroughly investigated the last seven days of Jesus' life and found a "profoundly historical basis" for the Resurrection.³⁰
- C.S. Lewis (professor & author): Rejected atheism and became a Christian after investigating classic Christian literature and the New Testament in Greek.³¹
- Dr. Gary Habermas (professor): Rejected being a "near Buddhist" and overcame "serious doubts about Christianity" by following the evidence to become a Christian and one of the leading authorities on the Resurrection.³²
- Josh McDowell (evangelist & author): Turned away from seeking "to write a book that would make an intellectual joke of Christianity" and "gather evidence to prove that Christianity is a sham" after "the overwhelming evidence" that "Jesus

²⁷ Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity*, p. 13 (2023) (italics in original; bold added).

²⁸ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Easter*, p. 8 (2003); Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 280, 336 (2016); Strobel, *The Case for Creation*, pp. 18-19 (2004).

²⁹ Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One*, pp. 24-26 (2016).

³⁰ Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?* pp. 9-10 (1958) (foreword by Lee Strobel).

³¹ PBS, *The Question of God: The Life of C.S. Lewis* (2004)
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/twolives/lewisbio.html#:~:text=As%20a%20result%20of%20his,and%20later%20Christianity%20in%201931.>

³² Gary Habermas, "A Short Life of Gary Habermas,"
<https://www.garyhabermas.com/vitainnuce.htm>. Since his dissertation, Dr. Habermas has dedicated his life to defending Christianity, publishing over 50 books, 80 book chapters, and 100 articles and becoming one of the world's leading authorities on evidentiary bases for the Resurrection. See Gary Habermas, "Publications," <https://www.garyhabermas.com/publications.htm>; see, e.g. Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences, "Reviews"* (2024); Gary Habermas' chapters in Norman Geisler & Paul Hoffman, *Why I Am a Christian*, pp. 120-134, 161-174 (2006).

Christ was God’s Son” led him to become a leading campus minister and apologetics author.³³

In summary, we have a Scriptural duty to defend the truth – including the historical proof – of Jesus Christ and the New Testament. As real-world examples show, such a defense serves the Great Commission “to make disciples of all the nations” and has a proven track record of bringing even atheists to faith in God.

V. Conclusion

In support of this duty to defend Jesus Christ and the New Testament, we have a wealth of historical facts. As the next seven programs will confirm, an overwhelming case validates the historical and factual accuracy of both Jesus Christ and the New Testament. Compared with other ancient records and works, the New Testament has no equal in the depth and breadth of proof establishing its historical truth and authenticity.

David Z. Bodenheimer
Trial Attorney (1982-2022)
Faith Defender & Advocate

³³ Josh & Sean McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, pp. xxv-xxx (2017). Since coming to faith, Josh McDowell has witnessed to over seven million students and professors on more than 700 campuses and written leading apologetics works defending Christianity and the Resurrection. See William Bright, Foreword in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. xi, (1999).