

**Does Eyewitness Testimony Confirm the Resurrection?**  
**A Study of Eyewitness Evidence Corroborating the Resurrection**

**I. Overview**

The Resurrection stands at the very core of Christianity. As Paul famously testified, our faith hinges upon the Resurrection – and without it, our “faith is worthless.” 1 Corinthians 15:13-19 (NASB). But the Resurrection did, **in fact**, happen. And among many other proofs, eyewitness testimony provides compelling evidence that Jesus Christ rose on the third day.

This analysis focuses specifically upon eyewitness testimony for the Resurrection, addressing the following three issues:

- What Eyewitness Proof Supports the Resurrection?
- How Strong is the Evidence for the Resurrection?
- How Credible are the Eyewitness Sources for the Resurrection?

**II. What Eyewitness Proof Supports the Resurrection?**

Whether for historical validity or courtroom proof, eyewitness testimony carries great weight. Overwhelming eyewitness proof for the Resurrection comes from multiple sources:

- (1) the plain language of the New Testament itself;
- (2) the earliest oral traditions (creeds) about the Resurrection; and
- (3) the most ancient records following the New Testament.

Each of these categories of proof are examined below. In combination, this mass of evidence not only confirms the Resurrection, but also lacks any effective historical rebuttal.

**A. What Do the Scriptures Say?**

By its express language, the New Testament identifies multiple eyewitnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- The Disciples at Multiple Times & Places.
  - Jerusalem. John 20:19, 25-29 (NASB).
  - Galilee. Matthew 28:16-17.
  - Sea of Tiberias. John 21:1.
  - Bethany. Luke 24:50.
  - Ascension. Acts 1:21-22.
  - Generally. Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:5.

- Simon Peter – Multiple Sources. Luke 24:33-34; John 21:7, 15-22; 1 Corinthians 15:5; 2 Peter 1:16 (NASB).
- Mary Magdalene & Other Women. John 20:16, 18; Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:33, 36 (NASB).<sup>1</sup>
- John as Part of Disciples & Individually. John 21:7, 21-24; 1 John 1:2 (NASB).
- Two Travelers to Emmaus. Luke 24:31 (NASB).
- James (Jesus’ brother). 1 Corinthians 15:7 (NASB).
- Apostles. 1 Corinthians 15:7 (NASB).<sup>2</sup>
- 500 Persons. 1 Corinthians 15:6 (NASB).
- Paul. 1 Corinthians 15:8; 1 Corinthians 9:1; Acts 9:1-6; Acts 22:6-10; Acts 26:12-18 (NASB).

Many accounts of ancient history “rest on just one ancient source,” thus making two sources virtually “unimpeachable.”<sup>3</sup> No other event in ancient history can claim dozens of eyewitnesses, much less hundreds of eyewitnesses, as documented in the New Testament’s multiple sources proving the Resurrection:

Jesus’ resurrection appearances and the number of people who claimed to witness them is **unparalleled in history**. [James] Dunn concurs, “Appearances of Jesus which impacted on the witnesses as resurrection appearances did not conform to any known or current paradigm.”<sup>4</sup>

By its plain language, the New Testament shows that the eyewitnesses not only heard and saw the risen Jesus, but some of them even touched him. Thus, the New Testament’s eyewitness testimony meets both legal and historical standards for eyewitness evidence.

## **B. What Do the Earliest Oral Traditions Say?**

Long before the Gospels were recorded, Christians preached the Resurrection from the earliest days. Some of these earliest preachings became known as creeds – short, easy-to-

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<sup>1</sup> The women saw the empty tomb and heard from the angels that “He was alive.” Luke 24:22-23 (NASB). Based upon this and other passages in Luke regarding the central role of women in the Resurrection events, “those who were with them” included the women as eyewitnesses to the Resurrection. Richard Bauckman, *Gospel Women*, pp. 281-82, particularly n. 57 (2002); *see also* Acts 1:15 (“along with the women” indicates that the women were part of the 120 “persons” as witnesses).

<sup>2</sup> Given that Paul specifically refers to “the twelve” in verse 5, the subsequent reference to “the apostles” in verse 7 must be the broader group of eyewitnesses. *See* Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 578 (2017) (“Clearly ‘apostles’ refers to a much larger category than just the Twelve”).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 197 (1998).

<sup>4</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 134 (2020) *quoting* James Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making 1*, pp. 874-75 (2003) (bold added).

memorize, easy-to-repeat statements of faith.<sup>5</sup> Paul captures perhaps the best-known creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 (NASB) (bold added):

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to **Cephas** [Peter], then to **the twelve**. After that He appeared to more than **five hundred** brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to **James**, then to all the **apostles**.

As a creed dating back to shortly after the Resurrection, this oral tradition provides powerful historical evidence corroborating the Gospels and validating the Resurrection:

- “the earliest, most authoritative, and most detailed list of Jesus Christ’s resurrection appearances in a single text;”<sup>6</sup>
- “the bedrock, most ancient source of Christianity;”<sup>7</sup>
- “This account meets all the demands of historical reliability that could possibly be made of such a text as things stood.”<sup>8</sup>

As discussed below, the Resurrection account in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 readily meets the best standards for historical evidence.

Early in Time. Scholars generally date Paul’s conversion experience (when Jesus appeared to him) as being within two to three years after the crucifixion.<sup>9</sup> The overwhelming consensus of the experts is that Christians had already been preaching the 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed even before Paul’s conversion.

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<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 371 (2024) (“brief, originally oral reports” about “what the earliest church actually taught, preached, believed, and practiced” before the first New Testament books had been written); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 54 (2024) (“formalized statements circulated in the earliest period of Christianity”); Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, pp. 98-99 (2002) (identifying 8 linguistic factors confirming 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 as an early oral tradition (creed)).

<sup>6</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 371-72 (2024).

<sup>7</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 23 (2020).

<sup>8</sup> Hans von Campenhausen, “The Events of Easter and the Empty Tomb, *Tradition and Life in the Early Church*, p. 44 (1968) *quoted in* Gary Habermas, “The Early Christian Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus: A Response to Thomas Sheehan,” *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations*, p. 401 n. 10 (1992).

<sup>9</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 376, n. 17, 453 (2024) (citing a multitude of sources); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 57 (2024) (“conversion around AD 32”). Even the radical Jesus Seminar agreed: “Most Fellows think the components of the list reported there were formed prior to Paul’s conversion which is usually dated around 33 C.E.” Funk & the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, p. 454 (1998).

- “All scholars recognize here an early tradition that was formulated **even before Paul’s own call** to be an apostle (to which he refers in v. 8).”<sup>10</sup>
- “It preserves the **most ancient statement of Christianity** and ‘the oldest record of Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth,’ as Joseph Fitzmyer notes. It is unparalleled in the New Testament. In fact, it is unparalleled in all of ancient literature.”<sup>11</sup>
- “There is almost universal scholarly consensus that 1 Cor. 15.3-5 contains a carefully **preserved tradition pre-dating Paul’s apostolic activity** and received by him within two to five years of the founding events.”<sup>12</sup>

According to leading scholars, this creed arose “**within months** of Jesus’ death”<sup>13</sup> and represented a “tradition in 1 Cor 15.3b-5, which goes back **very close to the events themselves**, attests appearances to both individuals and groups.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, this creed readily meets the historical standard for early dating of the Resurrection reported soon after the crucifixion.

Actual Eyewitnesses. In both the historical arena and the courtroom, eyewitness testimony serves as compelling – even decisive – evidence.<sup>15</sup> On its face, 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 identifies multiple eyewitnesses to the Resurrection:

There can be no doubt that in his own recital of a kerygmatic summary in 1 Corinthians 15[,] Paul is citing the *eyewitness testimony* of those who were recipients of resurrection appearances, including the most prominent in the Jerusalem

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 578 (2017) (bold added).

<sup>11</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 85-86 (2020) quoting Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 543 (2008) (bold added).

<sup>12</sup> James Ware, “The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15.3-5,” *New Testament Studies*, p. 60 (2014) quoted in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 386, 454, n.56 (2024) (bold added).

<sup>13</sup> James Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, p. 855 (2003) quoted in Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 81 (2020) (bold added); see also Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 382 n.28 (2024); Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 125 (1977) (dating 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 as early as AD 30) cited in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 450 (2024).

<sup>14</sup> Gerd Theissen & Annette Merz, *Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, p. 490 (1998) quoted in Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 80 (2020) (bold added).

<sup>15</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 38, 45 (2024) (“the strongest evidence possible”); Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, p. 29 (2008) (“best evidence”); Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 109 (2007) (“strongest evidences that these events did happen”).

church: Peter (Cephas), the Twelve, and James the brother of Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

Even non-Christians agree. Jewish historian Pinchas Lapide analyzed this creed, concluding that “this unified piece of tradition which soon was solidified into a formula of faith may be considered as a **statement of eyewitnesses** for whom the experience of the resurrection became the turning point of their lives.”<sup>17</sup> Atheist Bart Ehrman admits that Peter and James were “two good people to know if you want to know anything about the historical Jesus” and then candidly asks: “Can we get **any closer to an eyewitness report** than this?”<sup>18</sup> Thus, this creed satisfies the second major historical criterion – proof by eyewitness testimony.<sup>19</sup>

Meetings with Eyewitnesses. Paul did not simply teach the creed to the Corinthians. Long before he wrote to the Corinthians, he talked directly with actual eyewitnesses listed in the creed. During the first Jerusalem trip, he met with Peter and James (“the Lord’s brother”), followed by a second Jerusalem trip where he met with Peter, James, and John.

- 1<sup>st</sup> Jerusalem Trip (AD 35). “Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.” Galatians 1:18-19 (NASB).<sup>20</sup>
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Jerusalem Trip (AD 49). “Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. . . . and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” Galatians 2:1, 9 (NASB).<sup>21</sup>

The scholars nearly all agree that Paul received the 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed directly from Peter and James – *i.e.*, Resurrection eyewitnesses expressly named in the creed.<sup>22</sup>

Corroboration of Resurrection. For the first Jerusalem trip, Paul sought out Peter and James to “inquire” (*i.e.*, to learn directly from the eyewitnesses) when he received the creed.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 308 (2017) (italics in original); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 376 (2024) (creed “came from the most influential apostles themselves – the eyewitnesses”).

<sup>17</sup> Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*, p. 99 (2002) (bold added).

<sup>18</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?* pp. 144, 145 (2012) (bold added).

<sup>19</sup> For ancient historians, eyewitness testimony represented the gold standard for proof. *See, e.g.*, Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 8-11 (2017).

<sup>20</sup> The first Jerusalem trip occurred around AD 35. Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 58 (2024).

<sup>21</sup> The second Jerusalem trip took place about AD 49. Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 58 (2024).

<sup>22</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 453-4, 421, 402; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 266-67 (2017); James Ware, “The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15.3-5,” *New Testament Studies*, p. 60 (2014); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 83, 67 (2020).

On the second Jerusalem trip, the “pillars” of the early Church (Peter, James, & John) met Paul to verify that they all preached the same message – and they all agreed as underscored by sharing “the right hand of fellowship” (Galatians 2:9) on the message.<sup>24</sup> In 1 Corinthians 15:11, Paul confirmed that he and the other apostles all preached the same message on the Resurrection.<sup>25</sup> Thus, long before Paul wrote to the Corinthians around AD 55, he had fully vetted the fact of the Resurrection directly with the leading eyewitnesses – Peter, James, and John.<sup>26</sup>

In summary, the 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed delivers powerful factual evidence of the Resurrection meeting the most demanding historical criteria: (1) early proof within two years (AD 32) of the crucifixion; (2) multiple eyewitnesses (Peter, James, John, “the twelve,” and more); and (3) verification of the Resurrection by these eyewitnesses in two meetings.

### C. What Do Post-Gospel Ancient Records Say?

Beyond the New Testament’s plain language and the oral traditions (creeds) discussed above, both Christian and non-Christian sources corroborate the Resurrection.

Non-Christian Sources. Numerous non-Christian sources (many hostile to Christianity) verified fundamental facts about Jesus.<sup>27</sup> Key facts included that: (1) Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate; (2) His disciples believed He rose from the dead; (3) His disciples were willing to die for this belief; (4) Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome; and (5) His disciples worshiped Jesus as divine.<sup>28</sup> Specific to the Resurrection, Jewish historian Josephus acknowledged that Jesus’ disciples “reported that [Jesus] had **appeared to them three days after his crucifixion,**

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<sup>23</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 377 (Greek terms “indicate that Paul went to Jerusalem to ‘investigate’ or to ‘inquire’ of the other two apostles to obtain knowledge and/or information”); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 266 (2017) (presume that “Paul was becoming thoroughly informed of the Jesus traditions as formulated by the Twelve, learning them from the leader of the Twelve, Peter”).

<sup>24</sup> “Critical scholars acknowledge rather freely the agreement here between these four leaders on the essentials of the gospel message.” Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 391 & n. 70 (2024); see also Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 57 (2024).

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:11 (NASB) (“Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed”); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 266 (2017) (Paul “asserts the unanimity between himself and the other apostles on the key matters he has just rehearsed”).

<sup>26</sup> As “pillars” of the early Church, these eyewitnesses (Peter, James, John, and Paul) wrote 20 of the 27 books of the New Testament. Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 20 (2020).

<sup>27</sup> These non-Christian sources include, among others, Tacitus (Roman historian), Josephus (Jewish historian), Thallus (historian), Suetonius (Roman historian), Pliny the Younger (Roman administrator), Emperor Trajan, Emperor Hadrian, Mishnah and Talmud (two Jewish sources), Lucian (Greek historian and satirist), Mara bar Serapion (Syrian writer), and Celsus (Greek philosopher). See Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 167-209 (2024); Mark Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, pp. 187-88, 199-201; Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, pp. 54-59 (1999); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 90-99 (2024).

<sup>28</sup> Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 223 (2004).

and that he was alive.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, within 63 years after the crucifixion, non-Christian sources had confirmed not only the crucifixion itself, but also the disciples’ belief in the Resurrection.

Christian Sources. Shortly after the completion of the New Testament, the earliest Church records corroborated the Resurrection and New Testament Scriptures. Three such Christian sources included the early church’s apostolic fathers: (1) Clement writing from Rome (about AD 95); Ignatius writing from Smyrna in Asia Minor (about AD 107); and (3) Polycarp writing from Smyrna in Asia Minor (about AD 110).<sup>30</sup>

Thus, within 80 years of the crucifixion, the early church’s apostolic fathers had confirmed the New Testament Scriptures, including the Resurrection. In combination with the non-Christian sources above, this powerful evidentiary record corroborates both the Scripture’s plain language and the early oral traditions (creeds) discussed above.

### **III. How Strong Is the Evidence for the Resurrection?**

The overwhelming strength of the evidence has driven scholars across the spectrum to acknowledge the mass of proof confirming Jesus Christ’s Resurrection.

#### **A. Top Resurrection Experts**

Many scholars have written about the Resurrection.<sup>31</sup> However, two particular scholars stand out.

Dr. Gary Habermas. Few scholars can match the depth and breadth of Dr. Habermas’ publication record focused heavily on the Resurrection.<sup>32</sup> His latest series – *On the Resurrection* – now spans over 1,800 pages, covers 4,500 sources, and represents the definitive analysis of the

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<sup>29</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, Chap. 3, § 3 translated by Shlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and Its Implications* (1971) quoted in James Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, p. 95 (1988) (bold added); accord Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 200 ((1997). While some have questioned other versions of Josephus’ text, this Arabic version has solid support. See Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 178 n. 78; *id.* at 410 (“Perhaps even a majority of researchers would mention Josephus as at least (probably) recording the *disciples’ belief* in Jesus’s appearances to his disciples”); James Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, pp. 96-7 (1988) (“as certain as historical research will presently allow that Josephus did refer to Jesus in *Antiquities* 18.63-64”).

<sup>30</sup> Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, pp. 223, 235-36 (2004); Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, pp. 261-63 (2007); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 410, 425 (2024); Ignatius and Polycarp, quoted in Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 104, 106 (2024).

<sup>31</sup> For the “minimal facts” standard, Gary Habermas generally defines “critical scholars” as including those with relevant research, academic, and publication credentials. Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 94-98 (2024).

<sup>32</sup> Gary Habermas, “Publications,” <https://www.garyhabermas.com/publications.htm> (over 50 books, 80 book chapters, and 100 articles).

evidentiary basis for the Resurrection.<sup>33</sup> No one has yet to discredit the hundreds (perhaps thousands) of well-supported facts documented in *On the Resurrection*.<sup>34</sup>

Dr. Richard Bauckham. Just as Dr. Habermas published the premier analysis of the Resurrection, Dr. Bauckham has done the same for eyewitnesses to the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.<sup>35</sup> Dr. Bauckham's 615-page analysis remains unsurpassed as the best on eyewitness evidence in the New Testament.

## **B. Admissions by Skeptical and/or Non-Christian Scholars**

Regarding the core facts for the Resurrection, Dr. Habermas notes that “the current list of recognized facts pertaining to Jesus’s resurrection are so widely admitted that even the most radical critical scholars generally accept their historicity.”<sup>36</sup> Examples include the following.

- Paula Fredriksen (agnostic New Testament scholar). “I know in their own terms **what they saw was the raised Jesus**. That’s what they say and then all the **historic evidence** we have afterwards attests to their conviction that that’s what they saw.”<sup>37</sup>
- Pinchas Lapide (Orthodox Jewish theologian). “I accept the resurrection of Easter Sunday not as an invention of the community of disciples, but as a **historical event**.”<sup>38</sup>
- Bart Ehrman (atheist religion professor). “Historians, of course, have no difficulty speaking about the **belief in Jesus’ resurrection**, since this is a matter of **public record**. It is a **historical fact** that some of Jesus’ followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 101 n. 26 (2024) (4,500 sources); *On the Resurrection: Refutations* (2024).

<sup>34</sup> Under the “preponderance of evidence” standard, a party must offer “the stronger evidence, however slight the edge may be.” *Black’s Law Dictionary* (2009); see Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute (2023): “the burden of proof is met when the party with the burden convinces the fact-finder [e.g., judge] that there is a greater than 50% chance that the claim is true”; FED. R. EVID. 402 (evidence is “relevant” when it has “any tendency” to prove a fact as more probable than not). See also Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 23-24 (2024) (historians do not seek “absolute certainty,” but ask whether a fact is “probable”).

<sup>35</sup> Regarding Dr. Bauckham’s 615-page book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Dr. Habermas described it as a “sophisticated” and “most noteworthy” work that “may well be the single best book of all here” on Gospel reliability. Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 271, 46 n. 27, and 110 (2024).

<sup>36</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 106 (2024).

<sup>37</sup> From an interview in Peter Jennings’s *The Search for Jesus* (ABC News) (July 2000) *quoted in* Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p.141 (2020) (bold added).

<sup>38</sup> Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 13 (2002) (bold added).

<sup>39</sup> Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, p. 276 (2004) (bold added); accord Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, p.231 (1999).

- Dale Allison (skeptical professor & theologian). “I am **sure** that the **disciples saw Jesus after his death.**”<sup>40</sup> [Dr. Allison is “sure” of this fact, even though he skeptically claims that “the gospels contain mythical elements”<sup>41</sup>].

### C. Consensus of the Scholars

When it comes to the core facts relating to the crucifixion and Resurrection, the critical scholars generally agree.

- Crucifixion. “These lines of evidence have convinced **virtually all scholars** across a wide theological spectrum that Jesus’ death is a historical fact.”<sup>42</sup>
- Empty Tomb. “At present, hundreds of scholars who have provided their views have been counted, with those who favor the **historicity of the empty tomb** having risen to **80.1 percent** in my personal survey.”<sup>43</sup>
- Belief in Resurrection. “The appearances to Peter, to the Twelve, to James, and to Paul are all bedrock appearances in that **99 percent of scholars** agree that these three individuals (Peter, James, and Paul) and a group of Jesus’ followers *believed* the risen Jesus appeared to them.”<sup>44</sup>
- Transformed Lives. After the crucifixion, the disciples fled and hid behind closed doors; after the Resurrection, they changed dramatically, preaching the risen Jesus despite persecution and eventual martyrdom. Gary Habermas states: “the data indicate and **scholars overwhelmingly agree** that the disciples were willing to give their lives, if necessary, specifically because of an experience: *they were absolutely and sincerely convinced that they had seen the risen Jesus* alive after his death.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Dale Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, p. 346 (2005) quoted in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 479 n. 118 (2024) (bold added).

<sup>41</sup> Dale Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Criticism, History*, p. 21 (2021) quoted in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 41 n. 15 (2024); see also William Craig Lane, *Reasonable Faith* (As a skeptic, “He’s far more persuasive than Crossan, Ludemann, Goulder and the rest who actually deny the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection”) (<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/historical-jesus/dale-allison-on-jesus-empty-tomb-his-post-mortem-appearances-and-the-origin>).

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 133 (2024) (bold added); see also Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 343 (“vast majority of critical scholars who have studied this material also agree that Jesus’s crucifixion is a historical event”); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 96, 7 (2020) (“Jesus’ crucifixion is a bedrock fact,” meaning that it passes the 99-percent threshold of agreement among scholars).

<sup>43</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, p. 632 (2024) (bold added).

<sup>44</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 150-51 (2020) (bold added, italics in original); see also Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 433 (2024) (“scholarly consensus on the historicity of these early Christian experiences” and this fact “is rarely contested”); see notes 37-41 above regarding skeptical scholars.

<sup>45</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 535 (2024) (bold added; italics in original). Even “quite critical scholars acknowledge their widespread agreement” and “contemporary critical scholars, even (Continued...)

Resurrection facts cannot be determined simply by a vote of the world’s leading scholars. However, the negligible opposition to these fundamental Resurrection facts is telling. If the skeptical scholars could refute these facts, they presumably would. Thus, the consensus of scholars on these core issues convincingly shows where the real facts stand. As the Supreme Court has stated, when one party brings documented facts to the courtroom and the other party only comes with unsupported allegations, the one with the facts wins.<sup>46</sup>

#### IV. How Credible Are The Eyewitness Sources for the Resurrection?

As discussed above, nearly all critical scholars (including skeptics and atheists) agree that the Resurrection eyewitnesses **believed** that they saw the risen Jesus Christ.

The appearances to Peter, to the Twelve, to James, and to Paul are all bedrock appearances in that **99 percent of scholars** agree that these three individuals (Peter, James, and Paul) and a group of Jesus’ followers *believed* the risen Jesus appeared to them.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the eyewitnesses’ credibility is already firmly established. Three additional facts further bolster the Resurrection eyewitnesses’ strong credibility.

##### A. Why Did the Eyewitnesses Have Powerful Motives for Truth?

Few witnesses in history (ancient or modern) ever had stronger motives to tell the truth.

- Ten Commandments. “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Exodus 20:16.<sup>48</sup>
- Jewish Heritage. “No religion has ever stressed the importance of truth or truthful testimony more than the Jewish religion.”<sup>49</sup>

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including skeptics of several varieties, rarely challenge or doubt that Jesus’s disciples were radically transformed from fearful followers of Jesus or even unbelievers into courageous proclaimers of their faith.” *Id.* at 530, 529.

<sup>46</sup> As the Supreme Court has held, a party with evidence beats a party without evidence. *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 256 (1986) (opposing party must offer “significant probative evidence”).

<sup>47</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 150-51 (2020) (bold added, italics in original); *see also* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 433 (2024) (“scholarly consensus on the historicity of these early Christian experiences” and this fact “is rarely contested”); *id.* at 535; *see* notes 37-41 above regarding skeptical scholars.

<sup>48</sup> *See also* Leviticus 19:11 (“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another”); Proverbs 19:5 (“A false witness will not go unpunished”); Colossians 3:9 (“Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices.”).

<sup>49</sup> John Ankerburg & John Weldon, *Knowing the Truth About the Resurrection*, p. 20 (1996) *quoted in* Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, p. 146 (2009).

- Death Penalty. False statements or testimony could be punishable by death.<sup>50</sup>
- Blasphemy. Even worse, if the disciples falsely testified about Jesus' divinity and Resurrection, the crime would be blasphemy against God.<sup>51</sup>

## **B. Would the Witnesses Die for a Lie?**

Early Christians suffered brutal persecution and even martyrdom as both Christian and non-Christian sources confirm.<sup>52</sup> In fact, major eyewitnesses preached the Resurrection of Jesus Christ despite beatings and eventual martyrdom, including Peter, Paul, James (son of Zebedee), James (brother of Jesus), and Thomas.<sup>53</sup> Their willingness to testify to the Resurrection despite such martyrdom underscores the credibility of their testimony:

Although disillusioned at [Jesus'] untimely death, [the apostles] became the **first witnesses of the risen Jesus** and they endured persecution; many subsequently experienced martyrdom, **signing their testimony**, so to speak, **in their own blood**. The strength of their conviction, marked by their willingness to die, indicates that they did not fabricate these claims; rather, without exception, they actually believed Jesus to have risen from the dead.<sup>54</sup>

The apostles did not “die for a lie.”<sup>55</sup> Instead, these martyred eyewitnesses passed a far tougher credibility test than the “mere” perjury penalty for witnesses in modern courtrooms.

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<sup>50</sup> Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone*, p. 16 (2002; first published 1930) (“if the testimony given was demonstrably *false*, the witness should have been sentenced to death by stoning”); *id.* at 21; Lary Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* p. 169 (2005) (“Phinehas-type action [killing] for idolatry, apostasy, seduction by false prophets, and perjury”); Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, p. 146 (2009) (disciples knew false testimony “could be punished by death”).

<sup>51</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:14-15 (if Christ had not been raised, “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”); Acts 7:52-60 (stoning Stephen to death for telling the Jewish priests that they were “murderers” of Lord Jesus, “the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God”); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 446-47 (2024) (Saul and other priests viewed the earliest Christians as heretics that “deserved death for blaspheming the God of Israel” based on their preaching of Jesus “co-occupying God’s throne, receiving worship, and possessing God’s nature”).

<sup>52</sup> Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, pp. 47-51 (2015) (summarizing Christian and non-Christian evidence of persecution); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, p. 540 (2024) (“scholars overwhelmingly agree that disciples were willing to give their lives”); *id.* at 165-85 (summarizing non-Christian sources); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 93-98 (2024).

<sup>53</sup> Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, pp. 91-92 (Peter by crucifixion), pp. 113-14 (Paul by beheading), pp. 134 (James, brother of Jesus, by stoning), pp. 172-3 (Thomas martyred in India), p. 192 (James, son of Zebedee, martyred) (2015); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 533-4, n. 37 (2024).

<sup>54</sup> Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, p. 2 (2015) (bold added); *see also* Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, p. 342 (2009) (willingness to die for their beliefs confirms their sincerity).

<sup>55</sup> “Liars make poor martyrs.” Gary Habermas & Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 59 (2004); *see also*, Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 533 (2024) (same).

### C. Did the Eyewitnesses Ever Recant Their Testimony?

No evidence exists that any of the Resurrection eyewitnesses ever recanted their testimony that they had seen the risen Jesus.

- Gary Habermas. “We have already mentioned some ancient accounts of apostolic martyrdoms, and these cases effectively indicate that **no defections** occurred with at least these apostles! Further, there are no early accounts where these apostles, singly or in groups were given the opportunity to recant and left the faith . . . .”<sup>56</sup>
- Warner Wallace. “Each story of martyrdom is more gruesome than the prior as we examine the list of apostolic deaths . . . yet **none of the Twelve recanted** their claims related to the resurrection. Not one.”<sup>57</sup>
- Josh & Sean McDowell. “The disciples went to the grave with the conviction that they had seen the risen Jesus.”<sup>58</sup>

Given the horrific deaths of Christians during Nero’s reign (“torn to pieces by dogs,” “nailed to crosses,” and “burned to death to furnish light at night”),<sup>59</sup> the record would surely be filled with many recanting their faith – if it happened. Yet the historical record has no such reports, thus reinforcing the credibility of these Christian witnesses.

In summary, the Resurrection proof reinforces credibility of the eyewitnesses who testified till their death without ever recanting. No other ancient source can offer such a wealth of credible and unwavering eyewitnesses.

### V. Conclusion

Individually, these factors above show how strong eyewitness evidence supports the reliability and historicity of the Resurrection. In tandem, these big proofs build an overwhelming case validating the historical and factual accuracy that the risen Jesus appeared to multiple individuals and groups. Compared with other ancient records and works, these Resurrection eyewitness accounts have no equals in the depth and breadth of eyewitness proof establishing their historical truth and authenticity.

David Z. Bodenheimer  
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<sup>56</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 526-27 (bold added).

<sup>57</sup> Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity*, p. 128 (2023) (bold added).

<sup>58</sup> Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, p. 146 (2009).

<sup>59</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* quoted in Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, p. 49 (2015); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 167-68 (2024); John Mauck, *Paul on Trial*, p. 42 (2001) (“hundreds of believers in Jesus were executed by being hung on stakes throughout the city and burned alive”).